Eye of the Heart is a scholarly journal providing a forum for the exploration of the great philosophical and religious traditions. It addresses the inner meaning of philosophy and religion through elucidations of metaphysical, cosmological, and soteriological principles, and through a penetration of the forms preserved in each religious tradition.

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Eye of the Heart
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Vincit Omnia Veritas
Collected Essays
Edited by
Renaud Fabbri & Timothy Scott

Eye of the Heart 4, Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2009
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Editorial

It is with heartfelt gratitude to those people who have supported *Eye of the Heart* that we come to Issue 4. Since its release in May 2007, we have received overwhelming positive feedback: the website has attracted in excess of 7000 individual visitors from over 100 countries. Nevertheless, despite its success, this is to be the final issue in its current form.

This is not the place to rehearse in detail the reasons for the journal’s discontinuation. Suffice it to say that we have been unable to continue in the face of the incomprehension and hostility in parts of the hierarchy of La Trobe University. For the past thirty years the Philosophy and Religious Studies Program (under various names) at the Bendigo campus of LTU has been a vital and creative centre for the study of traditional wisdom in its manifold forms. Late last year the Program was drastically attenuated; the termination of *Eye of the Heart*, and of the editorial position, was only one consequence of these lamentable developments.

The *Eye of the Heart* website, including access to all issues, will remain available at its current web address. However, we are interested in securing a more supportive host for the journal. Expressions of interest may be directed to Dr Harry Oldmeadow (h.oldmeadow@latrobe.edu.au).

To strike a more positive note: it was always our intention to use the fourth issue of *Eye of the Heart* to showcase a selection of the submissions for the Ananda Coomaraswamy Prize. Unlike the essays in the first three issues, these have not been peer-reviewed; we wanted to present a range of essays without subjecting them to the normal academic screening—a process which would have excluded some interesting and highly worthwhile submissions.

Mr Graeme Castleman’s essay, ‘The Primordial in the symbols and theology of Baptism,’ which won the Graduate category, did undergo peer-review as the winning entry. It is perhaps worth observing that the length of this paper was questioned by both the reviewer and the
judges. In fact, a substantially revised and condensed version of this paper is to be published in the Fons Vitae volume, *Water & Its Spiritual Significance* (2009), celebrating the Louisville’s Festival of Faiths. After some discussion we have decided to publish the longer original version which contains some insightful exposition not included in the shorter version.

Issue 4 also includes a reprint of Ananda Coomaraswamy’s, ‘The Iconography of Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”.’ As we have noted elsewhere, this rare essay is of great value as a “statement of intention,” insomuch as Coomaraswamy regarded it as a model of the method for any serious investigation of symbols. We wish to thank Mr James Crouch for his help in sourcing and preparing this reprint.

Prof. K. S. Kannan’s ‘The Metaphysics of Ānandatāœōava, the Bliss-Dance’ surveys the key treatments of the *Dance of Shiva*, so valued by Coomaraswamy himself, before offering a unique interpretation based upon the work of the yogic guru, Srinaga Mahaguru. Ms Rebecca Miatke’s symbolic analysis of the gong in the gamelan music of Java is the type of illuminating essay which Coomaraswamy himself produced in such remarkable numbers. Ms Miatke’s analysis arises out her personal experience of the gong as a member of a Gamelan orchestra in Australia, and from her travels in Indonesia.

Mr Charles Upton’s, ‘Homer, Poet of Maya’ touches upon the kind of serious spiritual interpretation of Homer that is so dear to our own Roger Sworder (a founding member of our editorial board), who has dealt with this in his own way in *Science and Religion in Archaic Greece* (Sophia Perennis, 2008). Like Mr Upton’s essay, Mr Mihnea Capruta’s, ‘The Garden of the Heart’ is heavily flavoured by the metaphysics of Vedanta, a foundation for much of the work of the perennialists, in particular Frithjof Schuon and René Guénon. In fact Mr Capruta draws heavily on Guénon’s *Le Roi du Monde* (*The Lord of the World*), a greatly misunderstood work which, in our opinion, has much to offer. Like Guénon, Mr Capruta moves between various traditions in a way that can seem syncretic, but which generally points to the universal heart which, for that matter, is his theme.

Mr Phillip Serradell’s spiritual refection on bread and bread-making arises out of no merely academic curiosity but out of his work as a baker. In these latter days it is a rare joy to find a person whose vocation pursuit is informed by such insight into its spiritual depth. It is a privilege to bring this type of paper to a wider audience.
Editorial

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the scholars who contributed to *Eye of the Heart* and to those people who aided in issues of copyright etc. with the reprints. A debt of gratitude is also due to the members of our international advisory board, who have generously offered support and advice. Similarly we are grateful to the people who have given up their precious time and shared their expertise to act as reviewers. On a personal note, I would like to thank Roger Sworder, Harry Oldmeadow, John Penwill, Algis Uždavinys and Rodney Blackhirst for the opportunity to develop and edit *Eye of the Heart*.

Timothy Scott
Editor
I do hope that you are able to find a sympathetic and supportive institutional host for the *Eye of the Heart*. I hope also that they can recognise the real value of a journal such as *Eye of the Heart*, in line with the deep appreciation of scholars of religion and philosophy, such as myself. You see, I am acutely aware of the continuing need for such a forum for good scholarship on all aspects of esotericism. This is especially so today, when I witness, with some academic and personal anxiety, the diaspora of the Mandaean nation, as a result of military adventurism. As a result of military incursion into Iraq, the last surviving Gnostic tradition and its esoteric practices are in danger of extinction. In my process of recording what I’m permitted of their esoteric practices, as well as the practices of threatened aspects of esoteric Theravada Buddhism, I am acutely aware of the real need for quality avenues for publication and subsequent academic discussion on these precious records and their related ideas.

With the above in mind, I urge any institution to fully support the continuation of *Eye of the Heart*, so that this meritorious resource may continue to attract good scholarship in this valuable area of research. I hope that the journal continues to provide for a real need in the field. Thank you for what you have achieved so far.

*(Dr Edward F. Crangle, Department of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, Australia)*

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I would like to endorse the journal *Eye of the Heart* in the strongest possible terms. Academic journals specialising in comparative religion abound, as do journals engaging with the praxis of spirituality, but there are few if any that can compete with *Eye of the Heart* in bringing together the two strands: careful scholarship and profound spirituality.

*(Dr Reza Shah-Kazemi, Managing Editor, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London)*

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*Eye of the Heart* 4, Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2009
Eye of the Heart is the one journal that follows the example of Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Boston Museum curator and specialist in the metaphysical traditions of East and West. Like his work, it combines high academic standards with insights into the common ground of religious traditions.

The Traditionalist current initiated by René Guénon is part of the intellectual and political history of twentieth-century Europe, but little understood in the Anglophone world. Eye of the Heart plays a vital educational role in introducing this phenomenon to the Academy.

Research into the esoteric traditions of the world's religions is on the rise in the academic world, but periodicals in this field are few. Eye of the Heart offers a rare opportunity for scholars in this sub-discipline can meet and share their findings.

(Prof. Joscelyn Godwin, Professor of Music and Medieval & Renaissance Studies, Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y.)

I am very concerned to learn about the difficulties and uncertainties faced by Eye of the Heart. This is certainly most unfortunate as there are so few journals of this nature. Eye of the Heart fills a tremendous space in the literature and research on religious traditions.

I have been following the contents of this journal closely and am very impressed not only by its strong scholarly basis, but also the experiential and empathetic outlook expressed in many of the essays. There is a crying need for such an outlook in the study and understanding of religion and spirituality in our world today that is so torn with conflict and strife among religious communities.

Currently I happen to be writing a module on world religions for a degree programme at a local distance-learning university and have strongly recommended Eye of the Heart for supplementary reading for the course. I do hope the students will not lose the valuable opportunity for reference to it.

(Dr. Lalita Sinha, Senior Lecturer, University Sains Malaysia, Penang)
Eye of the Heart occupies a pivotal position in the contemporary academic study of religious traditions, cosmology, mythology and esoterism (to delineate its field in rather broad terms). The journal provides a forum for scholars who wish to apply more or less traditional modes of interpretation and exegesis to religious phenomena but who are not bound by a single religious tradition—which is to say the Eye of the Heart is not a theological journal per se. Contributors may also deploy more contemporary academic theories and procedures in their studies but the underlying assumption which informs this journal is that the different mythological and religious traditions from around the world should be allowed to speak in their own voices. Many but not all contributors subscribe to a perennialist position which finds in the manifold forms of the differing religions an underlying and universal wisdom. Eye of the Heart is a rigorous scholarly journal in which peer-reviews are scrupulously administered, and the highest intellectual standards are maintained. In its short life Eye of the Heart has established itself as a lively and provocative journal which commands the respect and interest of a wide range of scholars throughout the world.

(Prof. James Cutsinger, Religious Studies Department, University of South Carolina)

I have been following the development of Eye of the Heart for several years now. It is a superior-quality journal that has reached a very unique balance between scholarship and spirituality. Its editor, Dr Timothy Scott is a very talented and refined scholar whose many skills have made this achievement possible. I sincerely hope that Eye of the Heart will be able to find a new suitable hosting institution and will continue to flourish in the future.

(Dr. Patricia Reynaud, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University)
Eye of the Heart: A Journal of Traditional Wisdom

Review in Temenos Academy Review 12, 2009 by John Carey


This new periodical ‘arises out of the perceived need for an academic journal that recognizes traditional approaches to the study of philosophy and religion’. While Eye of the Heart is to a great extent inspired by the teachings of such figures as René Guénon, A. K. Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon, its editor stresses that ‘we are not aiming to make a specifically “perennialist” or “traditionalist” journal . . . . I am keen to develop the content . . . beyond a purely perennialist current, to move beyond the traditions that perennialism is usually associated with, and to open perennialism itself to a wider dialogue’. A particular focus for the journal is ‘the various methodologies of the traditions as such’. This is reflected in the republication of essays on esoteric etymology and the contemplative reading of the Bible by Coomaraswamy and Schuon respectively; and in the inclusion of articles on Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought on letters and language (Pierre Lory), lectio divina in the Christian West (Fr Michael Casey), and the recapitulation of universal time and space in Vedic ritual (Adrian Snodgrass). Perennialism’s universal perspective is another recurring theme: thus Graeme Castleman surveys the evidence for an attitude of openness to other traditions as one of the strands of Christianity before Constantine, while Harry Oldmeadow looks at the twentieth-century encounter of Christianity and Hinduism in the life of Swami Abhishiktananda. Both issues contain studies of ancient theurgy by Algis Uždavinys, and there is a two-part exposition of the symbolism of the number 72 by Timothy Scott. Nor is this all.

There can be no question that Eye of the Heart has amply realized its aspirations: it is a welcome and admirable resource in a dark time. It is to be hoped that, despite all that is unpropitious in the current academic climate, it will endure and flourish.

(Dr John Carey, Editor of Temenos Academy Review, University College Cork, Ireland, Department of Early and Medieval Irish)
The Iconography of Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”*

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

“La forma universal di questo nodo credo ch’io vidi”—Dante
Paradiso XXXIII.91.

Λύειν δ’ἔστιν ἀγνοούντας τὸν δεσμόν—Aristotle
Metaphysics III.1.2.

Among Albrecht Dürer’s wood-engravings is the series of Sechs Knoten; the design (Fig. 1) fills a circle and consists of a very complicated unbroken white line pattern on a black ground; the main pattern is echoed in four small corner pieces and in several cases Dürer’s own name is engraved in the central dark circle from which the main design expands.¹ The usual view is acceptable, that Dürer’s Knots are variations of a well-known engraving on copper of a similar medallion (Fig. 2), the design of which is commonly attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, and in the center of which there appear the words Academia Leonardi Vinci. Goldscheider² sees in this “fantasia del vinci” probably a “hieroglyphic signature,” and he quotes Vasari, who says that “he [Leonardo] spent much time in making a regular design of a series of knots so that the cord may be traced from one end to the other, the whole filling a round space. There is a fine engraving of this most difficult design, and in the middle are the words Leonardus Vinci Academia.” Goldscheider remarks that there is “a play on the words vincire (to fetter, to lace, to

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¹ Valentin Scherer, Dürer (3rd ed.), Klassiker der Kunst. The Sechs Knoten are reproduced on pls. 223-225.

² G. Goldscheider, Leonardo da Vinci the Artist, Oxford, 1943, pp.6, 7 and Fig.5 (in the present article, Fig.2).
knot) and Vinci,” and rather naively adds that interlacing patterns were not invented for the first time by Leonardo.

A. M. Hind³ says that “the prints were probably engraved by Leonardo with the definite aim of serving as patterns of a kind of decorative puzzle for artists of various crafts. Instances of similar knot design occur throughout Leonardo’s Mss. ... The connection of Vinci, the town of his birth, with vinco (willow, osier) which would be commonly used for plaiting baskets and the like in various interlaced patterns may have suggested the device, and some by-play to vinci in the sense of vincoli (bonds or fetters) may have been intended. The latter sense falls into line with the title of ‘Knoten’ (or Knots) given by Dürer himself to six woodcuts which he made after the present series.” Mr. Hind also observes that amongst Dürer’s variations is “the inner line used in representing the ‘cords,’ making them more closely resemble metal.”

G. d’Adda⁴ says that Dürer’s Knots have been called embroidery designs, but are really lace patterns (“veritable patrons de passementerie”); in any case Knoten suggests a textile application. The designs have also been called “dedali” or “labyrinths”; but in d’Adda’s view this is inexact, because here the lines both touch and are superposed on one another, which is not the case in true labyrinths. Amongst other books d’Adda cites in his Bibliography is one by Balthazar Sylvius (Du Bois), published in 1554 and entitled (in Latin): A Little Book of Geometrical-Designs, commonly termed ‘Moorish’ ... very useful to Painters, Goldsmiths, Weavers, Damasceners ... and also to Needle-workers. From all this it is clear that it must have seemed to Dürer’s contemporaries that his Knots were such as could be employed in a great variety of techniques; and that their likeness to Moorish arabesques was generally recognized.

There is more to be said for the designations “dedalus” and “labyrinth” than d’Adda supposed. It is true that in what he calls the “true labyrinth” the lines are never superposed; but that is inevitable, because the old constructed labyrinths are laid out on plane surfaces so as to form a “maze” through which one can actually walk until the

⁴ G. d’Adda, “Essai bibliographique des anciens modèles de lingerie, dentelles et tapisseries,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts, XVII (1864), 434 ff; also the same author’s “Leonardo da Vinci, la gravure milanaise et passavant,” ibid., XXV (1868), II, 123.
center is reached, while the representations, whether rock carvings or
drawings, are merely replicas of the constructed forms. These
constructed forms are of great antiquity; they may be referred to a
Megalithic culture, and occur as stone alinements in Finland and
Sweden. The famous medieval examples are inlaid on cathedral floors;
there were examples at Amiens, St. Quentin, and Rheims; and of those
still existing, the most notable is that of Chartres (Fig. 3), with a
pathway some six hundred and fifty feet in length, leading round and
about until the center is reached. In Hahnloser’s words, “Gleichzeitig
mit de Ruhme des Dädalus erhebt die Gotik auch seinen ‘Grundriss,’
die durchbrochene Spirale, zu symbolischer Deutung.” W. R. Lethaby
quotes Didron, who says that “the whole device was deemed to be
indicative of the complicated folds of sin by which man is surrounded,
and how impossible it would be to extricate himself from them except
through the assisting hand of Providence.” In the case of a labyrinth at
St. Omer, temples, animals and towns were depicted on the pathway
and the Temple of Jerusalem in the center. Lethaby says that the French
labyrinths “appear to have been called la lieue or Chemin de Jerusalem;
they were placed at the west end of the nave and people made a
pilgrimage on their knees, following the pathway to the center, which is
said to have been called Sancta Ecclesia or Ciel.” Of numerous English
examples cut in turf it is of great interest that one is called by the name
of “Troy Town.” The Italian examples of pavement labyrinths at
Ravenna, Rome, Pavia, etc., are descendants, through Roman pavements
(Fig. 4) and gems, from the representations of the labyrinth of Dedalus
which occur on Cretan coins. The motive survives in Oriental Folk Art
(Fig. 5). Villard de Honnecourt’s drawing is identical with the labyrinth
that appears on the Hereford map of Crete, inscribed Labarintus id est
domus Dealli; and the one at Amiens was inscribed Maison de Dedalus.
At Pavia the Minotaur is represented at the vortex in the form of a

5 Illustrations of these and other early labyrinths will be found in C. N. Deedes, “The
Labyrinth”; in S. H. Hooke (editor), The Labyrinth, London and New York, 1935; W.
6 W. R. Lethaby, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, London, 1892, Ch.VII. See also Fr.
M. Th. Böhl, “Zum babylonische Ursprung des Labyrinths,” Anecdota Orientalia, XXII,
1935, 6-23.
7 The equation of “Troy” with “labyrinth” is discussed by Deedes, loc. cit., pp.34-41,
and by W. F. J. Knight, Cumaean Gates, Oxford, 1936, Chs.V-VII.
8 H. R. Hahnloser, Villard de Honneecourt, Wien, 1935, p.38 and pl.14 g.
centaur. As Lethaby remarks, the exact form of the original designs is preserved throughout the Middle Ages, but “when the root of tradition was broken away from at the Renaissance, all this was altered, and mazes became inventions, every one different from the others—spiders’ webs9 of enticing false paths.” We reproduce here one late form, interesting because the center is occupied by a high tower with a spiral stairway and surmounted by a statue (Fig. 6); whoever ascended this tower would be able to look down upon the maze through which he had already passed, taking in the whole at one glance.

We have discussed the “dedali and labyrinths” at some length in order to show that it is their tradition that really survives in Leonardo’s and Dürer’s Knots. The best evidence for this is to be found in the fact that while the names of Leonardo and Dürer are inscribed in the centers of their designs, at Amiens the center of the labyrinth was occupied by an effigy of the architect of the cathedral, and similarly in some other instances identified by inscriptions. This implies as Hahnloser says, an apotheosis of the architect, by assimilation to Daedalus, the original constructor and the only mythical architect whose name was familiar to the builders of the Middle Ages. There can be little doubt that the octagonal form of the pedestal of which the traces remain at Chartres, bore the significance of a regeneration as in the case of fonts. In any case the affiliation and analogy of the knots to labyrinths is clearly established by the placing of their authors’ names or images at the center.

That the lines of the Knots are superposed and intersect involves no difference in principle, but represents a translation of the idea of the maze into three-dimensional and textile terms. The significance of Leonardo’s “decorative puzzle”—which, from an Oriental viewpoint

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9 The mention of spider’s webs is strictly appropriate, for the Sun is the primordial spinner moving along the threads he spins (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa XIV.2.2.22), and often explicitly likened to a spider (see references in JAOS, 55, 1935, pp.397-8) who “makes his net with a single thread” (Brahma Upanisad 1), and “wise is he who layeth hold upon it” (ibid., 3). There is more in the words, “Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly,” than catches the ear. The remarkable perfection of the “spider” symbolism extends to the fact that the radii (warp, threads) of the web are not sticky, while the spiral (woof) is adhesive; the spider himself walks only on the radii while the flies are caught on the sticky threads. For the “moral” of this tackiness see my “Note on the Stickfast Motif” in Folklore, LVII (1944), pp.128-131: “sense-experience depends on contact, and he who touches may be caught.”
must be called a manḍala—will only be realized if it is regarded as the plane projection of a construction upon which we are looking down from above. So seen, the pattern breaks up into three parts, that of the dark ground of the earth (with angle ornaments indicative of the four directions), that of a knotted tissue that broadens out below and is contracted above, and that of a center and summit that would be white if one were looking at it from below but in the figure itself is dark because the dark ground shows through it.

Leonardo’s concatenation is a map of the universe in the precise terms of Dante’s lines:

Co-created was order and inwrought with the substances; and those were the summit in the universe wherein pure act was produced:
Pure potentiality held the lowest place; and in the midst potentiality with act strung such a withy as shall never be unwound

(“strinse ... tal vime, che giamaii non si divima,” Paradiso XXIX.31-6), where the metaphor (of basket-work) is of just that technique which A. M. Hind quite independently suggests as the probable source of Leonardo’s design. Almost identical with Dante’s are the terms in which the Indian sacrificer imitates the Preparation of the Three Worlds for inhabitation, viz., “as a man throws (Webster, sense 2, twists or braids) strand upon strand (gune gunam), even so he throws world upon world, for firmness and that there may be no slackening” (Taittrīya Samhitā VII. 2.4.2). Guna, “strand,” or “thread,” is also “quality” or “virtue,” notably with reference to the “three worlds,” terrestrial, atmospheric and celestial, mentioned above, and of which the “qualities” are respectively dark-potential (tāmasik), variegated-activated (rājasik) and white-essential (sāttvik).

Nor must we overlook that other line of Dante’s in which he speaks of God “who draws the earth and unites it to himself” (“questi la terra in se stringe ed adune,” Paradiso I.117) or that in which he speaks of seeing all at once “the universal form of this knot” (“nodo,” Paradiso
XXXIII.91), which “if our fingers are unable to unravel, it is from long neglect (ibid., XXVIII.58-60).”

Leonardo’s Concatenation is a geometrical realization of this “universal form.” He must have known Dante, and could have taken from him the suggestion for his cryptogram. But there is every reason to believe that Leonardo, like so many other Renaissance scholars, was versed in the Neo-Platonic esoteric tradition, and that he may have been an initiate, familiar with the “mysteries” of the crafts. It is much more likely, then, that Dante and Leonardo both are making use of the old and traditional symbolism of weaving and embroidery. In connection with the traces of this tradition in Swiss folk art Titus Burckhardt remarks: “Ornaments in the form of a knot, which are widely distributed in nomad art, comprise an especially suggestive symbolism, based on the fact that the different parts of the knot are opposed to one another, at the same time that they are united by the continuity of the string. The knot resolves for whoever understands the principle of

10 Special senses of nodo include nodo di Salomone “a design showing a knot without any ends in the cords being visible,” nodo as “string (of pearls),” and nodi della vita, “ties of the soul to the body” (Hoare’s Italian Dictionary). Wicksteed and Oelsner render nodo by “complex,” and that is just what a “knot” is. “Universal form”: for, “indeed, this All is held together by invisible powers, which the Craftsman has extended (apátēine) from the ends of the earth even unto the sky, taking wise forethought that the things bound (dethēnta) and pendent, as it were, from a chain (seirá), should not be loosed; for the powers of the All are bonds (desmōi) that cannot be broken” (Philo, Migr. 181 with 167). Here things are thought of (in 167) as if pendent from a garland or necklace, to which they are secured, and to fall away from which would be their death. It is in this sense that in India the death of the individual is described as a being “cut off”; and in the same way in China, “the ancients described death as the loosening of the cord on which God suspended their life” (Chuang Tzu III.4). Similarly at the dissolution of the universe, the “wind cords” are severed (Maitri Upaniṣad I.4), cf. JRAS, 1942, p.230, note 6 and 1943, p.107, note 1; these “wind cords” are likewise those to which Rūmī refers as “cords of causation” (Mathnawi I.647).

knotting of which the invention is, so to say, itself a symbol of the hidden principles of things.”

Dante’s *questi la terra in se stringe* goes back through intermediate sources (cf. John 12:32) to Plato’s “golden cord” (*Laws*, 644) that we ought by all means to hold on to if we would be rightly governed, and not distracted by the pulls of contrary passions; and so to Homer’s “golden chain” (*Iliad* 8.18 ff.) with which Zeus could draw all things to himself and in which Plato (*Theatetus*, 153) rightly saw a solar power. It is related, too, that when Zeus was ordering all things, he consulted Night, and asked her “how all things might be both one and divided, he was bidden wrap aether around the world and tie up the bundle with the ‘golden cord’. “ It is in almost the same words that Marsilio Ficino (whom Leonardo must have known) says that “as in us the spirit is the bond of Soul and body, so the light is the bond of the universe (*vinculum universi*)”. The clew survives in William Blake’s:

I give you the end of a golden string,
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven’s Gate
Built in Jerusalem’s wall.

Sylvius’ words, “quas vulgo Maurusias vocant,” cited above (in translation), not only remind us that our “knots” are, so to speak “arabesques,” but also that the symbolism of the thread of life

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13 The words are A. B. Cook’s in *Zeus*, II, 1029, based on the Orphic Fragment, Niels 165, and other sources.
15 “L’arabesque, ce poème linéaire où la géométrie, la musique et l’écriture se rejoignent, est une synthèse métaphysique ... L’arabesque offre ainsi un passage incomparable du point de vue spatial au point de vue temporel ... De même que le dhikr, discipline d’incantation, l’arabesque entraîne celui que l’eprouve sur le chemin de retour vers Allah.” (Elie Lebasquis in *Le Voile d’Isis*, 40, 1935, p. 281. Luc Benoist, *Art du monde*, 3rd ed. 1941, pp.178-9.) Cf. E. Diez, “A Stylistic Analysis of Islamic Art,” *Ars Islamica*, V (1938), 36-45: “Islamic art is the art which expresses submission to [I would say, dependence upon] Allah ... Islamic art appears as the individuation of its metaphysical basis (*unendlichen Grund*) ... The construction of the linear configurations
(familiar, too, in connection with the Greek Moirai and Scandinavian Norns) recurs in Islamic contexts; analogous to Blake’s, for example are Rūmī’s lines:

He gave me the end of a thread—a thread full of mischief and guile—
“Pull,” he said, “that I may pull; and break it not in the pulling.”

Indian sources for the symbolism of sewing and weaving and the corresponding “thread-spirit” (sūtrātman) doctrine are even more abundant and explicit. William Crooke records that “at a place in Gilgit there is said to be a golden chain hanging down to earth from the sky. Any persons suspected of wrong-doing or falsehood were taken to the place and forced to hold the chain while they swore that they were innocent or that their statements were true,” and as he adds “this suggests the Homeric reference (Iliad 8.18 ff.), and the Aurea Catena Homeri, which was handed down through the Neo-Platonists to the alchemists of the Middle Ages.”

This is a remarkable parallel, but one from which no argument for an “influence” could be deduced. For to go back to the eighth century B.C. (and still earlier texts could be cited), we are told that “the Sun is the fastening to which these worlds are linked by means of the quarters. …He strings (samāvayate, √ ve, ‘weave,’ ‘braid,’ ‘string,’ present also in ‘web’ and It. vinci, vime) these worlds to himself by means of a thread (sūtra, √ siv, ‘sew’), the thread of the Gale (vāyu).” Verily, he who knows that thread, and the Inner Controller who from within controls this and the other world and all beings, he knows Brahma, he knows the

is ... insoluble for the spectator’s eye, and thus elevated above the limits of normal human reason into the sphere of divine inscrutability. These nets of lines and formulas, though thought out by human intellect, signify to a certain degree an outwitting and a supernatural surpassing of the human limits of reason. The best confirmation for the categorization of Islamic art as being polar-ornamentalistic is the Persian denotation of a rug pattern as zemān (‘time’), and of the ground as zemīn (‘space’).” In connection with the further statement, “every single figure of any ornamental design ... has a concrete mystic and symbolic significance,” Diez cites J. Karabecek, Die persische Nadelmalerei Susandjird, Leipzig, 1881, pp.137-67.

17 In Folklore, XXV (1914), p.397.
18 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.7.1.17 and VIII.7.3.10.
Gods, the Vedas, Being, Self, and everything”;\(^{19}\) for “by the Breath (Life) he connects \((\text{saṃtanoti}, \sqrt{\text{tan}}, \text{Gk. teíno})\) these worlds.”\(^{20}\) Better known is the text of the \textit{Bhagavad Gītā} VII.7: “All this universe is strung \((\text{protam}, \sqrt{\text{ve}} \text{ as before})\) on Me, like rows of gems on thread” \((\text{sūtra})\).

From the standpoint of the apotheosized architect, or that of the Demiurge to whom he is assimilated, the pattern of Dürer’s and Leonardo’s knots is that indeed of a circumambient ornament, nimbus or investiture. It is in these senses that Hermes Trismegistus, describing the power of the solar Demiurge who draws \(\text{('elkōn)}\) all things to himself, says that “he is set up in the midst and wears the cosmos as a wreath about him,” and again, that the sensible Cosmos and all things therein “are woven like a garment” \((\text{quasi vestimentum contexta})\) by the Intelligible Cosmos.\(^ {21}\)

And now with reference to the minor knots or dependent loops which are formed in this endless cord, and are made apparent by the chiaroscuro as of a white warp on which a black woof is cross woven; these \textit{nodi della vita} are the definitions of individual existences, determined by their names; and as such they are to be regarded favorably from the existential and unfavorably from the essential point of view. For, in the first place, “the cord \((\text{tanti}, \sqrt{\text{tan}}, \text{extend})\) in his

\(^{19}\) \textit{Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣād} III.7.1; cf. \textit{Sarva Upaniṣād} 3 (19), where the thread on which the gems are strung is the Spirit \((\text{ātman}, \text{Self})\) as Inner Controller, just as for Plato the “golden cord” by which we are suspended from above is our Hegemon. The threadspirit concept is not only widely diffused, but of great antiquity: for “the word \textit{markasu}, ‘band,’ ‘rope,’ is employed in Babylonian mythology for the cosmic principle which unites all things, and is used also in the sense of ‘support,’ the divine power and law which holds the universe together” \(\text{(S. Langdon, Semitic Mythology, 1931, p.109).}\)

\(^{20}\) \textit{Aitareya Āranyaka} I.4.3.

\(^{21}\) Hermes Trismegistus \textit{Lib.} XVI.5-7 and \textit{Aesc.} III.34 C. In the first passage the verb \((\text{hidrúo})\) is one that is often used in connection with the “setting up” of statues, especially of heroes, and this reminds us of the medieval practise mentioned above. The comparison of the universe to a garment or tissue appears also in India, notably in the first words of the \textit{Isāvāsya Upaniṣād}, “All this, whatever moveth in the moving-world, is the Lord’s garment.”
(the Breath’s, Life’s) word (vāc, here = logos), and the knots (dāma = Gk. desmós) are names; and so with his word as the cord and names as knots all this universe is tied-up.”22 “All transformation begins from the word, and is a matter of naming”;23 “everything here is held by name.”24 Writing quite independently on “Concatenation,” Professor William Savery has remarked that “the chain of beings has strange loops”!25

The giving of names by the Great Denominator is the primary act of creation.26 Hence the importance of “christening.” Skr. nāmakarman; for example, the new-born Agni complains that he is as yet nameless, and so “not freed from the evil,” i.e., not really an existent; and hence “one should give a name,” or more than one name, to a boy that is born, “for one thereby frees him from the evil,” i.e., from mere non-entity.27 Accordingly, one ties on an amulet or bracelet with the prayer: “May I abide firm as a rock. ... Man is the gem, Breath (or Life) the thread, Food the knot (granthi); that knot I knot, desiring food, the charm against death. May I attain the whole of my life, even old age,”28 etc.

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22 Aitareya Āranyaka II.1.6. Déo, desmós (Skr. dā, bind); hēlko; etro, härma, seirá (Skr. sr, “glide,” Lat. series); and teino (Skr. tan, tanti, tantṛ, tantu, tanū, etc.) are the key words in Greek and Indian contexts for the present cycle of ideas. The equation of knots with names may be connected with what was once an almost worldwide (old Chinese, Sumerian, Hebrew, Mexican) method of keeping records by means of knotted string. Thus Jeremias observes that Gudea seems to speak of “knots of words,” and that in Sumeria knots may have preceded writing (Altorientalische Geistesgeschichte, p.19); and Gaster that in OT. sis = ball or knop and that in Numbers 15:38, 39, etc. the reference is not to “fringes” but to “elaborate mnemonic knots,” while the beads of rosaries have taken the place of what were originally knots (Folklore, XXV (1914), pp.254-258). St. Augustine refers to “knots, which they call characters,” and which have either a hidden or an evident meaning (De doctr. christ., II, 20). In the Kathā Sarit Sāgara 25.14 (Bombay ed. 1889, p.116) the beads of an aged Brahman ascetic’s rosary are compared in number to knots (granthi) marking the centuries of his life (cf. Penzer II.189). The trace of the use of mnemonic knots seems to survive in Skr. grantha, granthana = literary composition and granthin, one who knows the letter of a text (Manu XII.103). We can still speak of the “thread of a discourse” or of that of an argument; and tie mnemonic knots in handkerchiefs or round a finger. Our problems, too, are often “knotty”; and we call the outcome of a drama the dénouement.

23 Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1.4.
24 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa IV.6.5.3.
26 Rgveda III.38.7, X.82.3 and passim.
27 Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VI.1.3.9, cf. Kauśitaki Brāhmaṇa VI.2.
28 Sānkhyāya Āranyaka XI.8.
On the other hand all determinations or knots are bonds from which one could wish to be freed rather than remain forever “all tied up in knots.” One would be released from all those “knots (granthi) of the heart,” which we should now call “complexes” and of which the ego-complex (ahamkāra, abhimāna, Philo’s oiēsis) is the tightest and the hardest to be undone.29 The concept of liberty, in Vedic contexts, is repeatedly stated positively in terms of “motion at will” and negatively in those of release from bonds, knots, or nooses (bandha, granthi, pāśa, etc.). In Skr. also, to be independent (“on one’s own hook”) is expressed by the significant term sva-tantra (√ tan), “being one’s own thread, string or wire”; we are not, then, if we “know our Self,” the knot, but the thread in which the knot is tied or on which beads are strung, the meaning of which will be clear from the often repeated simile of the threaded beads, cited above. The knots are many, but the thread is one. Indra, the Great Hero (mahāvīra) is said to have “found out the secret knot of Śuṣṇa,”30 and it is significant that the followers of the later Mahāvīra are known as Nirgrantha, “whose knot is undone.” There is a prayer addressed to Soma to “untie as it were a knot, the entangled (grathitam, knotted) straight and tortuous paths,”31 that is, almost literally, to guide us through the labyrinth in which these ways are indeed confused. The Spirit is in bonds only where and when the knots of individuality are tied; its and our true Self is the continuity of the thread on which the individualized entities are strung.32

“Continuity of the thread”: in these words lies the clew to the doctrine que s’asconde nel velame degli nodi strani—to adapt the words of Dante that must have been familiar to Leonardo. For what our “complex” states—and solves—is the relationship of one to many: “one as he is there in himself, many as he is here in his children”;33 one as thread and many in the knots, for as the Brahma Upaniṣad expresses it,

29 For the “knots of the heart” see Chāndogya Upaniṣad VII.26.2 and Kaṭha Up. VI.15, etc. The references to bonds and knots collected in J. Heckenbach, De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis, Giessen, 1911, have mostly to do with the ritual untyings that symbolize a spiritual liberation (lūsis, mokṣa).
30 Ṛgveda X.61.13.
31 Ṛgveda IX.97.18.
32 Cf. Sarva Upaniṣad 1-3 and 19.
33 Ṣatapatha Brāhmaṇa X.5.2.16, in answer to the question, “Is he one or many?”
the solar Spider spins his web of a single thread; an omnipresent thread, immanent and transcendent, “undivided in things divided,” “measureless in measured things,” “bodiless in bodies,” “imperishable in the perishable,” “th’ unstable, Thou, the stable, rangest.”

To have realized that the thread is one, however many the knots, is to be assured that by holding on to this one thread or golden chain by which, as Plato says, we are suspended from above, we cannot go astray; it is only for so long as we think of the knots as independent substances that we cannot “thread the maze” or escape from the toil. The device is really a labyrinth, and whoever keeps on going without ever turning back, however much the way winds, will inevitably reach “the end of the road”; and just as in the medieval labyrinths he will see there the image of the architect, or at the center of the knots their author’s name, so there at world’s end will be found the cosmic Architect, who is himself the Way and the Door.

The unity of the thread is reflected in what has been called the “one-line technique,” of which our knots are an example, and that is equally of our knots and of the spiral forms to which the labyrinths approximate. In this technique, one line is used to form the whole design. The line is often white on a black ground, and as E. L. Watson says, “the use of white lines, known as ‘negatives,’ to carry the continuity is a prehistoric characteristic”; and while the line is by no means always thus a “negative,” its whiteness is still conspicuous in the case of our knots and in the representations of labyrinths. Good examples of the continuous white line, combined with spirals, are represented in the two designs (Figs. 7, 8) from American Indian

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34 Thus “putting on appearances about his own thread (тану)” (Rgveda III.53.8, cf. VI.49.18), “winding through” them all (ibid. I.69.2).
36 Joshua Sylvester.
37 Lat. tela (texta), “web,” and metaphorically “pattern” or “design.”
38 The analogy of the human and divine architects is drawn repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages. Leonardo says himself that “that divine power, which lies in the knowledge of the painter, transforms the mind of the painter into the likeness of the divine mind” (H. Ludwig in Eitelberger’s Quellenschriften für Kunstgeschichte, 68).
Coomaraswamy: Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”

(Mimbres) bowls, both of which are unquestionably cosmic diagrams.\textsuperscript{40} On the other hand, the one-line technique in black has quite an extraordinary development in European calligraphy. Here, quite likely, it is at last employed solely for decorative purposes and without awareness of an implicit significance, although in the hands of the Spaniard Pedro Diaz Morante, perhaps its most brilliant exponent, it is repeatedly employed to form traditional motives that are far from meaningless to anyone who is acquainted with their history. One of these (Fig. 9), in which the ancient motive of the Hare and Hounds\textsuperscript{41} is treated, is reproduced here from Morante’s little book of calligraphic models, entitled *Nueva Arte de Escrivir*,\textsuperscript{42} in which, however, far more complicated examples are to be found. We find the “one-line,” too, employed in parts of his wood engraving of the Phoenix (Fig. 10), protecting a trinity of rabbits (who are guarded also by a one-line “fence”) from the poison of the snake, in what Strzygowski would have called a “Hvarena landscape” and is undoubtedly a Paradise; the inscription, “My piety makes light of poison,” in connection with the ancient motive of the Sunbird killing a snake, makes it almost certain that Morante meant his Phoenix for a type of Christ; while the form of the “fence” reminds us that the Greek key-pattern or meander had once a metaphysical significance.\textsuperscript{43} But it is, perhaps, in the New Hebrides that the one-line technique attains its fullest development.\textsuperscript{44} Here

\textsuperscript{40} After E. L. Watson, *loc. cit*. The types illustrated have many close parallels in old world art, see, for example, Anna Roes, “Tierwirbel,” in *IPEK*, II (1936-37), Abb. 12, 21, 31.
\textsuperscript{42} Parts I-IV, Madrid, 1616-31.
\textsuperscript{43} “From the fact that it was used to surround the figures of divine and royal persons and was associated with cult objects, the pattern seems to have possessed a protective value” (C. N. Deedes, *op. cit.*, p. 11). It can hardly be doubted, indeed, that this was the original intention of all kinds of borders, frets and frames enclosing a field. Cf. E. Küster, *Der Schlange in der griechischen Kunst und Religion*, Giessen, 1913, pp.10, 18, 21, 25, 95 (the formal development of the neolithic snake-motive is from the single to the double spiral, then to the continuous spiral (“running dog”) and finally to the spiral meander; the significance of the snake is not only vegetative, but also apotropaic).
drawings representing a great variety of animals and other forms, and in some cases at least having a religious significance and delineating the Way, are made with a pointed stick on a surface of smooth sand and are not permanent; the one-line tortoise (Fig. 17) is curiously like a tortoise that occurs in Morante’s book. There can be no doubt but that the well-known “string-figures” which represent all kinds of subjects and are met with in such variety all over the world, are also delineations in a similar sense. What, indeed, is Leonardo’s “fantasy” but the representation of a “string-figure” of the universe?

We have already remarked that our knots and labyrinths approximate to spiral forms. In the case of the single spiral, which resembles a coiled rope or snake it is evident that if we follow round the line from the outside we reach a center, just as in following round the thread of a spider’s web we should reach the spider’s “parlor.” Of such a spiral we reproduce a remarkable example from the Berthold Missal (Fig. 11); and it will be noticed that the spiral, formed of the main stem of the Vine (of which “ye are the branches,” John 15:1), when we come to the navel of the design, turns inwards, out of the plane of the design, and can only be thought of as connected with the figure of the Pantakrator seen above the cross-bar of the Tau; it is, in fact a tree whose “roots are above.” If we turn from such a spiral as

reviewed by M. F. Ashley Montagu in Isis XXXV, (1944), pp.43, 44 (“Mr. Layard’s valuable analysis of the relationship between the ingenious labyrinthine sand tracings of Vao and Atchin and mythology. Here we see clearly how illuminating the carefully recorded facts of a primitive culture can be for our understanding of puzzling problems presented by later cultures”); cf. notes 5-7, above.

45 We cannot enter here into the intimate connection of “ropes” with “snakes,” and can only remark in passing that from certain points the convolutions of our “cord” are to be regarded as the coils of a cosmic serpent, in which we are entangled. Designs of interlacing serpents are met with all over the world and are very abundant. Cf. H. H. van der Osten, “The Snake Symbol and Hittite Twist,” AJA., Series II, XXX (1926), 405-417. For the elaborate technique by which the spiral designs of primitive art appear to have been actually traced and some discussion of the meaning of spirals, see Lars-Ivar Ringbom, “Entstehung und Entwicklung der Spiralornamentik,” Acta Archaeologica, IV, Kobenhavn, 1933.


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this to Claude Mellan’s extraordinary engraving (Fig. 12), a representation of the Sudarium by means of an unbroken spiral line which, after countless revolutions, ends on the tip of the nose, the center of the Christ face, we do not need the assurance of the subscription *Formatur unicus una* (By one the One is formed), to convince us that this is no mere tour de force. The spiral line is inevitably lost in the reproduction.

From the single we are naturally led to a consideration also of the double spiral. Here too we shall meet with striking illustrations of the one-line technique. The spiral itself is a growth form, and it will depend upon our own orientation with reference to movement along it, whether we think of it as a centrifugal or as a centripetal form. This ambiguity is made more explicit where we have before us a pair of connected spirals of which the convolutions are either in opposite directions or which are placed on opposite sides of a common axis. These oppositions are essentially those of the paired motions of evolution and involution, birth and death, positive and negative values, etc., that inhere in the totality of the world extended in space and time. On opposite sides of a common axis (where they are sometimes replaced by two separate forms each of concentric circles) they correspond to the right and left hand branches of the Sephirotic Tree and more generally to the “things of the right hand and those of the left.” This is sufficiently clear in the Boston Museum earring (Fig. 13), of the type of which the history has been discussed by Miss Berta Segall. The motive survives in the folk art of Sumatra (Fig. 14).

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51 Compare the winding and unwinding of the ribbons by which the dancers are connected to the Maypole. The history of the labyrinth is intimately connected with that of dancing and we still speak of “treading a maze.”
52 MFA. *Bulletin*, No. 245, 1943.
53 “Wer sich darüber wundert, dass ein Symbol als Form nicht nur jahrtausendlang am Leben bleibt, sondern auch ... nach tausendjähriger Unterbrechung wieder zum Leben ensteht, der möge sich sagen, dass die Kraft der geistigen Welt, welcher der einen Teil
Even more interesting is the double spiral form of many early fibulae, of which there is a magnificent example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 16). The outstanding constructional feature in these brooches is the fact that the whole is made of a single wire, of which one end (which may be called the beginning) forms the “eye” and the other the “hook” (which may be called its termination); it is, in other words, a metal pin or needle, bent upon itself, so that when it fastens anything the point rejoins the head or re-enters the eye; a wiry “thread” that ends where it began; and a snake with its tail in its mouth; and what it holds together is the two opposite edges of a “material” that is itself an imitation of the cosmic veil in which the spirit of life at once conceals and reveals itself. The whole is, so to speak, a puzzle: for what one sees when the device is in act, is only the two spirals, and it is not apparent that the whole is really an endless circle in which the visible spirals are the knots; we do not “see the point.” The last end and the first beginning coincide.

des Symbols bildet, ewig ist” (W. Andrae, Die ionische Säule, Bauform oder Symbol, 1933, p.66).

54 Many others are illustrated in Chr. Blinkenberg’s fascinating book Fibules grecques et orientales, Kobenhavn, 1926, pp.253-261. There are also examples of a type with four spirals (Fig. 15), forming a swastika, and a few with six spirals and a central disk. The spiral fibulae are actually “Geometric” (9th century B.C. and later), but so far as their form is concerned they represent a survival of Mycenaean style. The form in which the spirals are replaced by independent circular disks, although contemporary, is typologically a derivative of the double spiral type. It may be observed here that the modern “hook and eye” is nothing but a divided fibula. It may be noted that “frogs” have nothing to do with the Batrachia but with Lat. floccus, a “flock” of wool, cf. “frock.”

55 The notion of the “hook” which corresponds to the point of the pin by which the material is really “caught” up, appears also in the symbolism of fishing with a line. For example to the logos, “I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17) corresponds Hafiz’ couplet, “Fish-like in the sea behold me swimming, Till he with his hook my rescue maketh.” This means of rescue has, indeed, actually been provided for the saving of shipwrecked men and one can easily see how well a naval chaplain could preach on such a text. In fishing with a net the whole body of the net, and in hunting with a lasso the slip-knot, corresponds to the “hook.”

56 We have previously discussed the symbolism of safety-pins in an article on the “Primitive Mentality” (Q. J. Mythic Soc., XXXI, 1940) and remarked there that “the significance of the metal pin, and that of the thread that is left behind by the needle are the same: it is that of the ‘thread-spirit’ (sūtrātman) by which the Sun connects all things to himself and fastens them; he is the primordial embroiderer and tailor, by whom the tissue of the universe, of which our garments are an analogy, is woven on a living thread.” In the same connection it may be noted that the gold threads with which
The primary sense of “broach” (= brooch) is that of anything acute, such as a pin, awl or spear, that penetrates a material; the same implement, bent upon itself, fastens or sews things together, as if it were in fact a thread. French *fibule*, as a surgical term, is in fact *suture*. It is only when we substitute a soft thread for the stiff wire that a way must be made for it by a needle; and then the thread remaining in the material is the trace, evidence and “clew” to the passage of the needle; just as our own short life is the trace of the unbroken Life whence it originates. We cannot here pursue the symbolism of embroidery, i.e., of the technique itself, except to call attention (1) to the correspondence of the needle to the arrow and (2) to the well-known symbolism of the “needle’s eye” as a strait gate. How the quarters are attached to the Sun by a pneumatic thread, as stated, in *Satapatha Brâhmaṇa* VI.7.1.17, is very clearly demonstrated in the *Sarabhanga Jâtaka*, where the Bodhisatta Jotipāla (the “Keeper of the Light”) standing at the center of a field, at the four corners of which there have been set up posts, attaches a thread to the nock of his arrow and with one shot penetrates all four posts, the arrow passing a second time through the first post and then returning to his hand; thus, indeed, he “sews” all things to himself by means of a single thread. We meet with the needle’s eye not only in the familiar context of Luke 18:25, but again in Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* I.3065, “’Tis the thread that is connected with the needle; the eye of the needle is not suitable for the camel.”

We have said enough, perhaps, to remind the reader that in primitive art the needs of the soul and body are provided for at one and the same time, thus fulfilling the condition on which Plato admitted the artist to his ideal city. Here there is no divorce of meaning from use; much rather, the aptitude and beauty of the artefact (*et aptus et pulcher*, like St. Augustine’s stylus and Xenophon’s house) at the same time express and depend upon the form (idea) that underlies it; content and shape are indivisible. As Edmund Pottier says: “à l’origine toute représentation graphique répond à une pensée concrete et precise: c’est veritablement une écriture.”

57 *Céramique peinte de Suse*, Délégation en Perse, XIII (1912), 52.

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57 *Céramique peinte de Suse*, Délégation en Perse, XIII (1912), 52.
Ages “was at once a script, a calculus and a symbolic code” and by the same token still “retained the hieratic grandeur of primitive art.” The Middle Ages, for which art had been not a merely “aesthetic” experience but an “intellectual virtue,” lived on into the Renaissance; the modern divorce of “science” from “art” had not yet taken place; a Guido d’Arezzo could still maintain that it was not his art but his documentum, i.e., doctrine, that made the singer; philosopher and artist could still be combined without conflict in one and the same individual. M. Vulliaud remarks that some of Leonardo’s works are “enigmatic,” and can only be understood in the light of the “intellectualism of the Renaissance.” He is speaking, indeed, of the paintings, but what he says will apply as well to the geometrical “fantasies.” He points out that the Renaissance, too, “expressed itself through the lingua franca of symbolism” and that Leonardo was by no means the least of those artists in whose works it is the voice of the spirit rather than that of fancy that can be heard. “To pretend,” he says, “that Leonardo painted traditional subjects in which he did not believe, I dare not.” Belief is defined theologically as “assent to a credible proposition” and we are asked to “believe in order to understand.” For the modern decorator, indeed, ornament is nothing but an “ornament,” devoid of any “meaning”; but I cannot admit that Leonardo was already one of those who do not “understand their material.” And even if it could be proved that in his concatenations he was only amusing himself, it would still remain that these unilinear devices retain a meaning in the same way that a word retains its meaning even when spoken by one who no longer knows what it means, and that its history can only be understood when we take account of this meaning.

I am sure that nearly every reader of the present article will spring to Leonardo’s defence, claiming that he was nothing but an artist and interested only in beauty. Many of our art historians and most of our estheticians claim that whereas art began with utility, the artist gradually frees himself from all mundane ties and spiritual theses, the idea of beauty then separating itself from life to stand alone in its own right. Thus Jerphanion distinguishes the interest of the archaeologist who seeks in the monument for l’expression d’une pensée from the critic

59 Vulliaud, op. cit., pp.102-103.
and historian of art whose only concern is to discover *un rayon de beauté*. It is in the same sense that Deonna hails the “progress” of art from a primitive *formality* to a classical *figuration* in which all significance is lost and there remains nothing but an esthetic surface to which we are expected to react only emotionally; what had been an imitation of nature in her manner of operation becomes an imitation of *la nature morte*. But at what a price has this “emancipation,” H. M. Kallen’s “conquest of fate and defeat of God,” been bought! As Deonna himself admits, “les belles appa rences,” to which the art is now directed are:

de beaux corps trop souvent dépourvus de vie intérieure.
L’imitation de la réalité, entraîne le classicisme sur cette pente que devait lui être funeste ... le primitivisme demeure vivace ... le classicisme, après avoir parcouru en quelques siècles ses possibilités, est épuisé, et ne peut se renover par lui-même.61

Ours is, indeed, a world of *impoverished* reality.62

We have no intention to deny that Leonardo cared, perhaps as much as Plato himself, for “beauty”; our argument is that “the beauty of the material world” was still for him, as for Marsilio Ficino, “a kind of shadow or symbol of that of the immaterial world”; and that this applies as much to his abstract “fantasies” as to his more realistic drawings. Leonardo was still a whole man. Our distinction of a fine from an applied art, of the artist from the workman and of the archaeologist from the critic, are all the evidence of the contemporary schizophrenia; for none of these, by himself, is a whole man. Is it not absurd to pretend that man cannot be at the same time an archaeologist and a philosopher or theologian whose interest is in ideas, and an artist whose interest is in “beauty” or in “feeling,” or to pretend that the artist was less a man when he designed ornaments for the use of goldsmiths or embroiderers

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than when he painted the Gioconda? Let us at least desist from the persuasion that the primitives cared only for ideas on the one hand and the Renaissance only for beauty on the other. We assert that Leonardo’s concatenation is *et aptus et pulcher* and that these are qualities inseparable in the thing itself; the knots are food for the mind as well as for the eye.

One further word: our customary horror of all “symbolic” explanations of works of art, apart from the fact that we are no longer interested in the intangibles to which the symbols refer, arises from the fact that symbolic analysis has so often been undertaken by amateurs and “interpreted” rather fancifully than knowingly. Then, again, we have in mind the romantic vagaries of the modern symbolists, with whose *symbolisme qui cherche* our traditional *lingua franca*, that of *le symbolisme qui sait*, has very little in common. A language that can be described as a “calculus” and as “precise,” demands to be studied by methods no less disciplined than those of the philologist. We have tried to show in the present article how such investigations should be conducted.
Coomaraswamy: Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”

Fig. 1.
One of Dürer’s “Sechs Knoten”

Fig. 2.
Leonardo da Vinci “Concatenation”
Fig. 3.
Labyrinth, Chartres
After Hahnloser, Abb.40

Fig. 4.
Labyrinth,
Roman Pavement, Verdes
After Hahnloser, Abb.39
Fig. 5.
Labyrinth, Basket-work, Ceylon,
Coomaraswamy,
*Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, 1908
Fig.143

Fig. 6.
Labyrinth and spiral tower,
Villa Pisani, Strà
After W. Born, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1943, p.248
Fig. 7 & 8.
Designs from Mimbres Bowl
After E. L. Watson, *Art and Archaeology*
Fig. 9.
*Hare and Hounds*
Designed by Morante, ‘Nueva Arte de Escrivir’

Fig. 10.
*Phoenix*
Engraving by Morante
Fig. 11.
Initial Tau, Missel de Berthold,
New York, Pierpont Morgan Library
Fig. 12.
Claude Mellan, ‘One-line Sudarium,’ 1649
Fig. 13.
Greek Archaic,
Fibula and Earring
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts

Fig. 14.
G. Kinzer
Batak Woman
(drawing)
Coomaraswamy: *Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation”*

Fig. 15.
Boeotian 9th-7th C.entury B.C., Four-spiral (swastika) Fibula
After Blinkenberg, Fig.388

Fig. 16.
Greek Geometric, Double Spiral Fibula
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Eye of the Heart 4, Bendigo: La Trobe University, 2009
Fig. 17.
New Hebrides, One-line Tortoise
After Deacon and Harrison

Fig. 18.
Basarh, India before 4th A.D.
Stone Tablet
ASI.AR., 1930-4,p.99
The Gong: Harmony in the religion of Java
Rebecca Miatke

For the Javanese, it is the obligation of man to maintain the harmony of reality. This is expressed in the ancient high Javanese language as the virtue of mamayu hayuning bawono or “preserving the beauty of the world.” Harmony is the primary pillar of Kejawen, the indigenous mystic religion of Java.

The cyclic properties of Javanese gamelan music and its relationship to the traditional perception of time in Java has been well considered by scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Alton and Judith Becker, Stanley Hoffman and David Goldsworthy, among others. These have illuminated the phenomenon of a musical system that perfectly reflects its culture’s organisation of time into cycles, subdivisions of cycles and concentric cycles rotating simultaneously within each other. Gamelan translates the complex layering and converging of cyclic time structures into a system of music. This system does more than simply point to and describe an idea of time, rather it is, in its most fundamental nature, time.

Within this system the gong, as Goldsworthy observes, serves as the harmonising element, whose stroke functions as the time-marker of each musical rotation, ‘bringing all together temporally in harmonious agreement’. This paper expands upon previous findings by demonstrating that the gong can in fact be understood as the ultimate symbol of the paradoxical unity of all things.

Harmony is the balance of opposing tensions. It is worth distinguishing this from the idea of equilibrium, which is the central point of the “beam” held in balance, so to speak. Equilibrium is thus a singularity, the unity of God. The state of harmony is, as it were, a bi-unity. It is what the Christian writer, Nicolas of Cusa, called the

coincidentia oppositorum, the point of resolution of contraries, of dissolution of duality into Unity. The striving for harmony is present in every element of Javanese life and is elegantly embodied in the music of the gamelan orchestra. The Javanese believe that cosmic harmony can be reached by constantly undertaking to maintain a correct relationship firstly with others in society, secondly with one’s own physical and spiritual self and lastly but most importantly, with God. The gong’s relationship to the rest of the gamelan orchestra represents each of these levels, thus constituting a comprehensive symbol of harmony. If the instruments of the orchestra and their music symbolise the struggle for harmony, it is the gong which incarnates the point at which these conflicts or dualities meet. The gong is the paradox of stillness within movement.

The principle of cosmic oneness or monism, is at the heart of many of the world’s mystical belief systems and Kejawen is no exception. It is necessary and always will be, to use symbols and metaphors to comprehend the paradox of unified Being—that is no-time/no-space, all experience occurring simultaneously, nothing being separate from anything else and all things being one. How we express these inexpressible ideas varies from culture to culture. Theologically speaking, the indigenous Javanese religion had a deity who represented this concept, known as Sang Hyang Tunggal, or the “Divine Oneness.” According to Javanese mythology, the gamelan orchestra originated from one gigantic gong which was created by the god Syang Hang Manikmayu for the purpose of communication with the other gods. As the need for more articulate communication arose, more and more gongs were created in different pitches. Finally the gamelan orchestra as we know it today came into existence, and still serves as a means of communication with divinity.

The Javanese gamelan orchestra consists of mostly bronze percussion instruments, mainly in the form of gongs and special types of xylophones, as well as drums and a few stringed and wind instruments. The gong plays the crucial role of the phrase marker in the music of the gamelan. The *gong ageng*, or big gong, marks the longest phrase of music in a gamelan piece. Sometimes smaller gongs, known as *gong suwukan*, mark the end and simultaneous beginning of each repeated phrase or *gongan* within the piece.
Miatke: *The Gong*

The gong as an expression of a Unified Being or “Divine Oneness,” expresses Java’s unique organisation of time and society. It represents harmony in a number of ways. Firstly, in form: the circle shape symbolises eternity and balance, and its single-material body bears the quality of uniformity. Secondly, in the role that it plays within the music of the gamelan, which symbolises both time and timelessness. The gong’s strike indicates the coincidence of start and end, birth and death, or, as the Indonesians say, *lahir batin*, that is, body and soul. Thirdly, in the actual energy that it creates: a self-perpetuating vibration which produces an undifferentiated and complex dissonance.

Several instruments of the Gamelan Orchestra
Clockwise from top left: Gong Ageng, Kempul, Kethuk Kempyang, Bonang, Kendang, Kenong (centre)
The Sacred Circle: Shape and Form as Metaphor

Let us consider the form of the gong itself. Already, without even hearing the sound that it makes, or its presence within a piece of gamelan music, we are presented with the universal symbol of the circle. The oldest, simplest, most accessible of all symbols is here in the bronze body of the gong. The circle is the visual representation of the concept of the continuum of cyclic time. Here we should distinguish time extended for perpetuity from the idea of Eternity, which properly refers to the Timeless. The continuum of cyclic time is, in the words of Plato, a ‘moving image [my italics] of eternity.’

To talk of the circle is to talk of the centre, which is its origin and principle. The centre “point” is in reality non-spatial, for any spatial representation of a point immediately entails dimension and distinction and hence is no longer a point. Insomuch as a visual representation of the centre is expressible the spatial point may be employed. Technically this is a circle. The point is the visual symbol of Eternity which “abides in Unity.” The circle—circumference and centre—is an eloquent symbol of what the Mediaeval Scholastics referred to as aeveriternity (or sempiternity), that state which participates in the natures of both the continuum of time and Eternity.

The circumference is in turn a “line” comprised in indefinite points, each imagining the centre. All points on the circumference are equidistant from its centre and thus harmonised by reference to it. This feature, unique to the circle, suggests constant and homogenous expansion. The centre of the circle is also a circle so that the form repeats itself endlessly inward and outward, like radiating ripples. The seeming static shape of the circle is in fact constantly in motion, a ‘moving image of eternity.’ In this way, the concept of Eternity is manifested not only in the parameter of the circle but in the dimensions...

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3 Plato, Timaeus 37D.

4 The only true point is the “metaphysical point.” See K. Critchlow, Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach, Thames and Hudson, 1976, § 1. The Point of Departure; with respect to our current considerations see also § 8. The Circle and Cosmic Rhythms.

5 Tim. 37D; Plotinus, Enneads 3.7.4.

6 Snodgrass, Architecture, Time and Eternity, p.75.
of the circle as well. The spatial image of the circle adequately symbolises the notion of cyclic time which underpins traditional Javanese ways of understanding the universe. Harmony is innate in this form because of its union or balance of beginning and end. The circle form conduces to the expression of this concept because it begins where it ends, and so it embodies both extremes. It contains every extreme opposite and balances them all.

The circle shape also suggests a wheel. The Javanese term, Cakra Manggilingan, means the ever-turning wheel or cog, the image used to expresses the Javanese philosophy of the constant revolving of the life process. Indeed, daily life in traditional Java is bound to the revolving cycle: farming villages conform to the rotation of the reaping and harvesting seasons; fishermen and sea-farers must observe the cyclical movement of marine conditions. The importance of the cycle of human existence is obvious in the ceremonial patterns which not only feature events such as births, deaths and circumcisions but a considerable amount of anniversary celebrations, marking for example 1000 days since a death or every 35 days following a birth.

The circular gong is suspended from a wooden frame or gayor by two ropes. The tension of the two ropes again expresses the principle of balance. The vertical pillars of the gayor describe a “doorway,” so that the gong is suspended between two worlds; the world of time and space, and the world of Eternity and Unity. The gong, hanging between them, is the point of union. Whitall Perry describes a similar reading of of the “split gates” of the Balinese northern temple, Meduwe Karang, at Kubutambahan. These “gates” are iconographically carved on either side, both facing outwards and inwards; however, the opposing faces between the gates are smooth, expressing the state of non-distinction “within” this unity.

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7 S. S. Negoro, Kejawen: Javanese Spiritual Teaching, Surakarta: CV Buana Raya, 200, p.40
9 On this symbolism see A. Coomaraswamy’s essay, ‘Symplegades’ in Selected Papers Vol.1: Traditional Art and Symbolism, ed. R. Lipsey, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, which offers an extensive bibliography on this subject. See also the related essay in the same volume, ‘Svayamātmānā: Janua Coeli.’
The gong itself is made from a single material expressing a sense of homogeneity and self-sufficiency. Crafted from one piece of metal, the gong is undivided in form. Of all the instruments of the gamelan, the gong, fashioned from one single piece of material and generating sound from its own uniformity, is the most self-determining and independent. Yet it is not detached or unconnected to the rest of the gamelan; on the contrary, it is the axis upon which the gamelan turns. Sounding at both the beginning and the end of each revolution of music it is inextricably tied to each and every element of the music.

The process of gong-forging warrants its own treatment. A few comments demand our attention, being relevant to the mysticism of the gong and its importance as a symbol of harmony. Traditionally gong-forging was a sacred art. Indeed, the very first gong-smith was the god Sang Hyang Manikmayu, the Lord of Heaven, son of Sang Hyang Tunggal, the Divine One. According to the mythological origins of the gong, before Java was populated by humans Sang Hjang Manikmayu made a gigantic gong for the purpose of communicating with the other gods. A state of chaos resulted after the gong strokes developed into a fairly complex vocabulary. To make his messages more clear, Sang Hjang made a higher-pitched gong and used the two of them in alternation. This too became complicated, so he fashioned yet a third gong, still higher-pitched. Later, Sang Hjang was reincarnated as the god-king Sri Panduka Maharadja Dewabuddha and in this human form invented a musical art reserved for sacred occasions that would appeal to mortals as well as to the gods. Thus the gamelan was born. This myth illustrates the sacredness of both music and of language for the Javanese. Both are truly divine arts because both emanate directly from God’s creative process and parallel creation itself.¹⁰

The task of the gong-smith is elevated to that of a priest. Similar to the role of the blacksmith in other traditions, (for example Hephaestus in Greek history), the Javanese gong-maker is microcosmically creating

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The Javanese sense of self is connected to a belief in the mystical paradox of unity. One’s centre is where all emotions are still and the individualised self is disintegrated. The centre is where God or the unqualified Self resides. In his book, *Religion of Java*, Geertz recalls an account of the following diagram drawn by a Javanese man:

“The picture is also a gong. The outer solid line, representing man’s physical body, is the circumference of the gong. The broken line (emotions and perceptions) and the dotted line (conscious desire) are

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either edge of the ridge running around the gong’s face, midway between the parameter and the central knob. The inner unbroken line, depicting the unconscious origin of desire, is the outline of the knob and the centre dot is the furthest protrusion of the knob. In this way the form of the gong presents a comprehensive account of the totality of the self.

The single central point, or *kula*, is the Eternal coincident with the Self. Given the multivalent nature of symbolism, this image also represents the self within the community. Given that the self and the community are inextricably linked in a traditional Javanese society, the gong, as a symbol of self, also becomes a symbol of community.

### The Gong and the Gongan: Function as Metaphor

Like the shape of the gong, the structure of the Javanese song or *gending* is cyclical in nature. The gong punctuates and perpetuates these cycles, its function mirroring its form. It is the timekeeper; it ensures the continuum of the piece. An obvious analogy arises between the relationship of gong and *gongan* (one musical cycle) and that of sun and day. As a day is signalled by the rising and setting of the sun, so each *gongan* begins and ends with the crash of the gong. Similarly the *gongan* expresses the span of a human life; the gong simultaneously indicating birth and death with each strike. These are just two of the countless metaphors applicable to this relationship.

The various calendar systems found in Java clearly convey not only the fundamental significance of cyclic recurrence, but of cycles operating within cycles. In her essay, ‘Time and Tune in Java’, ¹³ Judith Becker maps the connection between time cycles and musical cycles (see diagrams opposite). As she shows, Javanese time is structured according to concurrent five and seven-day week cycles. These cycles converge every thirty-five days, shown falling on *Jumat Legi*. The numbers five and seven are significant to the two musical modes of the gamelan: *slendro* mode, consisting of five notes and *pelog* mode, consisting of seven notes. The subdivisions of the *gongan*, shown in the second diagram, are the strokes of the other time marking instruments, and the outside broken line represents the beats of the *balungan*, or melodic line. As she illustrates the gong relates to the thirty-fifth day of the calendar.

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Miatke: *The Gong*

The Javanese organization of time into concurrently running five-day and seven-day week cycles.

The Gongan—one cycle of music which repeats over and over. The musical instruments play their respective melodies at differing speeds but converge at the beginning/end of each cycle, marked by the gong.
The central melody of a *gending* is infused with exquisitely complex elaborations, rippling configurations of ranging speed and pitch, over and underlapping harmonies, all woven together to create a textural tapestry of sound. A vivid polyphony, now clamorous, now delicate: we are listening to the colour and complexity of life itself. Each new phrase, though based upon the same *balungan* (the “skeleton” of the melodic line), brings us something new. The central melody is invariable but the elaborations, the rhythm, the tempo of the other gamelan instruments around this melody, change constantly. The dramatic clanging of the *saron*, which plays the balungan, the agonising restraint of the *rebab* and the playfully convoluted tinkling of the *gender*, each elaborating on the *balungan* and acting as melodic leaders in the ensemble—all these elements merge over and over in endless combinations, creating unique effects and infinite possibilities. Then finally, to the rising tension of the musical phrase, the gong stroke delivers blessed release. Amidst the lively interaction of the various components of the orchestra, the gong conveys union and transcendence.
Miatke: The Gong

The time-marking instruments bear little, if any, elaboration and this part of the gong is never malleable or subject to improvisation. Its constancy and stability are crucial to the piece. Its sound does not conduce to elaboration, nor does it need it. Its distinctive timbre demands a dignified solitude which reinforces the quality of unity and oneness that the gong embodies.

For the Javanese, a life starts, returns to the void, and then starts again. The name of the first month is Sura or Rijal, which means “beginning.” Suryo S. Negoro, drawing upon the mystical teachings of the Priyayi Sepuh, the “Wise Elders” of Kejawen who are believed to have reached perfection, remarks, ‘Every existence of new human life always begins with Rijal, the light of life created by the mystical power of god.’ The last month of the year, Besar or Suwung corresponds with the end of an existence and a returning to the start again: ‘The last is suwung, which means void, the life goes back to where it came from.’ This image of the constantly turning wheel, returning and returning again to the void, as well as the unmoving central axis of that wheel, is exactly the musical role that the gong plays within the gamelan.

As explained, the musical phrases between each strike of the gong are based on a balungan (“skeleton”). In this way, the music is related to the human form. The musical parts of the instruments of the gamelan make up the physical organisation of the human body, growing and flourishing around this central skeletal melody, like flesh and blood. The gong is the steady beating heart of the organism, the primordial rhythm of the body, enabling and perpetuating the circulation of the life-giving elements of blood and breath to the rest of the body. The circulatory system of the body, regulated by the beat of the heart is the circulatory nature of the Javanese song, regulated by the beat of the gong. In fact, the practice of what is known as “breath rhythm” is usually employed by the gong player—that is the momentary delay of the strike of the gong at the end of a gongan. The aesthetic effect of the delay adds to the suspense and drama of the piece. It emphasises the gong’s ability to suspend time thereby revealing the illusion of time.

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14 Negoro, Kejawen: Javanese Spiritual Teaching, p.47.
16 The start and conclusion of each gongan (cycle) is distinct from the start and conclusion of the gending (song). This delay acts like a caesura, as these operate in Greek and Latin poetry.
The gong simultaneously establishes time by marking it, and negates time by uniting past, present and future. This contradictory nature of this has been seen as ambiguous. Yet, it is precisely this feature which makes the gong the paradigmatic metaphor for the paradox of reality.

It is interesting to note that while the gong signals the start and end of each gongan cycle within a gending, it does not begin or conclude the gending itself. The gending opens with a phrase known as buka, usually played on just one or two of the instruments, which then leads to the first striking of the gong, indicating the end of the buka and the start of the first cycle of the gongan. Similarly, at the conclusion of the song, the final sound is not the gong, but the last note of the balungan, struck a moment after the final gong. All of this confers a sense of continuance. The cycle has no beginning or end, but is continuous; the gong is just one point along the cycle. For the purposes of practicality, the song has a beginning and an end, but theoretically it just goes on indefinitely. It is as though the song takes up in the middle of a rotation and leaves off in the same way, unfinished. Unbegetting and unbegotten, if you like. The presence of the gong after the opening and before the conclusion emphasises this continuum or eternally cyclic characteristic manifested in the Javanese gending. The gong marks time, but time itself has no boundaries. This view of time is typical of Eastern philosophies and goes a some way in illuminating the differences in Eastern and Western styles of music. Western music tends to expresses a more linear mentality, conveying movement from A to B, a climax and a resolution, a narrative. This too, in a sense, is a re-establishment of harmony and order, but the underlying value here is progression. In a cycle there is no progression. Each gong is a return, not an advance. Of the multitude of characters within the gamelan, none will “win” or “lose,” but all will defer to the justice of the gong.17 It is a reminder of the timelessness of Eternity, the illusion of progress and movement, the simultaneousness of all time and space. This notion is at the heart of Javanese mysticism, or Kejawen.

17 The East/West contrast is an obvious generalisation and this expression of cycles is found in Western music—an obvious example being Carl Orff’s Carmina Burana with the dramatic O fortuna returning periodically to play the part of “Justice.”
Miatke: The Gong

The *coincidentia oppositorum* expressed by the gong is starkly highlighted by the dichotomy of movement and rest. The perceived division between movement and rest constitutes the difference between the phenomena of myth and ritual, or between music and dance. Music uses word or language and is thought of as passive; dance is physical and activity. They are both, of course, simply two sides of the one coin. The gong, as a centre, is both movement and rest. It is still, but radiates. The gamelan music, expanding outwards on either side of the gong’s strike, is like concentric ripples, radiating from a tranquil centre. The music is multiplicity, life, creation—emanating from a single point within which all things are implicit. The music is the explosion of the Unity, yet the Unity remains intact. Finally then, the music reveals the illusion of an explosion, or disintegration of the centre. ‘These gongs possess a sound that grips one through the splendour that emanates from them, spreading an atmosphere of truly lofty restfulness and power,’ observes Kunst.¹⁸ Rest permeates movement; the Gong is ubiquitous in the music of the gamelan.

During my time in central Java I had the opportunity to study the *gender* privately with a lecturer from the National Arts Institute, ISI Yogyakarta. Pak Teguh had a wonderful teaching style that consisted of spending half of our sessions instructing me in the practical technique of the *gender*, and the other half imparting the many beautiful and polysemic meanings of the gamelan, posed in the form of graceful metaphors which articulated the essential Javanese view of life and the world. For Pak Teguh the gamelan is analogous to the social system, an idea deeply rooted in the cultural subconscious of every Javanese person. ‘*Peking dan kendang, sama pentingnya*’ he would say. ‘The *peking* (the smallest of the glockenspiels) and the drum are of equal importance.’ This is not an original observation by Pak Teguh but a natural and immediate association that all Javanese make, subliminally or consciously, that comes from a heightened sensitivity to social harmony. The need for this sensitivity to other elements of the whole in

order to create harmony is clearly replicated in the playing of the
gamelan.

Java does not have a strict hierarchical caste system, but central to
the Kejawen concept of harmony, and the understanding of its
preservation, is the wisdom of knowing one’s place and one’s social
obligations. To a certain extent the maintaining of the order of the
universe rests upon the fulfilment of social duties and observation of
social etiquette. An obvious reflection of this can be seen in the intricate
language of Java, basa Jawa. Acknowledged as ‘exhibiting the most
elaborate use of language levels in the world’, the complexity of basa
Jawa lies not only in the existence of many levels of language, but in the
infinitely complicated and subtle combinations of these levels, which
are carefully and skilfully blended depending upon the relationship
between the two speakers. This combination of language levels then
differs to some extent when any new combination of speakers interacts,
reflecting the uniqueness of their particular relationship. This
remarkably elaborate system, based upon acknowledging and respecting
every person’s unique place in society, attests to the importance of
social awareness and harmony in Java. The accurate acknowledgement
of particular relationships and the skill of appropriate interaction within
these relationships, is intricately maintained by correctly combining the
levels of language to use. By this harmony is maintained. This skill is
highly regarded within Javanese society. It is considered a sacred skill
to master, as it corresponds to the virtue of Jumbuhing Kawulo Gusti—
harmonious relationship between servant and God.

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19 L. Berman, Speaking through the Silence: Narratives, Social Conventions, and Power in
20 This type of language etiquette is also highly developed in Japanese society.
21 This language is strikingly similar to the Islamic imagery of servant and master, or
Lover and Beloved. In fact, this imagery existed in Java before the introduction of Islam,
as seen in the phrases which originate from the beliefs of Kejawen. Ancient Javanese
believed in one god, referred to as Gusti. This word was adapted by both Islam and
Christianity to denote the godhead and is used in liturgy and prayer within the practice
of both these religions in Java. Ancient Javanese religion and Islam, or more particularly
its mystical branch, Sufism, share this mystic feature of characterising the relationship
between man and god as that of two reciprocal halves of a whole. This is where the
concept of harmonious relationship, on any level, becomes representative of Divine
Union.
Miatke: The Gong

The moral and philosophical values of a culture are also expressed and reinforced through its creative arts and the gamelan is no exception. Here we find the perfect microcosm of the well-functioning and completely inter-dependant social network. Each instrument performs its role, all equally vital and valued. If the musicians are skilled, they understand and fulfil their obligations, not drudgingly or with any sense of forced duty, but with the joy and dignified grace that comes from knowing and doing one’s job well. The success of the gamelan also depends on the skill of the musician to understand the work of his fellow musicians, which accordingly helps him to understand and execute his own. Certain roles allow for creativity and elaboration, others depend on stability and constancy, others again upon initiative and leadership. All however must be aware of and open to changes in tempo and timing and in sudden movement from one section of the composition to another. These changes are not notated or agreed upon prior to the playing of the piece therefore successful transition hinges upon each player’s ability to respond accordingly to the movements of his fellows. This is described in Javanese as pada rasakake which can be translated as “shared feeling” or “sense of sameness.” What is required of the musician here is a sensitivity to his community, essentially, a skill in maintaining harmony at all costs. In this way, playing and listening to the gamelan is considered a kind of practice in spiritual discipline. In refining one’s ability to harmonise socially through the music, one refines one’s relationship with God. This is how the gamelan and indeed any music can be considered sacred and a powerful form of worship.

If we superimpose the social system onto the gamelan orchestra, the gong is the undisputed king. Gong is the Raja of the Kerajaan, the ultimate authority. An exemplary leader, it is steadfast and wise in its reign. It keeps pace with the flow of social activity but provides solid constitution and an unwavering justice to its subjects. Each striking of the gong is the loving law of the king restoring harmony and reassuring his subjects of his continual and eternal protection.

Each striking of the gong brings with it all the possibilities of the dawn of a new day. And at the same time all the assurance and constancy of the setting sun at the end of the day. We can be sure, that if nothing else remains the same, the gong will call the end to one period of percussive drama and invite the beginning of another. At that moment, whatever has occurred in the previous gongan is brought to
balance. The slate is wiped clean, the scales are reset. The gong calls the universe of the gamelan back to order. That primary Javanese virtue of harmony is re-established with each striking of the gong.

Musical Harmony as a metaphor for universal order is not unique to Java. The theory is most well known as postulated by Pythagoras in his work Harmony of the Spheres. According to this theory, the mathematical ratios to which our physical universe conforms can also be understood musically. Our cosmos is like a musical composition, made up of perfectly proportioned harmonies, the immense and subtle beauty of which is replicated in actual audible music. This ancient Greek theory is strikingly similar to the Kejawen cosmological view. The beauty of the natural universal order is undeniably reproduced in the music of gamelan. But what is unique about the gamelan is that while it certainly relies on these ratios, representative of the ratios of the cosmos, it also requires an irrationality or movement beyond the ratios: the ganti irama or transition phase. The music of the gamelan is constructed from ratio-determined elaborations, and one song or gending will move constantly between these different ratios. For example, the first phrase or gongan, may feature particular instruments playing two strikes to every one of the main melody or balungan. Upon a certain signal and a large amount of intuition, the instruments will move into a different ratio (irama), maybe four beats per one of the balungan, for example. This ratio or irama change may occur numerous times throughout a gending. The music may move between three or even four different iramas within a gending, each irama with its own name: irama lancar (ratio one), irama tanggung (ratio two), and so on. Irama is not tempo. Each irama has an established density of rhythmic/melodic behaviour with relation to the central melody, specific to each instrument. The timing of transitions are determined by certain instruments, namely the kendang or the rebab, who give a signal or cue. The smoothness of these transitions depends upon intuition and feeling—it cannot be conveyed by notation or guaranteed by any kind of mathematical approach. Rational thought will take you very close, but only a sheer non-rational intuition or faith can deliver you from one irama to the next.

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Miatke: The Gong

In this way then, the music represents not only the rational harmony of the cosmos, but also the transcending of the rational cosmos. It relies on supra-rational intuition. Ratio, and by extension rational thought, demands at least two elements or entities. The ratio 1:1, for example, requires that for every one item, there is another one. It necessitates separation or division. Music, as an audio expression of ratio, embodies dualism or pluralism; it represents the manifested cosmos. But a music which switches from ratio to non-ratio, from dualism to monism—in this music is not just the harmony of the physical universe, but also of metaphysical reality. Absolute Oneness transcends the separation of manifestation. It is the source of ultimate Truth. This truth can only be accessed through non-rationality, just as the transition between iramas occurs not through calculated formula or applied reasoning, but through instinct. This is analogous to the process of attaining enlightenment in many religions and philosophies. This departure from reasoning and leap of faith thrusts one into the realm of the Absolute. Indeed, the actual experience of sliding from one irama into another is nothing less than blissful. There is a split second of something like understanding and connectedness almost beyond the control of one’s own physical actions. It is quite joyful and reminiscent of those fleeting moments of extreme stillness which are sought through meditation.

Where then does the gong fit into this profoundly mystical dichotomy of ratio/non-ratio that is present in the gamelan? While the music moves between rationality and irrationality, the gong remains unchanging. Its function is to supervise or uphold the continuity and flow of the music itself. It balances the two extremes. It is neither one nor the other, but both. The harmony that is so precious to the Javanese, that must be acknowledged and even worshipped, is here in the gong. The word harmony then is synonymous with Truth because it is the result of two becoming one. To strike the Gong is to enable the worship of the Divine One. It is to ensure the continuation of the Divine Cycle. It is to acknowledge the eternity of Being.

Primordial Vibration: Sound as Metaphor
Harmony in a musical sense is problematic when applied to the gong. Indeed, the harmonics of the gong, that is, the composition of the sound
it produces, does not conform to a conventional understanding of musical harmony. What we hear when the gong strikes is a compound tone made up of many different notes. Goldsworthy observes, ‘The Javanese gong is tonally all inclusive and non-discrete in pitch and rhythm, providing an undifferentiated drone against which the other instruments provide specific melodic and rhythmic direction.’ On the level of the actual sound produced, the music of the gongan is specific and the gong is non-specific. Put another way, the music is the manifested world of separated things, time and space; the gong is undifferentiated all-time and all-space.

The sound of the gong does not fit the classical notion of harmony because the combination of notes which make up its tone are considered dissonant. To be consonant, a tone must contain notes between which are certain intervals. The notes must relate to each other in accordance with a particular ratio, producing a sound that is considered natural and pleasing to hear. We naturally and immediately accept the relationship between the notes of a consonant tone. It is a rational sound. A dissonant tone however, like the gong stroke, is one in which the notes seem unrelated and the effect is unnatural; even unsettling. It is an irrational sound. The degree to which we cannot comprehend the relationship between the notes of a dissonant tone directly corresponds to our inability to recognise reality as interconnected and unified. That is, when we perceive things in the world as separate, unrelated and differentiated, it is the same as when we believe a tone to be dissonant. Dissonance then, like the world, is illusory. Consider, for example, the possibility of experiencing all

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23 Ethnomusicologist Margaret Kartomi remarked to me of her scepticism regarding the idea of the harmony of the gong due to its discordance with musically contrived harmony. This scepticism, however, overlooks the idea that dissonance is contrary to harmony only in a rational sense and that it is this very discordance which lends the gong its transcendental quality.


25 D. Rudhyar, ‘Dissonant Harmony—A New Principle of Musical and Social Organization’ in HAMSA Seed Ideas No.1 (1928): ‘Absolute dissonance really does not exist. No interval is absolutely dissonant; it is only more or less so. When two tones are sounded, the relation between which cannot be felt by the hearer, a discord is thus produced. We might say to precise the meaning which we give to these basic terms that a consonance is a relation which can be easily reduced to unity; that a dissonance is a relation the terms of which are constantly pulling apart; that a discord is produced by the absence of any perceived relationship between two units.’
thoughts, moments and places at once: the impression is that it would be cacophonous, incomprehensible and even frightening. It would seem impossible to make sense of anything at all because the relationship between any two elements would be unclear. In the same way, a discordant note can seem unpleasant because the relationship between its notes is not one we easily or naturally accept. This phenomenon, termed dissonant harmony by early 20th century American composer and philosopher Dane Rudhyar, characterises the gong’s sound. So, for the truly enlightened being, one who recognises the world as pure undifferentiated unity, every single sound would be beautiful harmonious music.

For the unenlightened majority however, a consonant or “natural” harmony sounds pleasant because it appeals to our rational side; it is in accordance with the ratio of the physical universe. Dissonant harmony though has a power beyond physical beauty. It communicates to our profound intuition, the divine or eternal within us—that which is purely non-rational. Physically speaking, the vibrations of dissonant harmony are stronger than that of natural harmony and so the effect is more potent. The gong’s sound waves feature this kind of vibration. They are jagged and random. The vibration pattern is not a regular, rational waveform and thus creates an energy which seems to rejuvenate itself for a long period of time, rather than burning up and dying out like natural harmonic sound energy.

\[ \text{Gong jumeglug mandul-mandul} \\
\text{Gumulung obaking wareh.} \]

The sound of the gong, beaten heavily,  
Rolls on its ponderous beats like the ocean tide.\textsuperscript{26}

The lasting vibration of the gong creates a rhythm of its own. It is the same primordial vibration, that very first movement which, according to various creation myths, brings the world into being. Rudhyar explains: ‘Sound is, in ancient religions and cosmologies, the divine

\textsuperscript{26} J. Kunst, \textit{Music in Java}, p.141.
creative power, the energy inherent in the creative Word, the Logos.\textsuperscript{27} That sound, within which all of creation is innate, is the omni-tonal vibration of the gong. It is also this sound that has traditionally been used in meditation and healing techniques because of this creative, rejuvenating quality and its ability to restore physical harmony and balance from a divine source.

To understand dissonant harmony is to transcend the rational material world and access the truth and healing power of the Divine realm. The gong possesses cyclical rejuvenation not only symbolically but at the level of physics as well. It is quite literally an instrument of perpetual or immortal energy. In this sense, it is as close to infinity as a finite object may get.

The Metaphysics of Änandatäëòava, the Bliss-Dance

K. S. Kannan

Introduction
The Dance of Çiva-Naöaräja holds an enduring fascination in the minds not only of lovers of art but also those who are oriented towards religion and philosophy, and even science. Though the theme of the Dance of Çiva is millennia old, it continues to interest people of various times and climes. In this paper I present a unique and extraordinary interpretation of Naöaräja given by Sriranga Mahaguru (1913–1969), a saintly/scholarly householder Guru of Southern India, who hardly had any formal education. Sriranga Mahaguru offers a yogic interpretation of the Chola image of Tiruvälgaõû, now in the Madras Museum.1 Calambur Sivaramamurti too remarks that this is the ‘the best known image of its kind in any public museum of the world.’2

There can of course be numerous approaches to the study of Naöaräja: artistic, historical, theological, philosophical, scientific, archaeological and so on. The focus of this study, however, is the symbolism enshrined in the image, with special reference to the yogic ideas it embodies - an approach conceived of by none of the interpreters else than Sriranga Mahaguru.

Prior mainly to the pioneering work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, adverse criticism goaded by rank prejudice and general contempt ruled the field of criticism with respect to Indian art, a place for which was

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1 The Chola Empire, based on a Dravidian Tamil dynasty, ruled in southern India from the 9th century till the 13th century. The Chola period is remarkable for its sculptures and bronzes, producing many notable examples of the Naöaräja or ‘Dance of Shiva.’
2 C. Sivaramamurti, Nataraja in Indian Art, Thought, and Literature, New Delhi: Publications Division [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India], 1974, p.222.
Example of a bronze statue of the *Dance of Siva*
not, and in fact, would not, be accorded, or even acknowledged, by the Euro-centric historians, chroniclers and critics of the 19th and earlier centuries. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) cites some typical cynical opinions current during his own times. Thus, B. H. Baden-Powell (1857-1941) had remarked: ‘In a country like this [India], we must not expect to find anything that appeals to mind or deep feeling’ (italics ours).³ Though this critic modified his views considerably in later years, the famous historian Vincent A. Smith (1848-1920) had the nerve to remark: ‘Indian sculpture properly so-called, hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures of both men and animals become stiff and formal, and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of medieval temples have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque’ (italics ours).⁴ Similarly Alfred Maskell speaks of ‘these hideous deities with animals’ heads and innumerable arms’⁵. Sir George Birdwood (1832-1917), though sympathetic to many Indian causes, considered that ‘the monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India’ (italics ours).⁶

The situation has drastically changed today, thanks in no small measure to Coomaraswamy, and in particular to his book, The Dance of Shiva, and even more so his seminal essay bearing the same title in the said book. David Smith remarks thus of Coomaraswamy’s contribution: ‘Coomaraswamy’s training as a scientist along with his scholarly attainments enabled him to make a statement [regarding the dance of Siva] that has reverberated through the 20th century.’⁷ Kamil Zvelebil takes note of Coomaraswamy’s ‘tremendous intuition,’ through which ‘he [Coomaraswamy] grasped the philosophical essence of Çiva’s dance’ and ‘even in some seemingly minor points, [foresaw] the results of later

⁴ From the Imperial Gazetteer Vol.2, 1910.
In contrast to the pejorative views noted above, and more in line with Coomaraswamy’s view, Ernest B. Havell (1861-1934) remarks sympathetically: ‘Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet.’ With respect to the art of dance, Mary Clarke and Clement Crispe contrast the Orient and the Occident thus: ‘The dance of the Orient ... in many cases remains in direct contact with the spiritual ... In the West, the dance has lost this context. In neither folk nor theatrical dance can such a profound unity with the spiritual existence of a people be seen ... The dance in the West finds its richest sources not in man’s relationship to God or to the natural world, but in man’s concern with his own psyche...’.

The role and goal of music and dance are most clearly stated by that prince of philosopher-poeticians of India, Abhinavagupta (950–1020 CE). In his Abhinavabhāratē, a commentary on the Nāṇya Çāstra of Bharata (5th C. BCE), he says,

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svagata-krodha-çokådi-viçalikaåa-hådaya-granthi-bhaîjanåya
gétåi-prakriyå ca muninå viracitå |
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…it is for the purpose of sundering the tough “knots of the heart” such as anger, grief and so on in one’s own self, that the sage designed such music and allied arts.

The Āgama and Tantra texts are clear on the role of music and dance. The seeker-artist must first perform the “Internal Sacrifice” (antaryāga or hådyāga), and only then may he proceed to render his music, dance,

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9 Cited in K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, The Indian Concept of the Beautiful, University of Travancore (now University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India), 1947, p.84.
and other items that go to constitute what is called the “External Sacrifice” (*bahiryāga*).\(^{12}\) This idea is reiterated in *Çāradātilaka* of Lakṣmaṇa Deśikendra.\(^{13}\)

Here we wish to cite from two texts, one an Āgama and the other a Tantra, one a typically Vaiñēavite text, and the other, typically Çaivite, for corroboration and confirmation. The *Viñēudharmottarapurāṇā* accords a supreme place to the renderings of music and dance, characterizing them as ‘by far surpassing the offerings of flowers,’ and averring that ‘the Lord is pleased especially with a performance of dance by the worshipper,’ and concluding that the artist ‘reaps the benefit of the very performance of a sacrifice.’\(^{14}\) In its closing chapter, the *Näöyaçāstra* itself affirms that one may attain through dance, the self-same goal attained by the knowers of the Veda and the sacrifice!\(^{15}\) The texts of *Dharmaçāstra* too laid emphasis on the pursuit of the various arts. To cite one: ‘One who knows the essential principle (*tattva*) of playing on the lute attains salvation,’ asserts Sage Yājïavalkya.\(^{16}\)

The commentator, Vijïaneçvara, gives the logic behind this understanding in his *Mitākñarā* pithily thus: the mind is then centred in the Self.\(^{17}\) In the previous verse it is stated that singing liberates.\(^{18}\) The

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\(^{12}\) *Ahirbudhnyasaàhitā* 28.29: hādyāgā prathama kuryānniyatendriya-mānasau |
gēta-vāditra-nāttādyair devam abhyaarchayet tatau ||

\(^{13}\) *Çāradātilaka* 18.97: iti sampūjya deveçā bhaktīyā paramayā yutaù |
prēçayennātyya-gētādyaiù stotair mantrair manoharaïù ||

\(^{14}\) *Viñēudharmottarapurāṇā* 3.34.23-29:
23 so ‘pi tuñyati nāttena samyag aradhito harau |
anye ca devās tuñyanti samyaināttena toñītū ||
25 puñpa-naivedya-dānebhyo nāttadānaa viçīñyate ||
26 svayaā nāttena yaù kuryād devadevasya pūjanam |
viçēneēa mahābhāga tasya tuñyati keçavaù ||
27 nāttaa gētāa tathā vādyaa datvā devāya viñēave |
sarva-kāma-samādhdhasya yajiùsyā phalam açnute ||
29 devatārādhanaa kuryāt yas tu nāttena dharmavit |
sa sarva-kāmān āpnoti mokñopāya ca vindati ||

\(^{15}\) *Näöyaçāstra* 36: yā gatir veda-viduñāa yā gatir yajiù-vedinām |
yā gatir dāna-çēlānāa tāa gatiā prāpnyaut tu saù ||

The näöya is accorded the status of a Veda by Bharata (1.4.16): näöyākhyāa païcamaà vedam.

\(^{16}\) *Yajïavalkyasmāti* 3.4.115: vēēvādana-tattvaà yā jati-çēlā-çaradālau |
tālajāçca yā prayāsena mokñā-mārgā niyacChati ||

\(^{17}\) *Mitākñarā* 3.4.115: tad-anuiddha-brahmopāsanatayātālāi-bhāigya-bhāyēc-citār-vāttter |
ātmaikgratayāyā sukaratvād alpāyāsenaiva mukti-pathāa niyacchati ||

\(^{18}\) *Mitākñarā* 3.4.114: geyam etat tad-abhyāsa-karaēān-mokñā-saïjītam |
commentator says *the means for salvation* has also been called, by an extension of sense, *salvation*—representing, that is, the means and the end by the same word. The sage goes on to aver that if salvation itself does not accrue from the above means (possibly owing to any shortcomings), the singer would be conferred the status (no small one, verily) of becoming an attendant upon the very Lord Çiva!{\textsuperscript{19}}—the next best thing, as it were! We might also note that Kālidāsa calls the art of the stage a veritable “Ocular Sacrifice,”{\textsuperscript{20}} as against the regular sacrifices demanding multiple actions involving complex procedures.

**The Dance of Çiva-Naõarāja**

The French sculptor, Rodin, described the dancing Çiva of Chidambaram, which he compared to the famed Medici Venus, as ‘...Indeed their gesture can compare in gracefulness and elegance...‘{\textsuperscript{21}} Sharada Srinivasan notes that ‘Time magazine prophetically featured it [Naõarāja] as a symbol of a changing India on its cover.’{\textsuperscript{22}} William Dalrymple speaks of Naõarāja as the ‘ultimate Chola icon ... [endowed with] both a raw sensual power and a profound theological message.’{\textsuperscript{23}} He adds, ‘while the Gods of Thebes and the Parthenon have both been dead and forgotten for millennia, the Gods and temples of Hindu India are still as alive and active as ever’, speaking admiringly of ‘the astonishing antiquity, and continuity, of Hinduism’.{\textsuperscript{24}}

Recent times have witnessed a surge of scientific interest in the image of Naõarāja. The starting point perhaps was Fritjof Capra who remarked that the dance of Çiva is ‘the dancing universe, the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another.’{\textsuperscript{25}} More impressive is the statement of Carl Sagan: ‘If the universe is expanding as per the Big Bang model of Fred Hoyle and Abbel Maitre, then what happens to the stars that expand, explode and die? If as another school of astronomy says that the universe is

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{\textsuperscript{19}} *Mitākñarā* 3.4.116: gētaïjo yadi yogena nāpnoti paramā padam | rudrasyānucaro bhūtvā tenaiva saha modate ||

{\textsuperscript{20}} *Mālavikāgnimitra* 1.4: kāntā kratuā cākñuñam |

{\textsuperscript{21}} The Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature, ed. A. Datta, Volume 1, p 848.

{\textsuperscript{22}} India International Centre Quarterly, Volume 34, Number 2, Autumn 2007 issue.

{\textsuperscript{23}} Ibid.


contracting and that stars and galaxies are being pulled back to a centre of creation, where do they all go? The answer lies in Hindu Cosmology ... [showing Naöaräja’s drum on the one hand] this symbolises creation of the universe, stars, galaxies and human beings; [showing the fire on Naöaräja’s other hand] this symbolises destruction of what has been created.”

Yet more telling is the comment of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers:

Each great period of science has led to some model of nature. For classical science it was the clock; for nineteenth century science, the period of the Industrial Revolution, it was an engine running down. What will be the symbol for us? What we have in mind may perhaps be expressed by a reference to sculpture, from Indian ... art to our time. In some of the most beautiful manifestations of sculpture of ... the dancing Shiva ... there appears very clearly ... a junction between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. We believe that this confrontation will give our period its uniqueness.

Coomaraswamy chose the Chola image of Tiruvälaläigöu—exactly the same sculpture that inspired Sriranga Mahaguru too—as a frontispiece for his book, The Dance of Shiva. For Coomaraswamy the numerous depictions of Naöaräja ‘vary amongst themselves in minor details, but all express one fundamental conception.’ The central motif, says Coomaraswamy, is the cosmic activity of Çiva, a motif which he elaborates on in detail throughout his essay. So important was the interpretation of this image to Coomaraswamy that he entitled his book The Dance of Shiva even though there are other numerous interesting, and important enough, essays in the book.

We perceive here a special meaning, not noticed by anybody yet, in the subtitle of this book viz. Fourteen Indian Essays. This indeed echoes ‘the sounding of the drum fourteen times by Naöaräja,’ which gave rise to the Fourteen Aphorisms, which came to be the very foundation of

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28 Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva, p.86.
Sanskrit syllabry and of Sanskrit grammar itself, and was designated Māheçvaraśūtra. That Naöaräja so sounded the drum is detailed in a text called Nandikeçvarakārikā in the very opening verse.²⁹

In order to place things in perspective, and in order to demonstrate the originality of Sriranga Mahaguru’s interpretation, let us make a brief survey of the work done in the past, and in recent decades, about this Naöaräja image.

The Naöaräja Icon
There are around a dozen source texts bearing on the iconography of Naöaräja.³⁰ The Cidambaramāhātmya offers a fairly detailed yet charming description of Naöaräja. The gist of the verses of this book may thus be stated: Naöaräja has stamped one foot of His. The other, the “bent one,” (kuïcitapāda) has a charming anklet. The left hand is also “a little bent” (kuïcid-äkuïcita). The No-Fear hand has a serpentine bangle. The moving drum and blazing fire adorn the other two hands. He has the masculine and feminine ear-ornaments adorning the right and the left ears. A not too conspicuous smile beautifies his face. The Ganges, the serpent, and the young digit of the Moon bedeck his tawny, matted hair. The whirling matted hair has tinged the various directions with its hue. In the midst of all this, He looks like a thousand Suns arisen together.³¹

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²⁹ Nandikeçvarakārikā: nåttävasäne naöäräjaräjo nanäda óhakkää nava-païcaväram | uddhartukämaù sanakädisiddhän etad vimarçe çivasütrajälam ||
³⁰ Sivaramamurti lists the following: Aàçumadbhedägama, Kürmapuräëa, Caturvargacintämaëi, Devatämürtiprakaraëa, Matsyapuräëa, Viñëudharmottarapuräëa, Çilparatna, Çrétattvanidhi, Sakalädhikära (See his Nataraja in Indian Art, Thought, and Literature, p.150).
³¹ Cidambaramāhātmya 17.4.43–50:

43 sthäpitaika-padåmbhojaà niçcalaà vag-agocaram |
öffyak-kuïcita-vämäighri-lasan-mäëikya-nüpuram ||
44 kuïcid-akuïcitodbhäsi-vämäpäïi-saroruham |
dattäbhaya-karäbaddha-phaëi-kaïkaëa-bhüñitam ||
45 calaö-öamaru-deïptägni-bhüñitänya-bhuja-dvayam |
46 täöaika-çaïkha-bhüñäbhhyäà vilasat-karëapaçakam |
anatisphuöa-sambhüta-mandasmita-çuci-prabham ||
48 gaïgä-pannaga-mugdhendu-yuta-piïga-jaöädharam |
50 calat-piïga-jaöäbhära-pïçaïgékåta-diïmukham |
madhye sahasra-bhänünäa bhänu-bimbam ivoditam ||
The dhyāna-cloka-s of Ānanda-Tāēōava Naōarāja too deserve to be taken note of. They record every detail that the aspirant has to bear in mind. These descriptions are naturally pertinent in the context of a discussion of the symbolism.

Several interpretations of the Naōarāja image have been offered. By way of proceeding to the interpretation of Sriranga Mahaguru, let us rehearse three key studies, being those of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Heinrich Zimmer, and Kamil Zvelebil, approximately representing the beginning, middle, and end of the 20th century. Our focus is on the symbolic interpretations given by these writers.

Coomaraswamy
Coomaraswamy recognises the following key elements of the Nataraja image as typically represented:

The images, then, represent Shiva dancing, having four hands, with braided and jewelled hair of which the lower locks are whirling in the dance. In His hair may be seen a wreathing cobra, a skull, and the mermaid figure of Ganga; upon it rests the crescent moon, and it is crowned with a wreath of Cassia leaves. In His right ear, He wears a man’s earring, a woman’s in the left; He is adorned with necklaces and armlets, a chief part of His dress consists of tightly fitting breeches, and He wears also a fluttering scarf and a sacred thread. One right hand holds a drum, the other is uplifted in the sign of do not fear; one left hand holds fire, the other points down upon the demon Muyalaka, a dwarf holding a cobra; the left foot is raised. There is a lotus pedestal, from which springs an encircling glory (tiruvasi), fringed with flame, and touched within by the
Coomaraswamy exudes confidence when he remarks, ‘Even without reliance upon literary references, the interpretation of this dance would not be difficult.’

He isolates the features of Čiva in order that one may grasp the specialities of Naöarāja in better focus. He proceeds to describe the Païcakāṭya (‘the five activities’) of Naöarāja viz: Sāñöi (overlooking, creation, evolution), Sthiti (preservation, support), Saàhära (destruction, evolution), Tirobhāva (veiling, embodiment, illusion, and also, giving rest), Anugraha (release, salvation, grace). This cosmic activity is the central motif of the dance. The three points of his analysis are thus stated:

The Essential Significance of Shiva’s Dance is threefold: First, it is the image of his Rhythmic Play as the Source of all Movement within the Cosmos, which is Represented by the Arch; Secondly, the Purpose of his Dance is to Release the Countless souls of men from the Snare of Illusion; Thirdly, the Place of the Dance, Chidambaram, the Centre of the Universe, is within the Heart.

After identifying the essence of the symbolism, he proceeds to recognise the element of beauty, calling attention to the grandeur of this dance conceived of a synthesis of science, religion, and art.

How amazing the range of thought and sympathy of those rishi-artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race, nor acceptable to the thinkers of one century only, but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, and the artist of all ages and all countries.

Against the modern scourge of dividing life into water-tight compartments, the rishi-artists embraced a holistic vision, grasping and

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33 Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva*, p.86.
34 Ibid., p.87.
35 Ibid., p.93.
36 Ibid., p.94.
representing the fundamental rhythms of life. ‘No artist of today, however great,’ says Coomaraswamy, ‘could more exactly or more wisely create an image of that Energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena.’ Coomaraswamy’s ability to reconcile Time and Eternity, and the alternations of phase extending over vast regions of space and great tracts of time reveal his imposing blend of scientific thinking and artistic imagination. Alluding to the theme of cyclicity embodied in the sculpture, he succinctly remarks: ‘This is poetry; but none the less, science.’

Returning to the Naöaräja theme in his History of Indian and Indonesian Art, Coomaraswamy adds (nearly ten years later): ‘the movement of the dancing figure is so admirably balanced that while it fills all space, it seems nevertheless to be at rest - in the sense that a spinning top or a gyrostat is at rest; thus realising the unity and simultaneity of the Five Activities.’

On the whole Coomaraswamy’s interpretation of the Naöaräja image—profoundly influential on a good deal of later thinking on Indian art in general, and on Naöaräja in particular—essentially concerns the cosmic scales of time and space, and the notions of matter and energy, that scientists of his time were preoccupied with, and indeed still are.

Zimmer dedicates a chapter of his book, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, to the ‘Dance of Shiva.’ He feels that the details of the image are to be read ‘according to the Hindu tradition, in terms of a complex pictorial allegory.’ Each part of the image is capable of multiple significations. Referring first to the upper right hand holding the drum, he says: ‘This connotes Sound, the vehicle of speech, the conveyer of revelation, tradition, incantation, magic and divine truth.’ He observes the relationship between sound and Ether, recognising Ether as ‘the primary and most subtly pervasive manifestation of the

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37 Ibid., p.94.
38 Ibid., p.95.
41 Ibid., p.152.
divine substance’, hence symbolising creation. Its counterpart on the left side has ‘Fire, the element of destruction of the world’. ‘In the balance of the hands’, he argues, ‘is illustrated a counterpoise of creation and destruction’.42 His interpretation of the other two hands has not much to add to the traditional interpretation. Speaking of Apasmāra, he says it is ‘symbolic of life’s blindness, man’s ignorance. Hence conquering this demon amounts to attainment of true wisdom wherein is ‘release from the bondages of the world.’

Zimmer observes the traditional interpretations of prabhā-māṇḍala or tiru-vāsi—the ring of flames and light encompassing the god—as signifying the ‘energy of Wisdom’ and, also notes the reading of this as the utterance of the mystical syllable Aum. The famous interpretations of A-U-M are given next, as referring to the various states as jāgrat (“the waking state”) svapna (“the dreaming state”) and suñupti (“the dreamless sleep”). Beyond the pronunciation of the three, A, U, and M, lies the Silence, the Ultimate Unmanifest.43

When considering the five activities (Païcakåtya), Zimmer recognises how the first three sāñōi (“creation”), sthiti (“preservation”), and laya (“destruction”), and the last two, anugraha (“release”) and tirodhāna (“rest”), can be seen as two groups of ‘cooperative mutual antagonisms’.44 Çiva-Naöarāja expresses the paradox of opposition and balance: the creative force and the quiescence of the Absolute—Kāla and Mahākāla, Time and Eternity; the cyclic rhythm and sovereign calm blend in Him. As Zimmer remarks, Nataraja displays these patterns ‘not only simultaneously but in sequence.’45 Elsewhere he observes the ‘tension between the marvel of the dance and the serene tranquility of his expressively inexpressive countenance’.46 Çiva is the embodiment of ‘Super Death’ (Yamāntaka, “The Ender of the Tamer, He who conquers and exterminates Yama the God of Death, The Tamer”), as indicated by the skull shown in the icon. At the same time, ‘as Shishu, the babe, the crescent moon, Shiva is a sheer delight and the most auspicious thing to see, a promise of life and life’.47 As Zimmer says,

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42 Ibid., p.153.
43 Ibid., p.154.
44 Ibid., p.154.
46 Ibid., p.156.
‘Shiva is apparently, thus, two opposite things: archetypal ascetic, and archetypal dancer’; again, Total Tranquility and Total Activity. ‘These aspects’ remarks, Zimmer, ‘are the dual manifestations of an absolutely non-dual, ultimate Reality.’

For Zimmer, the dance of Shiva expresses a ‘marvellous blending of opposites’: ‘The dance, like life itself, is a mixture of the terrific and the auspicious, a juxtaposition and unification of destruction, death and vital triumph, the volcanic bursting of the lavas of life.’

**Zvelebil**

For Zvelebil, the figure presents a well-defined, almost rigorously conventionalized, mode of Naöaräja’s dance, which ‘to a great extent suppressed all other manners of Çiva’s dance and usurped for itself—legitimately so—the right to be the representative mode of the mystical dance of the Divine Dancer.’ The most important and characteristic mark of Änandatäëòava, according to Zvelebil, is ‘the left leg lifted and bent (kuëcita), with the simultaneous twist of the left hip to the front.’

For this has to do, for him, with the historical development of sculptural representation. Zvelebil’s primary concern is to ‘trace the evolutionary steps’ of this icon, the Änanda-täëòavamürti. The iconographic significance of the peacock feathers adorning the jaöä (“matted hair”) is that it combines the Kiräta-mürti (a gracious aspect of Çiva as a hunter), with the Naöaräja-mürti (Çiva as a dancer; mürti = form). Like Zimmer, Zvelebil emphasises the juxtaposition of opposites; he notes ‘the principle of contrast in art exemplified by the hideous grinning skull [kapäla] set close to the charming mermaid, the Gaigā.’ Again, the two types of kuëòala (“jewel earrings”) on the different ears indicate the masculine and feminine aspects.

Zvelebil continues to remark of the crescent moon on the crest as ‘above all, a symbol of beauty’. The third eye, vertically placed on his
forehead, adds charm to his face, like a tilaka on the forehead of Indian women. The three eyes represent the Sun, the Moon and Agni, sometimes called mutté in Tamil (“threefold fire”). He observes with Sivaramamurti the way that ‘the wavy line of the jaōä is wonderfully matched by the undulating form of the snake,’ remarking on how this is then reinforced by the fact that ‘the curls of the god’s hair have snakes entwined in them’.55

As regards the òamaru (the “tambourine” used by dancers) Zvelebil quotes Rustam Mehta in saying that it represents ‘the primary creative force and the intervals of the beat of time-process’;56 he compares this with Zimmer’s remarks about the elements of Sound and Ether ‘signifying the first, truth-pregnant moment of creation, the productive energy of the Absolute, in its pristine, cosmogenetic strength.’57 Zvelebil also remarks on the form of òamaru: ‘because of its form resembling two triangles, it symbolises the unity of the male and the female principles.’58 The foremost significance he perceives here is that of the rhythm of the cosmos, which returns him, like Zimmer, to the idea of Ether as the first manifestation.

Zvelebil offers an interesting comparison of the abhayamudrā hand with the magna manus (“great hand”) of Christian art.59 He notes the ardhacandrahasta, i.e. the outstretched palm forming a crescent or semicircle between the thumb and the index finger to hold a bowl of fire or a flame of fire, suggesting: ‘The tongue of the flame is not just a straight line but it too, dances violently or gently like the lamp-flame slightly stirred by a soft breeze’.60 The two upper hands symbolise thus the balance of creation and destruction. The daëòahasta, i.e. the staff-like stretched hand, is ‘stretched across the body, indicating power and strength’ and is pointing to the foot of salvation.

With respect to the legs, Zvelebil observes that ‘the bhujaigatrāsita mode of the position of the legs (reflecting fear of serpents) has the left leg raised and bent, while the weight of the body rests on the right

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55 Ibid., p.34.
57 Ibid., p.35, citing Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p.152.
58 Ibid., p.35.
60 Ibid., p.41.
The symbolism here is ‘Çiva’s world-creative force driving life-monads into inert matter, while the left raised foot symbolises their release.’62 Thus the two feet denote the ‘continuous circulation of consciousness into and out of the condition of inertness and ignorance.’63 Coming finally now to the figure below the foot, he compares Apasmāra or Müyalaka to Kahlil Gibran’s ‘shapeless pygmy that walks asleep in the mist searching for its own awakening’.64

According to Zvelebil, the ashes falling from Çiva’s body during the dance are ‘the lines of a master-plan to shape the world.’65 For him, the interpretation that dancing on Apasmāra signifies the eradication of ignorance resulting in the birth of knowledge is ‘the late, sophisticated, philosophical interpretation of the Cosmic Dancer.’66 The cobra on the head emits deadly poison that results in death, he says, and the moon emits rays of ambrosia which assure immortality. The laughing skull laughs at those who consider the world and themselves eternal. The crescent moon is the symbol of growth and eternity; the Gaigā the symbol of the sustenance of life; and the snake, symbol of transmigration of the eternal soul from one body to another. The prabhāvali or tiruvāsi (the “flaming aureole”) ‘represents the “dance” of nature (Prakāti) within which the dance of the Prime Mover is an eternal event’.67 The whole form may be read too as the mystic mantra Om, he says, and refers to the reputed Païcakātya interpretation.

Towards the end of his book, Zvelebil says: ‘As to the meaning of Ānanda-tāēòava, it remains enigmatic. However, we may interpret it, possibly, as a dance expressive of the polarity of opposites, of the conjunction of opposites and the resolution of contradictions (which is usually the objective of most Hindu myths): ānanda “peaceful bliss”; tāēòava “vigorous, awesome, fearsome dance”’.68 In the final analysis, Zvelebil feels, this dance of Naōarāja is to an analytical, discursive mind, a mystery; he avers ‘it is so, inevitably; that it must remain so; for I do

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61 Ibid., p.41.
62 Ibid., p.41.
63 Ibid., p.41.
64 Ibid., p.41.
65 Ibid., p.41.
66 Ibid., p.42.
67 Ibid., p.42.
68 Ibid., p.73.
believe, with Frederick Franck, that “symbol and myth are not to be analysed, but to be responded to.”

Yogic Interpretation: Sriranga Guru

That Indian art and yoga are intimately connected is a well-acknowledged fact. Coomaraswamy devoted a whole chapter, ‘Art and Yoga in India,’ to this notion in his book, *Essays in National Idealism*. Zvelebil cites a paper entitled, ‘The Yogic Significance of the Dances of Çiva’ by Dr. S. C. Kersenboom-Story, which equates the seven dances as the happenings in seven *cakra*. In her role as editor of Stella Kramrisch’s writing on India’s sacred art, Barbara Miller remarks,

> Yoga discipline is as much a prerequisite for the Indian artist as was physical discipline for the Greek. It is as though in Indian art the image is embossed from within by the movement of breath, or circulation, through the vital centres of the living being, unimpeded by the gross matter of the actual physical body.

The yogic interpretation of Naöaräjä’s dance, such as we get with Sriranga Guru, is simply unique, but it does not essentially contradict interpretations offered by Coomaraswamy and his successors, nor those offered in the Tamil sources, such as *Cidambara Mummani Kovai* or *Tirumantiram*, or the Sanskrit sources such as *Cidambaramāhātmya*. Sriranga Guru agrees with the traditional meaning of the dance as a depiction of the Five Acts (*Païca-kåtya*); he also sees in the image, however, as none of them could see, the embodiment of the deepest Yogic principles as well as their attainments (*tattva* and *anubhava*) in an unparalleled manner.

Sriranga Guru quotes from a few Çästric texts; but we have added corroborating and substantiating citations where apposite. We have drawn upon the work of one of Sriranga Guru’s earliest disciples, S. V. Chamu. Together with Chamu’s, *The Divine Dancer*, we have drawn upon certain other sources, such as the several volumes of *Amaravāēe* (transcriptions/jottings of certain formal/informal private talks of

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69 Ibid., p.73.
Sriranga Guru), and some oral information gleaned from the disciples of the Yogin.

The Änandat-äëòava of Naöaräja

The Naöaräja (of Tiruvälaìgäòu) is depicted—true to name—in a dancing pose, he says, trampling on the pigmy figure (Apasmära) on a pedestal. The original prabhävali encircling the figure is now broken and missing. The matted hair, tied at the top but spread far and wide at the bottom, is also missing. The pose depicts the culmination of various dancing movements and, simultaneously, the static position reached in conclusion. The waist has been sculpted as befits a dancer, in terms of its shape and slenderness. Also typical of a dancer is a flowing waist-band wrapped around the diaphragm, with a loop that is suggestive of the movement of the body. There are three bends: one at the knee, another at the hip, and the third at the neck, thus constituting the famed tribhaıgi (“triple-bend”) posture. The outstretched hands are collinear.

The knee of Naöaräja’s right foot is bent, obviously conducing to balance in standing, but adding eminently to the grace of the posture. The bent left foot (hence called kuicita-päda, “bent foot”) has pointed toes. In the parlance of devotion, it is anugraha-päda (“The Foot of Favour”). The digits of the kuicitapäda are stretched. These are among the numerous minute observations made by Sriranga Guru.

In considering Sriranga Guru’s interpretation, we have confined here to certain specific, more important, aspects of this image, viz.: Apasmära; the four arms; the head and face, and the items adorning the head (the skull, the plume, the flower, the serpent, the lunar digit, and the river Ganges; the Ardhanaréçvara (“The Lord Who Is Half Woman”) aspect; and the bandha (“knots” or “bonds”).

Apasmära

The figure of Naöaräja is very much larger than the crouching figure of Apasmära (Muyalaka in Tamil). Apasmära holds a serpent in his left hand, which has raised its head and spread its hood. Naöaräja’s right foot presses down on the back of Apasmära, almost matching in length his spine. Rather than being depicted as writhing in pain consequent to the trampling, Apasmära is shown with his head raised, and, puzzlingly,
with a smile on his face. His eyes appear to be endeavouring to catch a glimpse of the dancer’s face.

The *Cidambara-mahātmya* describes how the sages of the Devadāru forest created an imp and set it against Čiva: They made it to look like a boy: the boy had rolling eyes comparable to Kuja (Sanskrit for Mars), tawny hair, dwarfish stature, and protruding teeth, and was surrounded by numerous serpents; charging against Čiva with great ferocity, the imp ended up getting trampled down by Him, only to serve as His pedestal, finally.

This image is commonly recognised as Čiva overcoming evil and ignorance. In the system of traditional Indian medicine known as Āyurveda, Apasmāra is the name of a disease, characterised by convulsions consequent to an eclipse of the inner faculties. Suçruta gives the etymology of Apasmāra as ‘the absence of proper memory.’

Sriranga Guru points out how there is nothing mysterious about this trampling of Apasmāra. The pressing of Naöarāja’s foot upon Apasmāra’s spine is highly significant from the point of view of yogic science. Yogic texts describe several *cakra*-s (“wheels”) in the human body. Of the seven, the six *cakra*-s spanning the spine form one unit, whereas the ones from above the nape up to the cranium form another. The former is called *çakti-sthāna* and stand for the realm of *Prakåti* (“Nature”); the latter is called called *çāmbhava-sthāna*, and stand for *Puruña* (“Person”). The entanglement of *jéva* (the “individual self”) in *saàsāra* is primarily due to the *jéva*’s being unable to go beyond the realm of *Prakåti* to the original realm, that of the *Puruña*. Naöarāja applies pressure upon the *Prakåti* portion which easens the “transportation” of the *jéva* into that realm, thus restoring the same to

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72 *Cidambara-mahātmya* 13.29-32.
73 *Caraka Saàhitä* 6.10.4 (ed. Y. Sharma, Bombay: Nirmaya Sagar Press, 1941). The concept of Apasmāra including its causes and consequences upon epileptic seizures obtains a detailed treatment by Bharata (*Nāöya Çästra* 7.74).
74 *Suçruta Saàhitä* 6.61.3
the original nature. It is as a conspicuous consequence of this act that even Apasmāra is able to raise his head, and explains why Apasmāra is trying to look at the face of Čiva, and why there is a smile on the face of Apasmāra matching that of Čiva. It is worth remarking that Čiva tramples Apasmāra with His right foot, which is the Puruña portion of His own body: the Puruña portion of the body imparts the Puruña nature to the crouching figure.

The arms
The image has four arms, two normal ones in front, two additional ones behind, which seem to sprout from the shoulder joints. The front arms are both turned rightwards; the left one is so stretched to the right as to cover the bosom, and is known technically as gaja-hasta (“the Elephant-Hand”) or daēòahasta (“the Staff Hand”). It is bent at the end, with the fingers pointing towards the bent left foot (kuïcitapāda) in a graceful manner.

The daēòahasta is indicative of a position conducive to the practice of breath control (prāēāyāma), which is essential to yoga. As a consequence of the particular position of the legs, the apāna (“the Expiratory Breath”, approximately) has moved upwards, and needs now to be held in check lest it relapse downwards, and is achieved by the stretched left hand pressed somewhat upon the bosom, the left portion of the frame. The band that is tied at the waist - at the point of the diaphragm, reinforces and reiterates this pressure. All this is a matter of sheer yogic practice, hardly recorded in yogic texts, and there can hardly be anything to “prove” here except actual experience.

The front right arm is positioned in the gesture of “promise of freedom from fear” (Abhayamudrä). As for the hind arms, they are stretched sideways. The left arm is bent at the elbow accentuating its beauty. This ardha-candra (“Half-Moon”) hand holds fire in it. The right arm in the rear holds a hand-drum (òamaru), which Čiva appears to be sounding gently. The fire and the drum respectively represent prāēa and apāna (the twin aspects, inspiratory and expiratory, of vital energy), there being a general equation between apāna and agni (“fire”). In fact, the òamaru itself symbolises the “movements” of prāēa and apāna, for the alternation of the two strings of this drum expresses the movement
of the jéva. The balance or harmony of präëa and apäna is considered the essence of präëäyäma.

The harmony of präna and apäna is also recognised as the defining condition of the “primordial vibration,” which is manifest as nāda (“sound”) and more, specifically, the sound of the mystical Om. The union of präëa and apäna, the active listening to the nāda, and the act of following nāda to its subtle end wherein resonance merges into energy (nädänta) culminating in manonmané, (“Upthrust Mind”), a high yogic state, are all intimately related to the dance of Naöaräja.

As Naöaräja dances to the melody of the subtle nāda, His mind (manas) glides into the stillness of nädänta. According to the Nädabindüpaniñad the mind functions only as long as the nāda sounds. The relationship between präëa and manas is not unknown in Vedic literature. Çatapathabrähmaäa refers to the mind as ‘lording over all the vital airs.’ The Muëòakopaniñad talks of the simultaneous transcendence of präëa and manas. The drawing of the mind “upwards” physically and “inwards” experientially is manonmané: ‘It is when there is no stirring in the eyes, nor in breathing, nor in mind, that this state is attained’. Yoga is thus ‘an integration of the senses, the mind, and the präëa’ as stated in Maiträyaëyupaniñad. We might also note that Pärvati Herself is sometimes referred to as Manonmané and Çiva as Manonmana, and that the Taittirëyäraëyaka calls Çiva Manonmana. No wonder, then, that the dance of Naöaräja is called Nädäntanaöana, “Trans-nāda Dance.”

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77 Cf. Yogacüòämaëyupaniñad 28: nidänajïasya bhiñajo rugëa-hiàsăâ prayuïjataù | na kïcid api nairghåëyaà ghåëaivåtra prayojikå | |
78 Cf. Bhagavadgétä 5.27 : präëapänau samau kätvä. |
79 Saigétaranäkara 1.3.6 : nakåraà präëänämàmaà dakåram analaà viduù |
jåtaù präëägni-saàyogät nåda-namåbhüdhåyate |
80 Nädabindüpaniñad 43: nådo yävan manas tävat nädånte tu manonmané. |
81 Çatapathabrähmaäa 14.3.2.3: mano vai präëänäm adhipåù | manasi hi sarve präëäù pratüohitåù |. This is repeated in the Haöhayogapuradépikå 4.29: mano-nåthas tu mårutåù. |
82 Muëòakopaniñad 2.1.2: apräëo hy amanåù çùbhraù |
83 Çaìkara, Yogatärävalé 17: netre yayoneñya-nimeñña-cünye väyur yayä varjita-recapüraù | manaçca saikalpa-vikalpa-cünyaà manonmané sa mayi sannidhattåm | |
84 Maiträyaëyupaniñad 6.25: ekatvaà präëä-manasor indriyåëå adhipåù | manasi hi sarve präëäù pratüohitåù |. This is repeated in the Haöhayogapuradépikå 4.29: mano-nåthas tu mårutåù. |
85 Taittirëyäraëyaka 10.44.1; also Mahänäräyaëopaniñad 17.2.
The head
Looking at the face of Naöaräja one is immediately aware of the third eye set vertically in the forehead. The vertical extremes of this tilaka-shaped “eye” touch the rim of the head-dress at the top, and the point between the two eyebrows at the bottom. The pupils of all the three eyes appear equidistant. It is common to refer to the two eyes of the Lord as the Sun and the Moon. The third eye, the “eye of knowledge,” is commonly represented as the Eye of Fire. This trinity of eyes thus represents a trinity of luminaries.

The third eye is closed, while the horizontal eyes are depicted as open. This combination suggests the special condition known in yogic literature as “eyes open but gaze turned inwards,” which is a reference to the peak of yogic experience called Çämbhavé-mudrä.87 The left eyebrow of Naöaräja is considerably raised. This indicates a high state of mind. Kälidäsa makes a reference to this as a culmination in the particular positioning of the eyebrow. This is also the way to attain the high yogic state(s) called unmané / samunmané / manonmané.89 The connection between the raising of the eyebrow and the state of mind is a matter of yogic experience, as the Upaniñad sets it forth.

The ecstatic state of Naöaräja is borne out by His facial expression. An ineffable, gentle smile adorns His face. There is an asymmetry noticeable in the smile, recognised only upon a close observation: the left portion of the smile has a certain femininity, with a visible dimple on the left cheek, while the right portion is somewhat tinged by restraint, as the dimple is not so obvious. The lower lip is a little projected forward, as against the upper one which is a little drawn back. The nostrils betray features of deep inhalation, followed by the retention of breath; thus these nostrils show the stillness attained by what is spoken of as Kevala-kumbhakävasthä (“the state of Kevala Kumbhaka, Stilled Inhalation”) in yogic texts.

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86 Cf. dhyäna-çloka of Viñëusahasranäman, or the much older Muëòakopaniñad 2.1.4.
87 Çäëòilyopaniñad 1.7.14: antar lakñyaà bähir dåñöir nimeñonmeña-varjitä | enañ sá çämbhavé mudrä sarva-tanstreñu gopitä | |
89 Çäëöilyopaniñad 1.17: täraà jyotiñi saàyojya kiïcid unnamaya bhruvau | pürväbhÝäasasya margo’yaì unmané-kärakaù kñäëät |
Çiva’s head-dress incorporates His matted hair. And Gaigā, the sacred river on His head is recognised as a symbol of “knowledge.” Atop the right ear is a floral ornament, suggestive of a serpent. It is in all probability an atasé flower (Linum usitatissimum or common flax) or paläça (Butea monosperma). Above the same is an arka flower (Calatropis gigantea) in three layers. Moving further on, we notice a serpent, its hood open. Between the serpent and the left ear, there is a single-digit crescent moon. Serving as a backdrop to all the objects of the head-dress is a crest of peacock plumes. The fifteen plumes of Çiva’s head-dress visually allude to the flames of the prabhävali.

The association of Çiva with the Crescent Moon is well known; here the arka flower and the peacock feathers compliment the moon, with the three images forming a coherent tripartite symbolism. The arka is so named because it is “of the Sun.” The peacock is also known by the term çikhé, which also means “fire,” the word çikhä standing for tuft/summit/plume/ray/peacock’s comb. Thus these two symbolise the Sun and the Fire; and along with the Moon, they form a trinity of luminaries, reinforcing the symbolism of Çiva’s three eyes. The Tantra texts regularly refer to the Sun, the Moon, and the Fire as representing Brahmä, Viñëu, and Rudra, symbolising creation, maintenance, and destruction.

The location of the Moon on the left side has another significance. It is indicative of the iòä-näöé (iòä = “channel”), also called candra-näöé, and refers to the pitàyäna (“The Path of the Forefathers”). Further, the Moon is also sometimes a taken as a symbol of jéva, the individual self, as both are represented as having 16 digits, as in Chändogyopaniñad 6.7.1: ūoòaçakalo vai puruñaiù. And as the Jéva Principle is itself sacred, Çiva bears it, under the guise of the Moon, on His head. The jéva in its pure state neither waxes nor wanes, and it is only in the impure state that it goes through fluctuations.

The next item to be observed is the serpent on the crest. The iconography of the serpent with its open hood, on or behind the head of a deity is a common element in iconography. The reference is obviously

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90 Käçépaïcaka 5: vyäpiné jïänagaìgä.
91 See for example, Bhagavad-gïtâ 11.17; Śrïmad Bhãgavatam 1.7.30; 1.11.27; 2.5.30.
92 For example, Çäràdàtilaka 12.93: çabdärtha-bhävi-bhuvanaà sàjaténdurüppä | yä tad bibharti punararkatanuù svåçakttyä | vahnyätmikä harati tatsakalà yugânte | tää çäradàà manasi jåtu na vismarâmi | |
to the Kuëòaliné serpent in its final state, confirmed also by the proximity of the Moon. For we read in the Çäradätilaka 25.64:

 mülonnidra-bhujaiga-räja-mahiñéà yäntéà suñumnäntaram
 bhitvä’’dhära-samüham açu-vilasat-saudämäne-saàñibhäm |
vyomämbhoja-gatendu-mäöòala-galad-divyämäthä-galad-plutäà
 sambhävya svagåhaà gätäà punimåà saícintayet kuëòalém ||

[Abandoning sleep and rising from the Mülädhära-cakra, the Serpent Queen penetrates the Suñumnä. Piercing through, She blazes like lightning. Getting aspersed in the divine nectar oozing from the orb of the Moon situated in the Lotus Celestial, She finally returns to her abode. The aspirant must contemplate on Her.]

Towards the centre of the head-dress is found the kapäla (“skull”). Normally, the skull (or for that matter even just bone or hair) is considered inauspicious in Hindu tradition. 93 Gautama even goes to the extent of saying that one should not even utter the ghastly/inauspicious name kapäla, but should rather circumvent its use by a surrogate word such as bhagäla (same word, but a little deformed). 94

In our context, however, kapäla actually signifies the [Masculine] Principle Immaculate (Puruña). As we understand from Ayurveda: ‘hard items like bones come to the child from the father, and soft items like skin, from the mother.’ 95 The kapäla, being a bone-like structure, is thus masculine. When a person dies, the flesh dissipates fast while the bones and the bony kapäla last. It is for this reason that the long lasting skull—a physical token of the Ever-Abiding Metaphysical Puruña Principle—is placed on the head by Naöaräja.

The presence of all these on the head of Naöaräja is itself significant. As stated in Näradaparivräjakopaniñad, the head is the place of Turéya, “the Fourth [State]” (the other three being—the Wakeful, the Dream, and the Deep Sleep States). 96 The head is accorded the supreme place (hence styled uttamän̄ḡa—“the Best Limb”) in Ayurveda also, as ‘the

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93 Cf. Gautama-dharmäsüttra 9.16: na bhasma-keça-tuña-kapälämedhyäny adhitiñöhet
94 Gautama-dharmäsüttra 9.22: kapälaà bhagälam iti [brüyat]!
95 Suçrutasaàhitä 3.3.43: garbhäsya keça-çmaçru-lomästhī-nakha-danta-sirīä-snäyudhamän̄retaì-prabhätēni sthirāëi pitäjāni.
96 Näradaparivräjakopaniñad 25: turéyāà mürdhni saàsthitam.
very abode of all the vital airs." The *Aitareya Ārāyaka* attaches supreme importance to the brain, as the source of all activity in fine. The *Gētā* also refers to yogic practices wherein one “deposits” one’s prāēa in the crown.

**Ardhanārēçvara**

An important aspect of Naöarāja, and for that matter of Çiva Himself, is His being *Ardhanārēçvara* (“The Lord Who Is Half Woman”). According to this symbolism, the Unitary Principle divides itself vertically: the right-hand side is masculine/Male, and the left hand side feminine/Female. The idea occurs in Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava* with specific reference to Çiva. In the image under our consideration, Naöarāja exhibits a conspicuous orientation of the limbs towards the right side, as all except one (a left hand), are turned that way. The bent left leg is also stretched towards the right. Once again, this orientation towards the right emphasizes Naöarāja’s dominant Puruña aspect.

Naöarāja’s ears present a study in contrast, between the masculine and the feminine. The left ear has a *patrakuēòala* (“Leaf-ornament”), worn typically by women, and the right ear has a *makarakuēòala* (Crocodile Ornament), worn by men, even though the latter is not so easily discernible. A double-string necklace adorns His throat, easily discernible as being the maïgala-sütra, “Auspicious String” of a woman, emphasizing again the *Ardhanārēçvara* aspect. This masculine-feminine contrast is also evident in the depiction of the fingers of the left hands and the right hands, as too, the toes of the left foot and the right foot: the ones on the left look slenderer, tenderer, and more graceful. The

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97 *Carakasaàhitä* 1.17.12: präēaù präēabåtäà yatra çritäs sarvendriyäïi ca | yad uttamäïgam aïgïnaù çiras tad abhidhéyate ||

98 *Aitareya Áraëyaka* 2.1.4: yacchiro’çrayat tacchiro’bhavat | tacchirasas çirastvaaà | tä etäù çérñaïcchriyaù çritäs cakñuù çrotraà mano väk präēaù | çrayante’smiïcchriyo ya evam etac chirasåù çirastvaaù veda.

99 *Bhagavadgétä* 8.12: mürdhny ädhäyä”ùtmanau præam.

100 *Manusmåti* 1.32: dvidhä kåtvä”ùtmano deham ardhena puruño’bhavat | ardhena näré || . Also, *Båhadäraëyakopaniñad* 1.4.3: ätmänäà dvedhä’pätayat; and, *Avimāraka* 2.12: pürvä tu kāñöhä timiränuliptä sandhyårüëùa bhäti ca paçcimäçä | dvidhä vibhaktántaram antarikñaà yäty ardha-näréçvara-rüpa-çobhäm ||

101 *Kumārasambhava* 2.7: stré-puàsä ätma-bhägau te bhinna-mürtes sisäkñayä; cf. *Mälavikägnimitra* 1.4: rudreëedam umäkåta-vyatikare sväïge vibhaktáà dvidhä; also 1.1: kántä-saämiçra-deho’py aviñaya-manasää yau parastäd yaténäm.
difference shows itself even at the genitalia, and the ring-like circle, not too apparent, is indicative of femininity.

Bandha
Yogic texts expound the paramount role of bandha-s (“Locks” or “Bonds”), the practice of which involve pressure on particular parts of the body, and involve/assist concentration. Naöaräja’s posture expresses the key bandha-s. The position of the raised left foot suggests the Müla-bandha, “the Basic(al) Bond”, as it raises the apäna upwards. The high position of the diaphragm in the image of Naöaräja, along with the band at that very position, is indicative of the Uòyäna-bandha, “the Leap Bond”, and the closeness of the chin and the neck is indicative of the Jälandhara-bandha, “Chin Lock”. “These three bandha-s (Locks) mastered,” asserts Çaìkara, “one transcends the fierce bandha (“bondage”) of Time!”.

Çaikara’s observation shows how it is through the practice of the yogic bandha, that the bandha (“bondage”) of karmic process is overcome. This idea is powerfully expressed in the pressing of Apasmära, for it is by Naöaräja’s act that Apasmära is freed of his äsura nature. The divine and diabolical natures are not settled once and for all in creation, but depend upon the way the freedom given is utilized: One may “fall” from an angelic character to a demonical, if he abuses the freedom/power given him; or equally, rise from an asuric demeanour to a daivic one, if he presses his powers into noble use. Çaikara analyses this very well and sets forth succinctly in his commentary on Båhadäraëyakopaniñad.

As per the Puranic accounts, even Apasmära is later on granted a place among the “troops” (gaëa) of Çiva, thus corroborating the idea above. For, once the evil aspect of Prakåti is undone, Apasmära loses his nature of self-forgetfulness, which is why there is a joy in his face: the diabolical is displaced by the divine; the lost paradise regained. Akin are the concluding words of Arjuna when he says he

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102 Çaikara, Yogatärävalé 5: jälandharoòyäëana-müla-bandhän jalpanti kaëöhodara-päyu-mülän | bandha-traye’śmin paricéyamäne bandhaù kuto dãruëa-kåla-pâçät ? ||
103 Çaikara on Båhadäraëyakopaniñad 1.3.1: çästrajanita-jïäna-karma-bhävitäù dyotanäd devä bhavanti, ta eva sväbhävika-pratyakñänümäna-jañita-dänöaprayojana-karmajäna-bhävitä asuräù |
has ‘regained his memory, even as the delusion has been cleared (nañöö mohas, småtir labdhä)’ by the grace of Kåñëa.¹⁰⁴ Likewise in the Chändogya where it is stated: ‘all bonds will be sundered, once memory is restored.’¹⁰⁵

We have already cited the statement of Abhinavagupta stating that the “denouement” of music/dance is also this breaking of bondages (hådayagranthi-bhaïjana referred to earlier on Bharata 6.33); it is interesting to note that the etymological sense of “denouement” is “un-knotting,” though the latter has reference to the mere plot of a drama, where it is regularly used in a technical sense.

**Naöaräja: Embodiment of Yoga**

We have glossed over many items and have largely been brief; nevertheless, it is possible, we hope, to conclude with Abhinavagupta, that ‘little ought to stir in a dance recital that conduces not to the representation and experience of rasa [“the Essential Emotion”].¹⁰⁶ The dance of Naöaräja is an embodiment of all the quintessential concepts of yoga, decipherable only by a master yogin, which Sriranga Guru was.

The stamp of originality and brilliance of analysis in his exposition are indubitable. Our task has been one of elaboration of the same, garnering in an organised fashion, the not so apparent and rather disparate expositions bearing on this theme, all scattered in various texts on Yoga, Tantra, Ägama, Äyurveda, Näöya etc., but basically working on the cues provided by this Master who saw through the image as none else did. As the essential ideas are his, we dedicate the work to the Master Yogin Sriranga.

\[ \text{jïänena cäpavargo,} \\
\text{viparyayäd iïyate bandhaù} \]

Liberation ensues from Knowledge; and bondage from the opposite.

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¹⁰⁴ *Bhagavadgétä* 18.73.
¹⁰⁶ *Abhinavabhäraté on Näöyaçästra* 20.26: na ca rasopayogi-lalitéabhäga-çünyaù ko’pi näöye parispandau.
Homer, Poet of *Maya*

Charles Upton

In the great epics of Greek antiquity, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer presents a complete doctrine of what the Hindu’s call, *maya*, and of the cycle of Divine manifestation as unfolded and dissolved by *maya*. Together the two poems constitute a mythopoetic cycle in the strict sense of that term: the story of the creation and destruction of the universe (a word that means “one turn”)—which, in sober fact, is the only story there is.

According to the Hindus, Maya is the Great Mother of manifest existence; She is the creative illusion or magical apparition of Brahman, the Formless Absolute, in terms of the finite field of forms. Maya is not strictly unreal or non-existent; it’s simply that She is not what She seems; to use the traditional Hindu simile, She is like “a rope mistaken for a snake.” Maya appears in two forms: *avidya-maya* or “ignorance-apparition,” and *vidya-maya* or “wisdom-apparition.” Since Maya is not what She seems, she seduces us to try and make sense of Her, a task which is both inescapable and ultimately impossible. As *avidya-maya* she lures us into a false identification of Absolute Reality with the relative world, and in so doing creates that world; as *vidya-maya*, she lures us (as in Plato’s *Symposium*) toward identification with ever higher and more comprehensive images of Absolute Reality, each of which is progressively discarded in favour of a greater conception, until all images and conceptions are finally transcended and Absolute Reality realised.

The *Iliad* is the epic of *avidya-maya*, the *Odyssey* the epic of *vidya-maya*. Helen, the cause for an expansive, imperialistic war, the ‘face that launched a thousand ships,’ is *avidya-maya*, the power that lures men into worldly identification, conflict and dissipation. Penelope, the wife of Odysseus ‘the cunning,’ the image of retreat, of withdrawal from the world, of home, is *vidya-maya*. She is the power of recollection, of return to the “centre in the midst of conditions”; she is of Holy Wisdom. In the epics of Homer, Troy is the “City of This World,” and Ithaca is the “City of God.” And Athene, the weaver-
goddess who transcends the action of the epics but whose power is
immanent everywhere within them, is Mahamaya herself.

The end of the expansive and dissipative attempt to “conquer the
world,” to control material conditions, to possess and dominate the
“ten-thousand things” is, precisely, apocalypse—the end of the world—
the burning of Troy. And Odysseus knew this. Like any wise and
cunning man, he knew that the war to conquer the world would end in
destruction and nothing else, that Troy would burn, that the victorious
Agamemnon would be murdered—and that Helen, once “rescued,”
would simply become irrelevant. And so, of course, he tried to avoid
the conflict; he flinched at the call to be born into this relative and
conditioned world. He, like many “draft dodgers” in the Vietnam War,
feigned madness to avoid service; he tried to plough his field with his
plough harnessed to an ox and an ass, expressing the inevitable
divergence of intent and division of the will that this world is made of,
due to the fragmentation of the original human character (as the giant
Ymir, in Norse myth, was dismembered to create the universe). But
when his son was placed in front of the plough, he turned it aside—
proving that he was not mad enough to destroy his own spiritual centre
and destiny. And so he had to go to war. He was wise enough to foresee
the inevitable tragedy of the fall into this world of division, conflict and
destruction—but Maya, the deceiver, was wiser than he. Only She
knew the darkest secret of existence: that the descent into this world is
really a felix culpa, a “fortunate sin”; that in the depth of the Great
Mystery, the loss of God—felt and fought against and suffered through
and finally redeemed—is in fact the deepest realisation of God, that
after “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” comes “Into
Thy hands I commend my spirit; it is finished.”

Helen, in the Iliad, is shown sitting in Priam’s palace in Troy,
weaving a ‘double purple cloak’ upon which appear the scenes of the
great war between the Trojans and the Achaeans that she herself
precipitated; by this she is revealed precisely as avidya-maya, who
weaves the pattern of manifest existence. But Penelope, Odysseus wife,
is also a weaver. She has told her many suitors that she will wed one of
them when the shroud she is weaving, the shroud of her father-in-law
Laertes, is finished—but every night, in order to put them off, she
unweaves what she had woven during the day. Laertes, father of
Odysseus, is his Principle and Origin, the aspect of God that pertains
most directly to him, his archetype in divinis. And this world, to the wise, is not a cloak of the living, a purple garment fit for kings, depicting glorious and heroic struggles, but, precisely, the shroud of God, the veil that covers Him in death. This world unfolds in all its convincing multiplicity only when God is dead to us; only then, under the influence of avidya-maya, do we mistake this perishing world for Reality itself. Helen weaves the cloak of the world-illusion, but only Penelope shows it for what it is. Only vidya-maya can reveal to us the secret of maya per se, that the pattern of existence woven on the Day of Brahman is unwoven again in the Night of Brahman, that the world created by Maya is not a stable reality, but a coming and going, a wheel of birth and death, an outbreathing and inbreathing of the Great Sleeper who dreams the universe.

The course of vidya-maya embraces the many journeys and battles and awakenings and realisations that are the spiritual Path; the Odyssey, the epic that depicts the struggles of Odysseus to be reunited with Penelope, with Holy Wisdom (under the guidance of the goddess Athene, the providential manifestation of that Wisdom, and Hermes her emissary), is the story of that Path. The stations of Odysseus’ spiritual journey, symbolised by his long return from Troy to Ithaca, are as follows:

1) The raid carried out by Odysseus and his men on the Cicones of Ismarus, in which they are defeated. This symbolises the defeat of worldly ambitions, the proof that this world no longer holds anything of value for those who have embarked upon the spiritual Path.  
2) The land of the Lotus Eaters. This station, under the metaphor of drug addiction (possibly to opium) symbolises the overcoming of World Trance, the nearly universal addiction of the human race to the sort of earthly experience that denies any possibility of spiritual experience—either that or the habit of unconsciously translating the dawn of true spiritual experience back into a different kind of worldly experience, notably the intoxicating complacency represented by the Buddhists as Deva-Loka, the realm of the long-lived gods where “ignorance is bliss.” In terms of the spiritual Path, Vajrayana practitioners are warned not to fall into “the beautiful Hinayana peace,” into the complacent illusion that Enlightenment has already been achieved; by this they are taught to overcome the curse of the lotus-eaters.
3) The Island of the shepherd Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops, who devours several of Odysseus’ men. Jesus said, ‘if thine eye become single, thy whole body will be filled with light’ (Matt. 6:22); Polyphemus represents the dawning of this truth, the truth of the Absolute One, on too low a level, resulting in the “absolutising of the relative,” the precise error that creates religious fanatics, and then devours them. The premature identification with the Transcendent One at the expense of Its multiple manifestation results only in destruction; the rigor of Transcendence can be safely encountered only after the soul has been unified in submission to God’s will. Before that time, the Eye of the One—like the “third eye” of Shiva, the opening of which destroys the world illusion—must be blinded, veiled; otherwise it will burn up all the traveller’s spiritual potential instead of putting it to effective use. Furthermore, to contemplate Unity at the level of the head can never be complete; Unity can be realised in a stable way only at the level of the heart. However, what appears to be only a disaster is in fact the secret beginning of that necessary unification of soul. Throughout the Odyssey, Odysseus’ followers are gradually killed off, until only he remains alive; this symbolises the process of recollection, the mortification of the various divergent impulses of the soul, in terms of the affections, the will and the thinking mind, until all that remains is unity of character and one-pointed-ness of spiritual attention and intent.

As it says in the Tao Te Ching, ‘Knowledge is gained by daily increment; the Way is gained by daily loss—loss upon loss, until at last comes rest.’

The name “Polyphemus” means “many-voiced”; what might be the symbolic meaning of a figure with many voices but only one eye? In terms of the contemplative act—one of whose sites, in Hindu kundalini- or raja-yoga, is the “third eye,” the ajña-chakra in the centre of the forehead—the Eye of God is One; according to Meister Eckhart, ‘the Eye through which I see God and the Eye through which He sees me are the same Eye’—which is to say that, in contemplation, the knower is one with the thing known. However, the reflection of this contemplative Unity on the mental level (whose yogic site is the visshudha-chakra situated at the throat) is multiple, like the image of the Sun reflected in the waves of the sea. We may be granted—or we may steal—a glimpse of spiritual Unity, but if we have not paid the price required for the full and stable realisation of that Unity, this
incandescent glimpse will immediately fall to the level of discursive thought with its many voices; consequently the mental substance will become over-energised, driving us to the obsessive and futile attempt—all-too-clearly in evidence in today’s world—to think every possible thought. This is what it means to be “devoured by Polyphemus.”

4) Aeolus, the god of the winds, gives Odysseus a bag containing all the winds of the world, so that he will always have a fair wind in his voyage back to Ithaca. But his followers, out of curiosity, open the bag while Odysseus is asleep, let the winds loose, and all their ships are blown off course, back to their starting-point. This represents a wrong relationship to Divine Providence, based on lack of trust in God. If we dig up the seed every day to see if it is growing, the plant will never mature; if we arrogate to ourselves the right to see into the mind and Spirit of God, so as to better understand all the ramifications of our spiritual destiny—as if we could be better guardians and administrators of that destiny than God Himself—then we will be blown far off course. While Wisdom sleeps, curiosity wakes up and starts looking around; in the words of Frithjof Schuon, ‘mental passion pursuing intellectual intuition is like a wind that blows out the light of a candle.’

5) Landing on the Island of the Laestrygones, who are cannibals, Odysseus’ men encounter a young girl, daughter of the king of the island, who invites them to her father’s court, where many are devoured. The princess symbolises avidya-maya, who lures men to eat themselves up in worldly pursuits; spiritual curiosity ultimately results in a regression into worldliness. Nonetheless, the great purification continues. Cannibals are “self-eaters”; under the hidden influence of the Spirit, the divergent tendencies of the soul begin to destroy themselves by their own folly. As William Blake said, ‘If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.’

6) Next Odysseus and his men land on the island ruled by the witch Circe, who—weaving at an enormous loom—is Maya incarnate. She transforms half of Odysseus’ men into pigs, symbolising their total defeat at the hands of the lower passions. But Odysseus, the centre of the spiritual Heart, is not overcome. Hermes provides him with a “sobriety drug,” an “anti-illusionogenic” called moly, which is the exact opposite of the drug taken by the Lotus Eaters. Moly is the power of spiritual vigilance; it is this that allows him to overcome Circe’s spells and turn his pigs back into men. And precisely because Odysseus resists
her charms, Circe falls in love with him; when the contemplative “Centre in the midst of conditions” is established and maintained, the manifest, conditional world turns to serve that Centre. This is the great enantiodromia, where avidya-maya is changed into vidya-maya; Circe is here transformed from the maya that deludes Odysseus into the shakti that empowers and serves him. From now on she is not an enchantress, but a guide.

7) Circe now sends Odysseus to the western edge of the world, the limit of manifestation beyond which nothing remains but the One, where he invokes the shade of the seer Tiresias. Tiresias had been transformed into a woman by the goddess Hera for a period of years, for the crime of striking a pair of copulating snakes with a staff. Later she strikes him blind as well, but gives him in return the gift of foresight. The striking of the snakes with the staff invokes the caduceus of Hermes, who also has an hermaphroditic aspect. The caduceus represents the power to unite opposites, as the ida and the pingala, the masculine and feminine psychic currents (the two snakes), are united by being woven around the central sushumna, the axis mundi, in the practice of kundalini-yoga. Tiresias, having been changed from a man into a woman and back again, is beyond the pairs-of-opposites which are the warp and the weft of the world illusion. He is blind (like Homer was) to the multiplicity of this world, but his gift of foresight shows him the final end of the spiritual Path. He advises Odysseus on how to travel that Path to reach the final goal.

After Tiresias, Odysseus speaks with the shade of his mother, who reveals to him the plight of his wife Penelope, beset by unwanted suitors in Ithaca, and also encounters the shade of Agamemnon, who tells him of his own murder at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra. Here the necessity of completing the spiritual Path is revealed, along with the final destiny of all who fail to complete it: division and death, in a world woven on nothing but division and death, the world of the double cloak.

Odysseus and his men return to Circe’s island where she advises them further on the journey ahead, and they set sail again.

8) Odysseus and his men encounter the Sirens, symbols of the delusive and destructive side of spiritual Beauty—al- Jamal, al-Malakut—whose beautiful songs lure sailors to death on the rocks. His men put wax in their ears so they will not hear the Sirens’ songs, but
Odysseus asks to be tied to his ship’s mast—the axis mundi again—so as to be able to hear the songs, while being restrained from following them. The lesson here is that only those who have fully attained the centrality of the human form can witness the Beauty of God and the esoteric secrets of the spiritual Path without being led to destruction. The Beauty and Mystery of the Divine are gifts that come in their own time; to run after them and try to grasp them—like the lustful brave, in Lakota myth, who wanted to rape the beautiful emissary of Wakan Tanka, White Buffalo Cow Woman—is to be destroyed by the Majesty of God.

9) Next the voyagers encounter Scylla, a many-headed sea-monster, and Charybdis, a whirlpool. The whirlpool is sangsara (often compared to a whirlpool by the Buddhists), the engulfing and obliterating power of the world of relativity and formal manifestation; the sea-monster is the division of the soul—mind, affections and will—between many worldly concerns, each of which takes a piece of us. Odysseus chooses to brave Scylla instead of falling into Charybdis, losing only six men instead of the entire ship, and thereby demonstrating that even though the struggle with worldly necessity wounds us, to ignore it is fatal, and that passing beyond the pairs-of-opposites is not accomplished by failing to distinguish between them, but by choosing always “the lesser of two evils.” One does not transcend good and evil by treating them as if they were the same thing, but by always choosing the good, at whatever cost, until the Sovereign Good is won—that Good which lies beyond the opposition of good and evil because, being all good, it has no opposite.

10) The voyagers now land on the Island of Trinacis, where—contrary to the advice of both Circe and Tiresias—Odysseus’ men hunt and slaughter the Cattle of the Sun. In punishment, all are drowned in a shipwreck except Odysseus, who is washed up half dead on the island of the goddess Calypso, where he must remain as her lover for seven years. The Cattle of the Sun represent a glimpse into the Divine Intellect and the Majesty of God—al Jalal, a-Jabarut—producing a spiritual exaltation that the ego attempts to appropriate, which ultimately results in a titanic inflation and the resultant fall. Odysseus is back in the clutches of this world—the nymph Calypso. Nonetheless, though he seems to have been defeated, the merit he gained through his earlier spiritual victories is still working in secret.
11) Hermes now appears, and convinces Calypso to let Odysseus go; where spiritual works (necessary but not sufficient) must fail, the power of grace intervenes. So he builds a raft and sails to the island of Scherie. He is washed up on the beach exhausted, and there encounters the princess Nausicaa, symbol of vidya-maya. She introduces him to her parents, the rulers of the island, and when he tells them the story of his journey they decide to help him. With their aid he returns to Ithaca, disguised as a swineherd—as one who has gained the power to control the impulses of his lower self.

12) Odysseus, in Ithaca, is recognised by his old housekeeper due to a scar on his thigh he received in his youth from a wild boar. He enters his palace, still in disguise. The next day Athene prompts Penelope to issue a challenge to the suitors: to string Odysseus’ bow and shoot through the holes of twelve axes placed in a row. (These holes are sometimes called “helve-holes,” as if they were holes in the hafts of the axes by which they could be hung on a wall, but I see them rather as the semi-circular spaces between the two upward-curving corners of the Cretan double-axe.) None of the suitors can even string the bow, but Odysseus can; he shoots an arrow through the holes of the twelve axes and wins the contest. He kills all the suitors, as well as the twelve maids who slept with them. He reveals himself to Penelope, who is uncertain of his identity until he describes the bed he built for her when they were first married. They are reunited.

The axes through which Odysseus shoots are double-headed axes with crescent blades, representing the waxing and waning phases of the Moon, the waning phases symbolising the fall into the darkness of this world, under the power of avidya-maya, and the waxing phases the stations of the spiritual Path, by the power of vidya-maya. According to the Bhagavad-Gita, darkened souls destined for rebirth enter the waning Moon after death, while sanctified souls destined for Liberation enter the waxing Moon, and from there pass on through the Door of

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1 A friend of mine (a poet) once showed me, as a more-or-less magical object, a stone taken from the barrow-tomb known as The Grave of Queen Maeve, in Ireland. That night I dreamt I was a sacred swineherd; a boar came and slashed the outside of my right thigh, two or three inches above the knee—a wound I later identified as the wound of Odysseus. This dream took place on the night of the first full moon after the winter solstice—the one night of the year, according to Robert Graves in The White Goddess, when the ancient Egyptians ritually consumed swine-flesh.
the Sun. And in Sufi symbolism, the double axe represents the cutting off of attachment both to this world and the next, leading to the realization of God not after death, but in this very life.

The twelve axes, which are twelve moons, are a zodiac, an entire cycle of manifestation, like the twelve gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the twelve stations of the Odyssey itself. That the twelve maids who slept with the suitors are killed symbolises a passing beyond the sphere of the Moon, the cycles of nature and rebirth, and a realisation of full Enlightenment. The number of Penelope’s suitors is 108, a sacred number in Hindu and Buddhist lore. Koenraad Elst explains that the number 108, considered purely in mathematical (not necessarily mythological) terms, is the principle of ontological hierarchy, of total possibility, and of repeating pattern. It might be called the number of kosmos; in the Odyssey it would seem to represent kosmos considered as samsara, as the round of births and deaths (the round of the circling spheres, the generation of repeating patterns in astronomical and human and biological life—i.e., reincarnation) that the philosophical character or spiritual hero seeks to be liberated from. Elst remarks:

[Given the division of the circle into 360 degrees], the angle of 108 has a unique property: the ratio between the straight line uniting two points at 108 degrees from each other on a circle’s circumference (in effect, one of the sides of a 10-pointed star) and the radius of that circle equals the Golden Section. Likewise, the inside of every angle of a pentagon measures 108 degrees, and the pentagon is a veritable embodiment of the Golden Section, e.g. the ratio between a side of the 5-pointed star and a side of the pentagon is the Golden Section....

The Golden Section means a proportion between two magnitudes, the major and the minor, such that the minor is to the major as the major is to the whole, i.e. to the sum of minor and major. In living nature, there are plenty of sequences where every member stands to the preceding member in a Golden Proportion or its derivatives (square root etc.), e.g. the distances between or the sizes of the successive twigs growing on a branch, the layers of petals on a flower, the rings of a conch, the generations of a multiplying rabbit population, etc. What this symbolises is the law of invariance: in every stage of a development, the same pattern repeats itself. The son is to the father as the father was to the grandfather. Wheels
within wheels: every whole consisting of parts is itself likewise part of a larger whole. And the principle of order: the underling obeys the orders of his master to the same extent that the master obeys the requirements of the whole ... 9 is the Hindu number of planets, and 12 is the Zodiac, so 108 is the total number of planet-in-Zodiacal-sign combinations. This makes it into the total set of all possible planetary influences taken separately, or in a more generalised symbolism, the matrix containing all possibilities.²

The suitors symbolise the level where worldly multiplicity is always seeking the blessing of spiritual Unity, perpetually struggling to possess the One without first becoming the One—an impossible task. When this level is killed, only Unity remains. The pre-eternal Unity, symbolised by the marriage-bed of Odysseus and Penelope, that held sway before Principle and Manifestation were polarized, is re-established; the spiritual Path is complete.

This is the spiritual principle behind all Greek civilisation. This is the secret that Orpheus knew.

The mentality of the present humanity is shaped and hardened by gross materialism. The cognitive effect of this is the tendency to take the visible material world as the “natural” starting point of conjecture. In contrast with this there is another form of reasoning which was commonly shared by all traditional civilisations. This form of reasoning is rooted in metaphysical principles which are rationally applicable within the physical world, in both its psychic and somatic modalities.

Gross materialism treats the visible material world as the only reality. Everything that is of an invisible nature—from a relative materialistic point of view—is considered as “unreal” and labelled, pejoratively, as “poetry” and “idealism,” investing these terms with a sentimentality they do not properly possess. The materialistic vision does not understand that metaphor (meta pherein) and symbol (symbolon) have nothing to do with sentimentalism and fantasy but with intellection (Ātma-vidyā), and that poetry, as well as music, is meant as an effective means of conveying in a rhythmical respiratory manner truths of a higher order. Such being the case, the reasoning made from a materialistic perspective starts from the soil and is directed towards the soil. The reasoning made from the traditional perspective, starts from the immutable, universal, eternal metaphysical principles and is directed—within its own limitations—towards the same metaphysical domain. The materialistic vision is effectively blind to the realisation of metaphysical identity being, as it is, based exclusively on a poorly understood physical science. This mentality, perceiving only the natural disjunction and alterity of the physical domain, is in fatal need of an artificial unity, which could be designated as a strictly horizontal unity. Traditional thought does not deny the natural differences and contrasts which exist in the physical world. However, underlying these it recognises the unity of the Spirit. By this and through this, traditional thought has the great virtue of relating to the physical domain in terms of insight and empathy, and of transcending it in terms of metaphysical identity.
Traditional thought understands that beyond the differences of skin, muscle, individual interest, psychic orientation, there is one and the same centre. In order to return to it, we must “wear our inside out”: That which has contracted itself within, must bloom again, through an operation of expansion.

According to the Kabbalistic doctrine of tsimtsum, as expounded in the Lurianic School, in the act of manifestation God withdraws (tsimtsum) Himself into Himself thereby allowing an empty “primordial space” into which “that which is not God” can come into being. The Presence withdraws, leaving an empty cavity, a trace, a wound. We are “unwhole” and through this hole, which itself speaks of a fullness, we can come to our true self again. At the central point of manifestation, the heart is within the Presence of God and the Presence is within the heart. The heart and the Presence are One. It is the divine station (al-maqām al-ilāhiyy). The Sanskrit word for heart is hṛdaya, which designates both the heart and the idea of centre. The verbal root of both the English heart and the Sanskrit hṛdaya is hṛd, and in Sanskrit, this same verbal root possesses the meaning of heart.

The fallen man’s spiritual quest is not for God’s plenitude for “there is no other God but God” and because “only God knows God.” This man’s spiritual quest is that of God’s absence. Man has to realise that what lacks in his being is the Presence of God. This is the goal of the Lesser Mysteries and this is the quest of the Grail. As Meister Eckhart observed, the temple inside must be cleansed, emptied, drained, unbound, ledic. Orthodox Christianity speaks of two stages marking

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1 The wound of the heart is the Heaven within. This wound is the veil of Truth, Its garment, Its chalice. We communicate with God through the cracks in our establishment. Jean Duval mentions this curious riddle: within suffering, which is the literal translation of empatheia. In ancient Egypt, the heart and the Heaven were both symbolized by the cup. Heaven envisaged as a hollow is also present in the relation that some have seen between coelum (Heaven) and koilon (hollowed), as Guénon shows (Le Roi du Monde, Ch. VII). A very important aspect which should be also mentioned here, is the universal connection between gap and veil, between concavity and occultation.

2 Asta-anga Yoga emphasizes the knowledge of what the Self is not and this is actually the discriminatory knowledge par excellence. See my ‘Therapeyson Seayton,’ Oriens: Journal of Traditional Studies 5: 3-4, April 2008 (www.regnabit.com).

3 It is interesting to notice that the Medieval Latin term, gradale, besides the fact that it utters of a concavity, it seems to come from the same root, hrd.

4 ‘And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple’ (Matthew 21:12). Ledic is a Middle High German term, used frequently by Eckhart.
the spiritual path: the first stage is characterised by man’s strife of purifying his garden from passions and thus reaching the state of apatheia. The second stage is marked by God’s work within man’s emptiness.

The human heart devoid of Divine Presence is a concavity which can be symbolically represented by the cup, the vessel, the ship, the moon’s horn, the athanor, the cave, the calyx, the womb, the wound. Likewise, the centre understood as a prohibited locus, where—in this case—the Divine Presence dwells, is symbolically represented by a citadel, an island, a land or a garden guarded by a guardian and surrounded by thick impenetrable walls. However, depending on the different degrees of symbolical understanding, the thick surrounding walls could also be seen as marking the prison of the seeker and not as a defensive shield for the Divine Presence. Just the same, the guardian of the forbidden yard, could actually be understood as the key unlocking the door of our prison. The garden, as symbol for the heart, for the centre, conveys of the golden primeval state when man dwelled within the Presence of God and the Presence of God dwelled within man. The edifice of the garden is symbolically made of five concentric terraces, the most peripheral being the mineral domain, following the vegetative, the animal and the fourth one, forming the crown, the Androgynous man. In the centre of all, there is the Presence of God as quintessence, holding them together, assuring the unity and the peace of

It means free, unbound, empty, unmarried, void, pure, virgin, naked. The term is used for “describing” metaphysical reality, and its meanings are not to be taken strictly literally.

5 The verbal root GRD, which is identical to HRD, as Guénon noticed, gave the English yard, garden, the Old Germanic gardr (as in Midgardr, Asgardr), the German garten; it is also present in Slavic languages in such names as Novgorod, Belgrade, the Czech zahrada (to be noticed HRD instead of GRD), the Polish ogrodnik, the Russian ogorod. In the Latin languages it can be found in the French jardin, the Italian giardino, the Spanish jardín (which is pronounced with an h) and also huerto, which pretty much speaks for itself, the Portuguese jardim or horto, the Scottish gharradh and the Irish gairdin, the Welsh gardd; we should also mention the term horticulture. Our point here is not to demonstrate something in linguistics, but to stress some symbolic equations.

6 If the guardian stands in clear relation with the garden, being thus el jardinero, the vrtlar (in Serbian the name for garden is vrt, which is identical with the Sanskrit hRd), the Polish ogrodnik, etc., then the curator stands in the same clear relation with the heart (the Latin cor) and curator is related to cure. In ‘Therapeyson Seayton’ I shown that Mikael is both the heavenly physician and the guardian of Eden.
manifestation and representing the *axis* within this level of being, unifying the whole macrocosm and microcosm.\(^7\)

In order to realise the Presence of God, the heart of man—the human centre—must be opened, ready to receive the *Shivalinga*.\(^8\) But the *lingam* is not only the fullness of God, is not only His majestic kingly aspect, but represents also His sacrificial feature, which in Islam bears the name of the All Compassionate and All Merciful (*ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*). The *lingam* is also a mark, a trace, a symptom; it is the *image of God*. That which is cave-shaped craving for the King is the Palace of Wisdom, the resonance box, the meaning of Light, the articulation of the Holy Syllable, the seer of Truth, the wise filled with understanding, the Grail filled with Holy Blood. This is why the heart of man is a cup,

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*Eye of the Heart: A Journal of Traditional Wisdom*

1. Man is not whole without the Presence of God, and by this wholeness we understand the mineral, the vegetal, the animal integrated within man as cosmic cross and held together within this manifested unity through the power of the quintessential centre. By ignoring the quintessence, man lies in a state of division and war. Only within the Divine Presence, man wears the crown of the Androgynous being. In the *Shvetāśvatara Upanishad* we read:

‘When, as earth, water, light, heat, and ether arise, the fivefold quality of Yoga takes place, then there is no longer illness, old age, or pain for him who has obtained a body, produced by the fire of Yoga. As a metal disk (mirror), tarnished by dust, shines bright again after it has been cleaned, so is the one incarnate person satisfied and free from grief, after he has seen the real nature of the self. And when by means of the real nature of his self he sees, as by a lamp, the real nature of Brahman, then having known the unborn, eternal god, who is beyond all natures, he is freed from all fetters. He indeed is the god who pervades all regions: he is the first-born (as *Hiranyakarbha*), and he is in the womb. He has been born, and he will be born. He stands behind all persons, looking everywhere’ (II.12.14-16; tr. M. Muller).

The body of fire mentioned in the above fragment, should be connected with *Taijasa* and with Mikael’s fiery sword (see ‘Therapeyson Seayton’). The ‘mirror tarnished by dust’ suggests Genesis 1:26, 27:

‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.’

2. Ājñā *cakra* has as a symbol a lotus with two petals. In it, is depicted a reversed triangle, which is the symbol for the cup and the heart, but in this special case it represents the *yoni*—the Holy Womb, the Virgin—, which is basically the same thing at this point. The latter contains the *lingam*, named, very significantly, the other (*itara*). This is obviously connected with what we have called in ‘Therapeyson Seayton’ the ‘office of diagnosis.’ In the Catholic Christian art, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is depicted as a fiery heart, pierced by a sword and crowned with thorns (a vegetal crown for the King of the Garden).
a concave form that needs to be filled with the elixir of immortality that will irrigate the soil of the garden and make it bloom again.

It is said that Adam received the Grail in Eden. The Grail, symbolizing the centre, stands also as a symbol for the devoid heart, which in turn is the seat of the divine Self. The individual self must withdraw to the point of reaching the shape of a bowl, a gradale, a concavity, a cup meant to hold within the most exquisite wine, the fiery elixir, which will transform the fullness of the ego into the emptiness of the Royal Chalice. When the Fall takes place, what is lost is this receptivity, this opening, this cup-shape of the soul. After falling from the grace of the Manifested Unity, man saw that he was naked, he saw his opening; he saw the possibility of the paining wound, he started to fear, to be self-conscious, and once this possibility was realised by man, this possibility became actual.

Eden is God manifested within man. This is the Earthly Paradise. In Eden, the fallen man is a possibility of manifestation. Outside Eden, the fallen man becomes an actual reality. In Eden, the distinction between man and God is a possibility of manifestation and not an actual reality. The mysterious nature of Jesus Christ is that of the Edenic Man: a divine nature and a human one; this is the Edenic manifestation of God, this is the image of God—of which the Book of Genesis and the Shvetāśvatara Upanishad speak of—the incarnated Logos of Whom the Gospels and the Upanishads testify:

As a metal disk (mirror), tarnished by dust, shines bright again after it has been cleaned, so is the one incarnate person satisfied and free from grief, after he has seen the real nature of the self. He has been

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10 It is worth noting here that there is a double aspect of “fullness.” The supernal aspect indicates the idea of Infinity or All-Possibility; thus in Eden there is the possibility of Fall, which is to say, the Principle possesses the possibilities of manifestation. The infernal aspect of fullness doesn’t mean at all the idea of all, but the idea of a part pretending to be a whole: this is the “unbreached monolith,” this is the fallen angel: I, ego.
11 This possibility is represented by Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and by the divine disjunction of the Androgynous man. This is the cosmogonic point of view (downwards), which is reversed in relation with the initiatory perspective (upwards), in which the initiate, when reaching Eden, is virtually the Universal Man. This virtuality is a reality in the Heavenly Paradise.
born, and he will be born. He stands behind all persons, looking everywhere...

Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.

As Hiranyakarbhā, the centre must be understood as comprising two complementary halves: the lower concavity (the sacrificed man) and the upper concavity (the sacrificed God). The sacrificed man is the fullness of God and vice versa. This corresponds to the alchemical expressions “the Spiritualisation of the body” and “the embodiment of the Spirit.”

There are two perspectives here that should require our attention. The first one refers to the vertical “dimension”: the sacrificed God or “the embodiment of the Spirit” conveys of an avatāra or of a cosmogonic function; the sacrificed man or “the spiritualisation of the body” speaks of the spiritual realisation, the understanding of the Greater Mysteries.

On the other hand, there is also a horizontal approach of the matter. Thus, the sacrificed man symbolises the passage from whatever horizontal periphery to the horizontal centre, where the emptied heart shall be filled with royal wine. This also corresponds to the expression “spiritualisation of the body,” although the end of this journey is the restoration of the psyche in the equilibrium of the centre, in Tula. However, horizontally, “the embodiment of the Spirit” has no longer a sacrificial meaning but an infernal one.

The gradale is not only a cup but also a book and, as Guénon remarks, this has to do with the engravings made on the cup. In Le Roi du Monde Guénon observes that Ossendowski speaks of a black stone, which is what the Mysterious King traditioned to the Dalai-Lama. In the note, Guénon mentions that Ossendowski is trying to explain the

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12 Shvetāśvatara Upanishad II.14.16.
13 John 13: 31, 32.
14 See Guénon, Le Roi du Monde, Ch.I.
15 Concerning a particular aspect of the Centre as stone, see ‘The Philosophical Stone,’ Orients 2.7-8-9, Sept. 2005 (www.regnabit.com).
apparition of some *characters* on the surface of this mysterious stone.\(^\text{16}\) One may remark that there is a striking similarity between the words *hRd* or *hRdaya* (*heart* in Sanskrit) and *Agarttha*. Actually, *hearty* is translated *hRdha* and from this latter word to *aGaRTTHa* there is not a long way (the Scottish name for *garden* is *gharradh*).\(^\text{17}\) All of this strongly suggests the equivalence—if not the identity, taking into consideration the Kingdom of Priest John—between the *Gradale* and *Agarttha*.

It is said that a time will come when we shall rise from the cavern of our heart. That time is called Revelation (*apokalipsis*) and it is the end of *Kali-Yuga*. At the end of the final chapter of *Le Roi*, Guénon cites a Joseph de Maistre consideration in which is affirmed that “the time has come.” So let us gaze deep within.

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\(^{16}\) It should be noticed, among other symbolical meanings, that writing is performed with a sharp object that leaves a trace.

\(^{17}\) In Sanskrit the word for *garden* is *udhyaana* and the word for *meditation* is *dhyaana*. About the etymology of Agarttha in connection to the radical GRD see Mircea A. Tamas, *René Guénon et le Centre du Monde*, Rose-Cross Books, Toronto, 2007, p.160.
“This is my body”: Symbolism in bread & bread-making

Phillip Serradell

Bread is older than man.
(Albanian proverb)

Bread is life, the ‘food of the body and soul; the visible and manifest life (...) bread is the visible manifestation of the spirit which dies and rises again; man and divinity united; the balanced product of man’s skill and effort in agriculture’.¹ It is also universal, having been adapted many times over without serious compromise to its process or value.² Its prime ingredient is flour, from the medieval flower meaning the “best part of the ground grain,” and it shares much of the same symbolism of nourishment, vitality, blessing. It is a continuous gift as provided from the feminine principle of the Divine.³

For the Greeks and Romans, bread, along with wine and oil, represented the three sacramental foods; along with figs and honey, these were symbols ‘of the simple life, of a dignified poverty characterised by hard work and satisfaction’.⁴ The whiteness in bread

² A short list could include: Lavash, tabun, sangak, panettone, tortilla, farl, chapattis, rotis, brioche, pretzel, naan, oatcake, pita, injera, baba, and bagel.
³ ‘Demeter/Ceres gave the Greeks/Romans barley and wheat; Chicomecoatl gave the Aztecs maize. The Egyptians worshipped Reneoulet, the harvest goddess, and Min, the god of cultivation and master of generative force, whose son, Nepi, the spirit of wheat, was a life-giving principle’ (M. Toussaint-Samat, History of Food, Barnes & Noble, 1992).
was ‘a mark of purity and distinction’. Bread rose to the (if not degraded) symbol of citizenship itself and this perhaps adds a little understanding into the historical significance of the coming of Jesus Christ who was born in Beth-Lehem (“House of Bread”) and who said: ‘I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger’ (John 6:35). This echoes the Egyptian Book of the Dead that says: ‘I am a man who has bread in Heliopolis/My bread is in Heaven with the Sun God/My bread is on earth with Keb/The bark of evening and of morning/Bring me the bread that is my meat/From the house of the Sun God’. During the Eucharist we are given an unleavened wafer, or Host, that is the “body” of Christ and this, together with His blood in the form of wine, represent a union of the feminine and masculine principle (respectively) in the Divine. ‘St. Martin’ writes Madame Toussaint-Samat ‘recommended that the communicant receiving it should meditate on the three concepts suggested by its threefold symbolism: affliction and privation (both material and spiritual), preparation for purification (since it is unleavened), and the memory of our origins [‘In thy sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread’ (Gen 3:19)]’. We ask for our “daily bread” during the Lord’s Prayer as ‘hunger that cannot be satisfied with bread must be truly great’ (Finnish proverb).

For Paracelsus: ‘Nature brings to light nothing that is perfect, but man must perfect it. This perfection is called alchimia. An alchemist is

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5 ‘...Archestratus, a contemporary of Aristotle and author of the Gastronomia (a compendious account of ancient Mediterranean eating whose title gave us the word “gastronomy”), accorded extravagant praise to a barley bread from the island of Lesbos on just these grounds, calling it “bread so white that it outdoes the ethereal snow in purity. If the celestial gods eat barley bread, no doubt Hermes goes to Eresus to but it for them”’ (Harold McGee, On Food & Cooking, revised ed., Scribner, 2004).

6 ‘Barbarians were depicted and described by civilized citizens as nomad hunter-gatherers in contrast to those who grew their own produce ... Ovid’s myth of Anius and his three daughters who transformed everything they touched into grain, wine, and oil presented a utopia in which nature could be transformed by the human hand. Grain and wine made the eater and drinker human—to the extent that in Homer the term “bread eaters” was synonymous with the world “men”’ (Montanari, ‘Food systems and models of civilization’).

7 ‘Into this world of the Roman imperium came Jesus Christ. It was ... a world of real distress, of physical hunger; a world in which the grain speculators withheld the grain and the emperor misused bread for political purposes by feeding only those who supported his power. Into such a world came Christ ... the Son of God’ (H. E. Jacobs, Six Thousand Years of Bread, The Lyons Press, 1997).

Serradell: Symbolism in bread & bread-making

the baker when he bakes bread, the viniculturist when he makes wine, the weaver when he makes cloth’ (Paragranum). The baker is a solitary creature, often starting his day during the fragile hours before dawn and remaining in his workshop throughout the duration of his waking hours, but ‘whatever grows in solitude then goes back into the community’ as ‘bread is baked in order to feed people and strengthen them so that they may live’ (Hildegard of Bingen). Albeit its abuses through scientific and technological “improvements,” baking remains a traditional craft. In many areas of the world, knowledge of baking bread must be taught by a master-baker with the apprentice enters into an unbroken chain of such relationships stretching back over 4000 years. From D. M. Dooling:

‘Perhaps we could paraphrase what Coomaraswamy said of art and religion, and say that ‘craft is alchemy, alchemy craft, not related, but the same.’ For the craftsman as well as the alchemist knows that his central task is the creation of himself, the artisan; and it is above all his aim that he strives with endless patience, ‘separating the subtle from the gross, softly and with great care’ to make what his hands touch turn into gold’.12

The grain is the soul, as manifestation or “likeness” of God, as ‘the universe is the mirror of God—the mirror in which His majesty and perfection are reflected, the mirror in which He sees Himself’.13 But

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10 ‘A traditional society made every activity holy, not only labour, but even what is now gambling was originally an oracular procedure; our games originated as liturgies, our towns pilgrimages, our vehicles as portable tabernacles, our cities and homes as shrines, our marriages as hierogamies, our jokes as sacred clowning, our laws as taboos, our language and mathematics as prayers, our dresses as vestments, our medicine as propitiation, our jobs as symbolic worship’ (E. Zolla, ‘The Meaning of Tradition’ in R. Fernando ed., The Unanimous Tradition, The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 1991. See also R. Sworder, ‘The Desacralization of Work’ in H. Oldmeadow ed., The Betrayal of Tradition, World Wisdom, 2005).
11 In France, the apprentice to the boulanger is called compagnon: English: “companion,” which is from the Latin com (“together,” or “with”) panis (“bread”). Interestingly, “Boulanger” is also a French surname, as vocation and life were once inseparable, with equivalents in Italian, Panettiere, and English, Baker.
simply as we are, we are raw and “indigestible” because of our “fallen” or “ignorant” state. The milling, or grinding, of ourselves is metanoia which is ‘usually rendered by “repentance,”’ is literally “change of mind,” or intellectual metamorphosis ... a transformation of one’s whole being; from human thinking to divine understanding’.14 As the rough grain is transformed into fine flour that is suitable for our consumption, so we “grind” ourselves, rid ourselves of weakness, passion, and pride—and into a substance capable for His deliverance. Water is mixed with flour to create dough (from the Indo-European root “to form, to build”).15 The water is also religion, from religio (“that which binds”); it is baptism and submission under orthodoxy. Then comes the process of kneading (manipulation, usually by hand), a physical stretching and folding that strengthens the bonds of protein molecules (gluten: “the muscle of bread”) while simultaneously aerating the dough.16 As William Stoddart writes ‘it is the exposing of our paltry egoism ... to the withering and yet quickening influence of the divine Subject, the immanent Self’.17 If a cask is to hold wine, its water must first be poured out, says Meister Eckhart;18 then ‘by means of putrefaction, fermentation,19 and trituration—all of which take place in

15 ‘For the Hindus, the water of life finds embodiment in the Ganges ... Its water is held to be pure from beginning to end, and in fact it is preserved from all pollution by the fine sand which drags along with it. Whoever, with repentant mind, bathes in the Ganges, is freed from all his sins: inner purification here finds its symbolic support in the outward purification that comes from the water of the sacred river. It is as if the purifying water came from Heaven, for its origin in the eternal ice of the roof of the world is like a symbol of the heavenly origin of divine grace which, as “living water,” springs from timeless and immutable Peace. Here, as in similar rites of other religions and peoples, the correspondence of water and soul helps the latter to purify itself or, more exactly, to find anew its own—originally pure—essence. In this process, the symbol prepares the way for grace’ (T. Burckhardt, ‘The Symbolism of Water’ in Mirror of the Intellect, Quinta Essentia, 1987).
16 For his understanding into the subtle chemical activity of these processes, the author is indebted to Harold McGee and his book On Food and Cooking.
19 ‘The process of fermentation allows the spirit to surpass ordinary limitations, to release intuitive powers and produce dreams’ (J. C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols).
darkness—the *materia* is divested of its initial form*.\(^{20}\) The malleable dough can be baked right away, resulting in unleavened “flat” bread, or it can be left for a short period of time and develop leaven. This occurs through the infection from single-celled fungus, yeast, which roam freely everywhere; they breathe air and exhale carbon dioxide (which expands the mass of the dough). Leavened and unleavened bread are complimentary as they represent the exoteric and esoteric dimensions, respectively, of religion. The mystical or “direct” path of esoterism is the “centre” from which outward forms diverge. Unleavened bread is “pure,”\(^{21}\) not because bread with leaven are “impure” but because it wears nothing else, being unaffected by ornaments or additional flavours. Leavened bread, in turn, is the “form” of religion—its dogma, faith, and devotion. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened’ (Matthew 13: 33). This marks the end of the first stage of our “work,” purgation, and has prepared us for the second stage of perfection or illumination;\(^{22}\) the dough is shaped into its desired form and then baked.\(^{23}\) It is no coincidence that the end result, our finished bread, is “golden” in colour and is, in itself, complete in its “union.” It is, in the words of Dante: ‘...the bread of the angels whereby life is here sustained but wherefrom none come away sated’ (*Paradiso*, 2.11).

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\(^{21}\) Matzo is “historically” eaten on Passover to commemorate the Jews flight from Egypt; cf. Exodus 12: 20. The Eucharist Host, as mentioned, is also unleavened.
\(^{22}\) ‘The second stage “perfection,” corresponds precisely to the aspirants’ assimilation to the created Logos. In Christianity, this takes form of the “imitation of Christ” (Stoddart, ‘What is Mysticism?’).
\(^{23}\) ‘Then, as in a furnace, the fire draws out of matter and divides what is best, spirit, mind, life ... leads it upwards, takes the topmost by the helmet, holds fast to it and then flows downwards ... the same as God will do on the Day of Judgment; with fire He will separate everything, and divide the just from the godless’ (Martin Luther, *Tischreden*).
The Primordial in the Symbols and Theology of Baptism
Graeme Castleman

All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs. (St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk.1, Ch.2)

O strange and inconceivable thing! we did not really die, we were not really buried, we were not really crucified and raised again; but our imitation was in a figure, and our salvation in reality. Christ was actually crucified, and actually buried, and truly rose again; and all these things He has freely bestowed upon us, that we, sharing His sufferings by imitation, might gain salvation in reality. (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 20.5)

Introduction

Baptism is as old as the Church itself\(^1\) and vehicles a sacramental grace to the participant: a grace that affects a spiritual—indeed initiatic—death and rebirth in Christ. The liturgical rites of baptism declare and expound the nature and workings of this grace and in doing so vehicles the saving gnosis that is the noetic complement of the volitive sacramental grace.\(^2\) Essentially, the sacrament is the acceptance by the participant of the grace that is offered through the salvific economy of Christ.

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\(^1\) ‘Even critical exegetes... are nowadays of the opinion that there was never a time right at the beginning of the Church when there was no baptism...’ H. Küng, *The Church*, tr. R. & R. Ockenden, London: Search Press, 1968, p.204.

\(^2\) “Volitive” in the sense that “sacrament” is literally an agreement and oath. The word is borrowed for theological use and suggests that the heart of the Church and all its mysteries is the great *Amen* of the Blessed Virgin by which she consented to be the *Theotokos*, the bearer of God into the world; an assent in which the Christian shares as he consents to let Christ into his own inner being.
It has been asserted that ritual ‘consists of activity and is not necessarily, and certainly not by definition, a means of symbolic communication of ideas, thoughts, or mental states.’ However from any traditional point of view this is incorrect. It is of the very purpose of ritual to be ‘a means of symbolic communication of ideas, thoughts, or mental states,’ for liturgy is the work of the people and specifically their “doing of divine things.” Hence it is inherently meaningful and fulsome in its declaration of that meaning. As Michael Mathis remarks:

The rites of the Church and the greater feasts of Her liturgical year were intended to be an unfailing means, not only for transmitting the grace of the Sacraments, but also for instructing the faithful in their meaning and in the meaning of the whole Christian life.

As well as the conference of grace, baptism (or indeed any Christian sacrament) entails the dialectic of the ritual “text” which “enlightens” the ratiocinative faculties and opens them onto higher things, and the visual, performed and theological symbols of the ritual which “enlighten” the gnostic, or noetic faculties. The drama of death and rebirth played out in the ritual and the volitional core of the sacrament—the choice of life over death—engages the passional aspect of man. The progression of the rite and its physical elements: candles, music, processions, incense, garments, as well as the “physicality” of the sacramental water and oil, engage the body and its temporality, for ‘God fashioned man with his own hands and impressed his own form on the flesh he had fashioned, in such a way that even what was visible might bear the divine form.’ While our interest here is the Christian baptismal ritual, the same could be said of any ritual. All of these forms of communication—noetic/spiritual, psychic, somatic—and the immensity of what is communicated (the baptismal grace itself), along with fastings, vigils, teachings and prayers that proceed baptism are

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4 Leaving aside the problematic nature of the phrase ‘mental states’ itself.


preparations for and responses to the Presence of the numinous so revealed, and answer to what has above been referred to as “mental states.” Baptism vehicles its sacramental grace as well as knowledge of the nature and workings of that grace through its symbols: ‘That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death’. In doing this it addresses itself to the “whole man,” for it is the whole man who is reborn and saved.

The rite of baptism itself synthesises all modes of gnosis possible within its own formal terms and points of reference. In this way it addresses itself to differing human temperaments, receptivities, and capacities. Hence the scholastic maxim: quidquid recipitur per modum recipientis recipitur. ‘whatever is received is received according to the manner of the one receiving.’ Nevertheless, the gnosis that is communicated is in its own formal limits a full disclosure, for the miracle of revelation is that the finite contains the infinite (finitum capax infiniti). The knowledge transmitted through the baptismal rites is that of the relationship between God, man and the kosmos, and the change in this relationship wrought by baptismal grace. It is a theological knowledge that is transmitted through a complex web of inter-related symbols. It is this symbolic web, specifically the primordial and cosmogonic elements of this symbolism, which we wish to address in the present paper.

While baptismal rites varied according to time and place there is a common stock of symbols and practises that disclose the meaning of the

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7 Compare St. Ambrose, de mysteriis (Concerning the Mysteries) 3 (8): ‘Believe, then, that the presence of the Godhead is there. Do you believe the working, and not believe the presence? Whence should the working proceed unless the presence went before?’
8 Ph.3:10.
9 Christianity also addresses the ‘whole man’ in the corporate sense: a universal community. It is pneumatic for the pneumatikoi, psychic for the psychikoi, and corporeal for the somatikoi. As Theodotus remarks: ‘the sea is open to all, but one swims, another sails, and a third catches fish; and as the land is common, but one walks, another ploughs, another hunts,—somebody else searches the mines, and another builds a house: so also, when the Scripture is read, one is helped to faith, another to morality, and a third is freed from superstition by the knowledge of things’ (Theodotus, exerpta ex Theodoto 28).
10 Hence any exposition of these teachings must be, to a certain extent, “confessional”: participating in the subjective as well as the objective pole of Truth.
11 Luther’s assertion, cf. Calvin and Zwingli: finitum non capax infiniti.
sacrament. There is a great deal that may be considered but a few examples—some of which are idiosyncratic—will suffice to make the theology behind these symbols clear. To this end, we will consider some pedagogical and ritual elements of the catechumenate, the symbolism of pre-baptismal anointing with oil, the symbolism of the baptismal waters in which the initiate is thrice immersed (and the OT typology by which the baptismal waters are understood, especially the cosmogony, the Deluge and the Exodus), the symbolism of the changing of garments and ritual nudity, the symbolism of the sphragis (the sealing with oil of the sign of the Cross on the forehead of the newly baptised) and the descent into Hell and cosmic ascent which the initiate ritually undergoes. All this shall be considered with an eye to the symbolic exposition of baptism as, on the one hand, the recapitulation of the cosmogonic act and, on the other hand, the return to Eden, both symbolising a return to principle and re-manifestation or rebirth.

The Soteriological Drama
The theological and symbolic elements of baptism are underpinned by the initiatic power of the soteriological drama; that of the God who experienced death and resurrection and thus entered into an intimate fellowship with man, as evinced by the Letter to the Hebrews:

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.12

The saving drama of Christianity presents two phases: the theo-drama and the anthropo-drama, which is its consequence and participating image. The first concerns the action—or salvific economy—of the Christ who participates in humanity, died (and consequentially descends into the underworld) and was reborn. The second relates to what Christ has accomplished in this act, what soteriological power he has assumed and by what means he allows his initiates to participate in his victory over the pre-existing order of things.

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12 Heb.4:15-17.
In the *anthropo-drama* the initiate participates in the ordeals of Christ in such a way that he becomes identified with Him. The pattern of the initiatic rite is a recapitulation of the *theo-drama*, with the human initiate ritually in the place occupied by Christ. From the soteriological point of view, therefore, man stands at the centre of the *kosmos*. Vladimir Lossky:

...the earth is *spiritually central* because it is the body of man, and because man, penetrating the indefiniteness of the visible to bind it again to the invisible, is the central being of creation, the being who reunites in himself the sensible and the intelligible and thus participates, richer than the angels, in all of the orders of “earth” and of “heaven.”  

Clement of Alexandria dismisses rites of the pagan mysteries as ‘murders and funerals’ but the same may be said of Christianity. Its Paschal drama, at the heart of the Easter Feast, is that of the god who is, whilst divine, also fully human. Christ is the God who enters fully into the human condition, ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities; ...in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’ He enters into the human condition, emptying himself of His glory and suffering himself to be delivered into the hands of the wicked: in the words of the Symbol of Faith: ‘He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered death and was buried. He descended into Hell (*descendit ad inferos*). On the

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14 As the Definition of Chalcedon declares. This is a point that must be insisted upon. The full divinity and full humanity of the Christ are essential to the efficacy of his salvific work; ‘For’ as St. Cyril of Jerusalem asserts (against docetic teachings), ‘if the Incarnation was a phantom, salvation is a phantom also’ (*Catechetal Lectures [cat.] 4.9* and ‘if Christ is God, as indeed He is, but took not human nature upon Him, we are strangers to salvation’ (*cat.* 12.1).
third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures. He ascended into Heaven....’ Christ lived as humans live, died as humans die, and in doing so overcame the limitations of death. As the ‘firstborn of the dead’\(^\text{18}\) He makes possible an incorporation into the life of the divinity: ‘For He was made man that we might be made God’.\(^\text{19}\) The Christian initiate undergoes a ritual enactment and participation in the paschal drama by which he participates not only in the death but in the resurrection of the Christ.

The Christian Paschal drama and the corresponding initiatic engagement with it supersedes the previously prevailing order of things: it both “unmakes” and reforms the *kosmos*, both micro and macro cosmic. This insight informs Christian supersessionism. It is not merely the replacement of one revelation or covenant with another\(^\text{20}\) but the replacement of one reality, one nature, with another. In Christ, the whole of the created order, and especially man, is recapitulated. Irenaeus:

> For as by one man’s disobedience sin entered, and death obtained [a place] through sin; so also by the obedience of one man, righteousness having been introduced, shall cause life to fructify...
> And as the protoplast himself Adam, had his substance from untilled and as yet virgin soil (‘for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not tilled the ground’\(^\text{21}\)), and was formed by the hand of God, that is, by the Word of God, ... so did He who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in Himself, rightly receive a birth, enabling

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\(^{18}\) Col.1:18.

\(^{19}\) Athanasius, *de incarnatione verbi* (On The Incarnation of the Word) 54.3. The saint goes on, in the following passage, to outline the immensity of this gift: ‘And, in a word, the achievements of the Saviour, resulting from His becoming man, are of such kind and number, that if one should wish to enumerate them, he may be compared to men who gaze at the expanse of the sea and wish to count its waves. For as one cannot take in the whole of the waves with his eyes, for those which are coming on baffle the sense of him that attempts it; so for him that would take in all the achievements of Christ in the body, it is impossible to take in the whole, even by reckoning them up, as those which go beyond his thought are more than those he thinks he has taken in’ (54.4). Compare Irenaeus, *adversus haereses* 3:19.


\(^{21}\) Compare Tertullian, who claimed the opposite: that the element of water was an instrument of God’s creative action when he made man. The dust of the earth was ‘yet not apt for the purpose unless it be moist and juicy...’ (*de baptismo* [On Baptism] 3).
Him to gather up Adam [into Himself], from Mary, who was as yet a virgin.22

This reorganisation is both ontological and gnostic. It accomplishes a new relationship between created and uncreated orders of reality as well a radically new vision of the eternal order, one that was previously hidden, a potential (of the very nature of man) that is now actualised. This is most marked in the apocalyptic and eschatological traditions. Such reinterpretation is the result of ‘the unveiling of the mysteries to the eyes of the servants of God, so that for the first time they see and understand the truth about the created order and the divine plan for its consummation’.23 The Christian tradition understands itself as presiding over the unveiling of that which is eternally true but previously hidden. In the light of Christ ‘the divine plan stands out in all its logic and coherence’.24 Christianity understands itself to declare that ‘which was from the beginning.’25

This divine economy is both microcosmic (salvific) and macrocosmic (apocalyptic). The symbolism we are considering expresses both aspects, sometimes emphasizing one, sometimes the other; both are expressed in the symbolic web of baptism and especially in its cosmogonic and primordial symbolism. Thus St. Cyril of Jerusalem understands the breathing (by the Resurrected Christ) of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles (Jn.20:22) as a recapitulation of the first breathing of the Spirit by which life was imparted to Adam.26 The waters of Creation, of the Flood and of the Red Sea are universally interpreted as

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22 Irenaeus, *haer*. 3.21.10. The passage continues, and very curiously, ‘Why, then, did not God again take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should [require to] be saved, but that the very same formation should be summed up [in Christ as had existed in Adam], the analogy having been preserved.’ Here Irenaeus stresses a point he has previously made: Christ does not simply replace Adam, new for old, but ‘gather[s] up Adam [into Himself].’


25 1Jn.1:1. See also St. Augustine of Hippo, *retractationes* 1.13.3. (PL 32): ‘For that thing itself, which is now called the Christian religion, used to exist and was not lacking amongst the ancients from the beginning of the human race until Christ himself came in the flesh, from which time the true religion began to be called “Christian.”’

baptismal waters. The recapitulation of primordial man—the microcosmic—on the one hand and the connection between the cosmogonic waters—the macrocosmic—and those of baptism on the other hand lie at the heart of baptismal symbolism and theology.

The Drama of Fall and Redemption
Baptismal practices in the ancient world varied depending on location and period but shared a body of symbols and a more or less common theology of grace and salvation upon which those symbols are grounded. As a consequence of the primordial sin of Adam, the channels of grace that Adam denied are closed—their inaccessibility being precisely the state of original sin. St. Ambrose relates: ‘All flesh was corrupt by its iniquities. “My Spirit,” says God, “shall not remain among men, because they are flesh.” Whereby God shows that the grace of the Spirit is turned away by carnal impurity and the pollution of grave sin.’

The ministration of baptism reopens these channels of grace; what had been lost in Adam is regained in Christ. It is in this sense that Gregory of Nyssa employs the Old Testament account of Jacob meeting Rachael at the well and removing the stone which covered the waters as ‘a shadow of what should come.’ He explains:

There was lying, then, upon the well the spiritual stone \[ο\ λίθος \ ο\ νοητὸς\]—literally “noetic stone”—Christ, concealing in the deep and in mystery the laver of regeneration which needed much time—as it were a long rope—to bring it to light. And none rolled away the stone save Israel, who is mind [νοῦ] seeing God. But he both draws up the water and gives drink to the sheep of Rachel; that is, he reveals the hidden mystery, and gives living water to the flock of the Church.

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27 St. Ambrose, de mys. 3 (10).
28 Gen.29. It is significant that this event follows from Jacob’s vision of the heavenly ladder, after which he ‘went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east’ (Gen.29:1) where he met Rachel at the well. The symbolism of the east as the primordial place is significant to the baptismal context.
29 St. Gregory of Nyssa, in baptismum Christi (On the Baptism of Christ). There is a symbolic correspondence here with the stone that covered the well of Zamzam until it was removed by the uncle of the Prophet; see M. Lings, Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991, p.11.
This noetic stone is analogous, in the Eucharistic context, to the Royal Door of the *iconostasis*. The door remains closed and the sanctuary—the eschatological kingdom—remains sealed off until the moment of communion, when the door is opened and the grace of the sacrament issues forth and is made available to the initiated, when ‘heaven illuminates the earth, and God meets His creation.’ The Eucharistic liturgy plays out the soteriological drama in which the Christian initiate—the baptised—participates. The moment of communion enacts the Resurrection of Christ. The clergy commune behind the closed Royal Door symbolising, as Nicolas Zernov explains, ‘in this way the hidden character of Christ’s Resurrection, for no human witness was present at this turning point in the world’s history.’ He continues,

...the Royal Gates are opened, and the lay people are invited to... receive the Sacrament. At this sacred moment the last veil of ignorance and sin is drawn aside. The transformed bread and wine declare the victory of the Resurrection... 

This dramatic movement from the isolation of sin, through repentance, to the divine grace is concentrated in the Lenten and Easter observances, the commemoration of and participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by which it is made possible. Indeed, the Lenten and Easter observances, East and West, are both a participation in the paschal mystery and a recapitulation of the believer’s own initiation into that mystery: a re-engagement with his own baptism; his own movement from darkness into light, from sin into grace. Conducted at Easter, the initiation itself was preceded by vigils and exorcisms as intensifications of the Lenten period of fasting. The context of the Easter feast, in which the baptism took place, provided the *hieros logos*, the sacred story, and

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31 Zernov, Orthodox Encounter, p.67.
32 ‘In Lent the whole emphasis is laid on the need for repentance, fasting and bodily and spiritual mortification, services are long, and contain much reading, while the people express their sense of alienation from God by numerous prostrations and genuflections. Eastertide presents the sharpest possible contrast to Lent. It is a season of triumphant joy and praise to the Creator for His victory over the powers of sin and death. Everything is sung, the Royal Doors are never shut during the first seven days, and kneeling is banned for six weeks until Whitsun’ (Zernov, Orthodox Encounter, p.61).
the baptism itself the ritual participation—the *imitatio dei*—in that story. This movement from separation to union as the return to the primordial is well illustrated by the angelic guardians who—in the post-lapsarian ages—prevent access to the Garden: ‘So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.’33 Christ overcomes this barrier: ‘A fiery sword barred of old the gates of Paradise; a fiery tongue which brought salvation restored the gift.’34

Thus in baptism the Christian initiate who takes upon himself the cross of Christ is returned to the primordial, ante-lapsarian state and confirmed in it. This requires the death of the man who is born into the post-lapsarian state of sin and the birth of the man who is freed from it and its consequences. This death and rebirth is accomplished by the sacramental effect of the waters of baptism; the font being both the tomb of the old man and the womb of his rebirth.

**Baptismal Waters: Creation, Deluge and Exodus**

> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, 6:3-4)

> But now the holy day of the Passover is at hand, and ye, beloved in Christ, are to be enlightened by the Laver of regeneration. (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetal Lectures* 18.32)

The font is the tomb of the “old man” and also the womb through which the rebirth or regeneration of the Christian initiate, the “new man,” takes place. R. M. Jensen notes, in her study of North African baptismal fonts, a number labial shaped fonts35 and this enforces the

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33 Gen.3:24.
34 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 17.15.
symbolism of the font as womb and baptism as rebirth. The font is the initiatic cave, the womb of Mother Church, ‘the mother of us all, which is the spouse of our Lord Jesus Christ.’

The fruit of this Christic nuptial mystagogy—the initiate—is the golden or solar child in whom are united the terrestrial and celestial natures in one hypostasis. Tertullian acknowledges this nuptial mystery of Christ and His Church and the child it bears in his instructions to catechumens:

when you ascend from that most sacred font of your new birth, and spread your hands for the first time in the house of your mother, together with your brethren, ask from the Father, ask from the Lord, that His own specialties of grace and distributions of gifts may be supplied you. “Ask,” saith He, “and ye shall receive.”

As well as symbolising the waters of the human womb, the waters of the font symbolise the waters of the Genesis cosmogony: ‘...and darkness was upon the face of the deep (LXX: abysson). And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ St. Ambrose remarks:


37 Cf. Tertullian, de bapt. 20. For the corresponding macrocosmic vision of the Church as Mother, see ‘The Shepherd of Hermas’ 2nd vision Ch.4: “Who is it then?” say I. And he said, “It is the Church.” And I said to him, “Why then is she an old woman?” “Because,” said he, “she was created first of all. On this account is she old. And for her sake was the world made.””
38 The womb symbolism is exemplified in the concavity of the font, its waters and—in the case with baptism by effusion—the “shell” with which the waters are poured. The shell symbolism is expressed alchemically in, for example, Piero della Francesca’s The Virgin and Child with the Angels and Saints, Adored by Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino. Suspended in the curve of the bivalve shell is an egg or pearl: symbols of birth and gnosis respectively, and interchangeable as the reception of gnosis is a rebirth. Around the neck of the Christ child, born of this womb, is a piece of coral. The symbolism is, however, older, and Jensen notes that a repeating pattern of scallop shells has been used in both European and African fonts. Jensen, ‘Womb, Tomb, and Garden’ Pt I. Sec. D.
39 Gen.1:2.
beginning, when God made the heaven and the earth, “the Spirit,”
 it is said, “moved upon the waters.”

St. John Chrysostom explains that baptism ‘creates and fashions us anew not forming us again out of earth, but creating us out of another element, namely, of the nature of water. For it does not simply wipe the vessel clean, but entirely remoulds it again.’ Baptism is in effect, cosmogonic; it is a “second,” microcosmic, creatio ex nihilo. The “new man” is entirely new, having no continuity with the “old man.” St. Paul: ‘Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.’ ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.’

The association of baptismal and cosmogonic waters is a commonplace of baptismal liturgies and commentaries on baptism from the earliest periods of the Church. Tertullian emphasises the cosmic primordiality and pristine nature of water.

For water is one of those things which, before all the furnishing of the world, were quiescent with God in a yet unshapen state. ...they were the seat of the Divine Spirit ... water alone—always a perfect, gladsome, simple material substance, pure in itself—supplied a worthy vehicle to God.

Further, he draws a direct link between the cosmogonic waters and those of baptism:

…the Spirit of God, who hovered over (the waters) from the beginning, would continue to linger over the waters of the baptised [intinctorum]. ...All waters, ...in virtue of the pristine privilege of their origin, do, after invocation of God, attain the sacramental power of sanctification...

40 St. Ambrose, de mys. 3 (9), amongst others.
41 St. John Chrysostom, in catechumenos (Instruction of Catechumens) 1.3.
42 2Cor.5:17; see also Gal.6:15.
43 Eph.2:10.
44 Tertullian, de bapt. 3.
45 Tertullian, de bapt. 4.
St. Cyril of Jerusalem likewise employs this symbolism of the cosmogonic waters, noting that all things unfold from them. Water is present and effective in all the divine acts in the created order, being the first created thing, the created first principle from which all else unfolds. The heavens and the earth are from the waters, and, according to Tertullian ‘the work of fashioning man himself [was] also achieved with the aid of waters ... Suitable material is found in the earth, yet not apt for the purpose unless it be moist and juicy...’. Tertullian declares that the ‘waters were in some way the regulating powers by which the disposition of the world thenceforward was constituted by God’ and this points to a significance beyond that of one of the traditional quaternary of elements. These waters are prior to that imposition of formal qualities by which fire, air, earth and water may be distinguished, indeed prior to the division of the upper and lower waters that “creates a space,” so to speak, in which the unfolding of form may take place. The cosmogonic waters are the non-formal created principle or archē of the four manifest elements. Cyril likewise considers these primordial waters the material substrate or archē of the kosmos. It is the materia prima, the formless matter (ἀμόρφου ὕλης) of Wisdom 11:17, the earth which was ‘without form and void (tohu wabohu)’ which is ‘the mixture of still undifferentiated elements’.

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46 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 3.5: ‘For water is a grand thing, and the noblest of the four visible elements of the world. Heaven is the dwelling-place of Angels, but the heavens are from the waters: the earth is the place of men, but the earth is from the waters: and before the whole six days’ formation of the things that were made, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. The water was the beginning of the world, and Jordan the beginning of the Gospel tidings’.

47 See recognitones Clementinas (Clementine Recognitions) 6.8: ‘... water was made at first by the Only-begotten; ... when you have come to the Father you will learn that this is His will, that you be born anew by means of waters, which were first created.’ Compare homiliae Clementinae (Clementine Homilies) 11.24: ‘... water makes all things, and water receives the production of its movement from spirit, ... being born again by the first-born water, you may be constituted heir of the parents who have begotten you to incorruption.’

48 Tertullian, de bapt. 3. This is a reference to Gen.2:6-7: ‘But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man...’.

49 Tertullian, de bapt. 3.

that material from which all else sprung and in which the waters of baptism symbolically participate.\textsuperscript{52} This explains Tertullian’s insistence upon the presence of the waters in the dust or earth from which Adam was made and also the qualification he makes in the identity between the waters of baptism and those of the cosmogony: one is baptised ‘...not with those [cosmogonic] waters, of course, except in so far as the \textit{genus} indeed is one, but the \textit{species} very many. But what is an attribute to the \textit{genus} reappears likewise in the \textit{species}.’\textsuperscript{53} By “\textit{genus}” and “\textit{species}” Tertullian indicates the distinction between principle and manifestation, universal and particular.\textsuperscript{54}

Just as the first work of creation is accomplished through the agency of water, so is the salvific work of Christ, which makes possible the second creation. ‘Never’ Tertullian observes, ‘is Christ without water’:

...He is Himself baptised in water [Mt.3.13-17]; inaugurates in water the first rudimentary displays of His power, when invited to the nuptials [Jn.2:1-11]; invites the thirsty, when He makes a discourse, to His own semipeternal water [Jn.7:37-8]; approves, when teaching concerning love, among works of charity, the cup of water offered to a poor (child) [Mt.10:42]; recruits His strength at a well [Jn.4:6]; walks over the water [Mt.14:25]; willingly crosses the sea [Mk.4:36]; ministers water to His disciples [Jn.13:1-12]. Onward even to the passion does the witness of baptism last: while He is being surrendered to the cross, water intervenes; witness Pilate’s hands [Mt.27:24]: when He is wounded, forth from His side bursts water; witness the soldier’s lance [Jn.19:34]!\textsuperscript{55}
The close association between the cosmogonic waters and the waters of baptism, and the function of water in the divine economy, is for Tertullian the reason why water has a universal symbolic significance: it is implicit in the nature of water itself and confirmed in the actions of the Incarnate God. Tertullian poses the rhetorical question: ‘How foolish and impossible it is to be formed anew by water. In what respect, pray, has this material substance merited an office of so high dignity?’ His answer is, in part, that ‘the mere nature of water, in that it is the appropriate material for washing away,’ establishes its symbolism. ‘Water was the first to produce that which had life, that it might be no wonder in baptism if waters know how to give life.’

Two further instructive and commonplace examples of scriptural types of baptism, the Exodus from Egypt and the Deluge, both employ—and thereby reinforce—the symbolism of the cosmogonic waters. While there are a great many Old Testament types of baptism, these two are the most significant: not merely because they are the most common but because they both describe, in their symbolic use of water, a return to the primordial abyss when those waters which would be separated out into the upper and lower waters were still one.

The waters of the Deluge purged the world of wickedness, bringing death but also a “new creation,” the seed of the new age preserved in

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57 Tertullian, *de bapt. 3*.

58 Tertullian, *de bapt. 5*. It is a curious passage, in which Tertullian advances his argument by appealing to the universal recognition of the symbolic significance of water whilst at the same time denying its efficacy outside of the ministrations of the Church. Its universal character ‘leads men to flatter themselves with a belief in omens of purification...If men think that water is endued with a medicinal virtue by religion, what religion is more effectual than that of the living God?’ and ‘how much more truly will waters render that service through the authority of God, by whom all their nature has been constituted!’

59 Tertullian, *de bapt. 3*.

60 The association is scriptural, expounded in the First Letter of Peter (1Pet.3:19 ff) See for example St. Augustine, *de catechizandis rudibus* (On the Catechising of the Uninstructed) Ch.20 (34) but it is a patristic commonplace and examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely.
the family of Noah and the animals of the ark. The book of Genesis explains that ‘all the fountains of the great deep [were] broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.’ Thus the sinful generations are destroyed ‘with the earth.’ That the earth is also destroyed here is significant; the ark is returned to the state prior to the emergence of the earth from the waters. Here we are again in the presence of the cosmogonic waters. The waters of the Deluge are those of the upper and lower waters of the Genesis cosmogony coming together again from above and below. Thus the seed of regeneration, the ark, is returned to the state of primordial potentiality before the division of the waters.

The seven days in which Noah gathers in the animals to the ark reverse the unfolding of the seven days of creation. It is a return to the first created principle, a “winding back” of time, so to speak. Each day of the cosmogony represents an unfolding of the principle as an hierarchic order (the literal meaning of the Greek kosmos) symbolised by a temporal succession. This unfolding, the actualising of the principle, is folded back into the ark and is a return to the archetypal state from which the new order may unfold. This unfolding or regeneration is further symbolised by the forty days and nights of rain which refer to the forty weeks of human gestation and this alerts us that the symbolism of rebirth in this mythos is not only cosmic but microcosmic; hence its applicability to baptism. As Samuel Fohr notes, the ark ‘is at once the seed or egg of the regenerated world and the regenerated person.’ After the waters receded, God commanded Noah:

Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping

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62 Gen.7:11.
63 Gen.6:13.
64 Compare S. Fohr, Adam & Eve: The Spiritual Symbolism of Genesis and Exodus, 4th ed., Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2005, p.115: ‘In the flood narrative, the two [waters, upper and lower], as it were, come together once again, the heavenly waters serving to spiritually regenerate the world.’
65 Fohr, Adam & Eve, p.115.
thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.\textsuperscript{66}

This also recalls the cosmogony, specifically the description of the fifth and sixth days of creation in which the animals were made,\textsuperscript{67} and repeats the blessing to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’

The ark that floats upon the cosmogonic waters of potentiality returns to manifestation, actualising the potential it contains as it is grounded upon the summit of Mt. Ararat. The mountain is an axial symbol and as the waters recede so the earth re-emerges from the summit of the peak outward—a horizontal extension from centre to circumference. The peak of Ararat and the ark that is grounded upon it are the \textit{omphalos}, the centre or navel of the world from which the new order unfolds. The folding back into the ark employs the symbolic numbers seven and then forty: seven days in which the animals are gathered in (a “reverse” of the seven days of creation) and forty days of rain. The unfolding from the ark back out into manifestation employs the same symbolic numbers but in reverse order. First, from the grounding of the ark on Ararat to the sending out of the raven, forty days pass. Then the sending out of the birds, the raven and then the dove three times, occur at intervals of seven days. The sending out of the birds four times invokes manifestation by its numerical symbolism. As René Guénon remarks, ‘the quaternary is always and everywhere considered as the number of universal manifestation. In this respect, it therefore marks the very starting point of cosmology.’\textsuperscript{68}

The enfolding back to principle becomes an unfolding into manifestation and the opening of the ark marks the beginning of the

\textsuperscript{66} Gen.8:16-17.
\textsuperscript{67} Gen.1:20-25. The only discrepancy between the cosmogonic and Deluge accounts is the creation of those creatures which ‘fill the waters in the seas’ which are omitted for obvious narrative reasons that do not affect the central symbolic theme.
\textsuperscript{68} R. Guénon, \textit{Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science}, tr. A. Moore Jr., Bartlow: Quinta Essentia, 1995, §16 p.75. Within the patristic tradition see, for example, Irenaeus, who argues that the NT canon should include only the four Gospels because of the nature of quaternary symbolism: ‘For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the ‘pillar and ground’ of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars [ie. The Gospels], breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh’ (\textit{haer}. 3.11.8).
new creation. This is further signalled by a calendric *motif*: ‘...in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark’. ⁶⁹ We will also encounter this use of calendric symbolism to mark the new beginning in the account of the Exodus and in the Christian assimilation of the Paschal lamb to Christ.

St. Ambrose identifies the Baptist’s vision of ‘the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove’⁷⁰ upon the Christ as an indication that the Deluge is to be understood as an historical prefiguration of the sacrament.⁷¹ This symbolic link between the dove and the Holy Spirit also serves to return us to the cosmogony myth. The spirit “hovers” [*rachaph*] over the cosmogonic waters,⁷² the Hebrew recalling the movement of a bird: ‘As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth [*rachaph*] over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him [Jacob], and there was no strange god with him.’⁷³ The Holy Spirit symbolised by the dove recalls the dove sent out from the ark and in turn the work of the Spirit in the cosmogony.

The waters of the Red Sea, through which Moses led the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt, also prefigure the waters of baptism.⁷⁴ By this passage through the sea, according to St. Paul: ‘were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.’⁷⁵ Cyril explains this symbolic link to the catechumens:

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⁶⁹ Gen.8:13. ⁷⁰ Jn.1.32. ⁷¹ St. Ambrose, *de mys.* 4 (24). ⁷² Gen.1:2. ⁷³ Deut.32:11-12. The Hebrew *rachaph* occurs only once more in Scripture, namely in Jer.23:9: ‘Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake [*rachaph*]; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness.’ ⁷⁴ St. Augustine, *cat. rud.* Ch.20 (34) ⁷⁵ 1Cor.10:1-2.
for Israel deliverance from Pharaoh was through the sea, and for the world deliverance from sins by the washing of water with the word of God. Where a covenant is made with any, there is water also.\textsuperscript{76}

The old man who dies in the waters is symbolised by the armed hosts of Pharaoh while the Hebrews are the new man who emerges from the waters into freedom and this freedom is a new beginning. God commands of the month in which the Hebrews will be released, ‘This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you...’.\textsuperscript{77} This recalls the calendric symbolism already mentioned in relation to the Deluge; in both instances, the re-beginning of the calendar marks the beginning of the new creation. Christianity builds upon these calendric correspondences. While the Christian liturgical year begins in Advent (or in September in the Eastern Orthodox tradition), residual elements of the Jewish new year remain, as all lights in the church are extinguished with Christ’s death and new fire kindled with His Resurrection on Easter morn. The paschal candle of the previous year is removed and a new one blessed, put in its place and lit from the new fire. Christ is the Passover Lamb of Exodus chapter 12, both slain on the fourteenth day of Nisan. The blood of the Passover Lamb, which protects the Hebrews from the death of the firstborn, the final plague upon Egypt that leads to the Hebrews’ release, is the blood of Christ. This Scriptural correspondence is marked in part by the role of hyssop. Hyssop is used to mark the lintels with the blood of the lamb\textsuperscript{78} and appears also in John’s crucifixion account.\textsuperscript{79} Likewise, with the Resurrection on Easter Day ‘we have clean escaped from Egypt and from Pharaoh’.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{cat.} 3.5. Compare Tertullian, \textit{de bapt.} 9, quoted above.
\textsuperscript{77} Ex.12:2
\textsuperscript{78} Ex.12:22.
\textsuperscript{79} Jn.19:29-30: ‘...and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.’ Symbolically, the NT use of hyssop at the crucifixion identifies the salvific function of Christ’s sacrifice. It is used in the ritual cleansing of leprosy (Lev.14), where it is likewise dipped in the blood of the sacrifice), of one who has had contact with unclean things (Num.19:16) and, most importantly for our context, the purgation from sin (Ps.51). In short, hyssop is related to sacrifice, purification and protection, all of which are themes of baptism.
\textsuperscript{80} St. Gregory Nazianzen, \textit{orationes} 1.3.
In relation to baptism, it is important for this symbolism that we understand that the Egyptians and the Hebrews are the sinful and the righteous aspects of the one man who enters the baptismal waters. It is in this light that we may understand that, after Pharaoh had relented and let the Hebrews go, God hardened ‘Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall follow after...’ and be destroyed by the waters:

...the tyrant was pursuing that ancient people even to the sea; and here the daring and shameless spirit, the author of evil, was following thee even to the very streams of salvation. The tyrant of old was drowned in the sea; and this present one disappears in the water of salvation.

In order that the new man may be born, first the old man must die: ‘And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men.’ Tertullian makes the same association and Gregory of Nyssa concurs:

For even now, whencesoever the people is in the water of regeneration, fleeing from Egypt, from the burden of sin, it is set free and saved; but the devil with his own servants (I mean, of course, the spirits of evil), is choked with grief, and perishes, deeming the salvation of men to be his own misfortune.

This symbolic reading can also be found—cast in a dualistic context—in the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia*, where ‘they are Egypt, because they are matter.’

The inspiration of Pharaoh towards watery death is the inspiration of conversion that leads man to baptism, which is the death of the old man ‘by which’ St. Augustine explains, ‘the faithful pass into the new life,

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81 Ex.14.4.
82 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat., 19.2.
83 Ex.12:33.
84 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *bapt. Chr.*
while their sins are done away with like enemies, and perish." 86 And St. Ambrose instructs:

...observe that even then holy baptism was prefigured in that passage of the Hebrews, wherein the Egyptian perished, the Hebrew escaped. For what else are we daily taught in this sacrament but that guilt is swallowed up and error done away, but that virtue and innocence remain unharmed? 87

Thus Pharaoh and his hosts represent the lower, infernal, tendencies, those which impel man towards separativeness and death and which must be conquered in order that one may walk the spiritual way. 88 Through the waters the Hebrews enter into freedom and ‘the devil, their old tyrant, they leave quite behind, overwhelmed in the water.’ 89

Fohr notes that the “Red Sea” of the Exodus mythos, “yam sup” is better translated as “Sea of the End (of the world)” and that the reference is to the primordial chaos. 90 He links these two symbolisms—the crossing of the Red Sea and the cosmogony—together, making of the latter a symbol of rebirth or re-creation. The Hebrews return to the primordial abyss of the cosmogonic waters. But they do not remain there, just as the waters of the Deluge do not endure perpetually. The forty years—again a reference to the period of gestation—in the desert (a symbol of the non-manifested) culminate with the crossing of the Jordan (the place of Christ’s baptism) where the waters again part (before the ark of the covenant) to allow the passage of the Chosen Ones into the Promised Land. 91 As with the Deluge mythos, the process of return to principle is reversed in the process of re-manifestation. 92

86 St. Augustine, cat. rud. Ch.20 (34)
87 St. Ambrose, de mys. 3 (12).
88 On this theme see Fohr, Adam & Eve, Ch.12, pp.165-180.
89 Tertullian, de bapt. 9.
91 Jos.3.
92 The years in the wilderness are the length of time required for the idolaters—who worshipped the Golden Calf—to pass away, leaving only the righteous behind. This is another symbol of the death of sin wrought in baptism, analogous to the death of Pharaoh’s host and the destruction of the “sinful generations” by the Deluge. Again, this
To return to the *mythos* of the Deluge, St. Ambrose (who baptised St. Augustine) draws the raven and the dove within the scope of baptismal symbolism:

The water, then, is that in which the flesh is dipped, that all carnal sin may be washed away. All wickedness is there buried. The wood is that on which the Lord Jesus was fastened when He suffered for us. The dove is that in the form of which the Holy Spirit descended, as you have read in the New Testament, Who inspires in you peace of soul and tranquillity of mind. The raven is the figure of sin, which goes forth and does not return, if, in you, too, inwardly and outwardly righteousness be preserved.93

Here the symbolic meaning of the raven and that of the hosts of Pharaoh and the forty years in the desert in the Exodus story coincide. Symbolically the two stories are identical in the interpretative framework of Christian baptism.

Augustine notes that both of these Old Testament types, the Exodus and the Deluge, it is not the power of water alone that is at work but also what he calls ‘the sacrament of the wood’94 The waters of the Red Sea gave safe passage to the Hebrews when ‘Moses smote with his rod, in order that that miracle might be effected.’95 Likewise, it is the wood of the ark that bears Noah and his family upon the waters and brings them safely to the new covenant. This wood is the wood of the Cross. ‘For what is water without the cross of Christ? A common element,
without any sacramental effect.\textsuperscript{96} By the wood of the ark, the new human race—Noah and his family—are borne safely over the waters, which otherwise destroy the sinful generations. The announcement of the new world in which this new race would live—under the Noachide covenant\textsuperscript{97}—takes the form of the branch carried by the dove.

On each occasion life comes by means of wood. For in the time of Noe the preservation of life was by an ark of wood. In the time of Moses the sea, on beholding the emblematical rod, was abashed at him who smote it; is then Moses’ rod mighty, and is the Cross of the Saviour powerless? ... The wood in Moses’ case sweetened the water...\textsuperscript{98}

This last point, the wood making the water sweet, is a reference to the spring at Marah.\textsuperscript{99} St. Ambrose elaborates on the efficacy of the wood—which prefigures the Cross—in his baptismal reading of Marah. He writes:

Marah was a fountain of most bitter water: Moses cast wood into it and it became sweet. For water without the preaching of the Cross of the Lord is of no avail for future salvation, but, after it has been consecrated by the mystery of the saving cross, it is made suitable for the use of the spiritual laver and of the cup of salvation. As, then, Moses, that is, the prophet, cast wood into that fountain, so,

\textsuperscript{96} St. Ambrose, \textit{de mys}. 4 (20). To this insight St. Cyril of Jerusalem adds that, just as the Holy Spirit sanctifies the waters, so too may dedication of the waters to idols defile it. ‘Regard not the Laver as simple water, but rather regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water. For just as the offerings brought to the heathen altars, though simple in their nature, become defiled by the invocation of the idols, so contrariwise the simple water having received the invocation of the Holy Ghost, and of Christ, and of the Father, acquires a new power of holiness’ (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{cat}. 3.3).

\textsuperscript{97} The Noachide covenant is imposed—contra Paul—by James, “Brother of our Lord,” upon gentile converts to Christianity (while Jewish Christians were expected to continue to observe the Mosaic covenant). This Noachide covenant (largely extinguished in Christianity by the triumph of the Pauline impulse) would be further perpetuated in Islamic observances.

\textsuperscript{98} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{cat}. 13.20.

\textsuperscript{99} Ex.15.23 ff.
too, the priest utters over this font the proclamation of the Lord’s cross, and the water is made sweet for the purpose of grace. ¹⁰⁰

Ambrose does not discuss it but the passage from Exodus in question notes that from the Red Sea to the well of Marah was a journey of three days.¹⁰¹ This is surely a type of the three days which Christ spent in the tomb: three days between the “death” in the Red Sea and the sweetening of the bitter waters in the “resurrection” at Marah. The priest blesses the waters of the font with the sign of the cross—symbolically touching them with the wood of the Cross—and makes the bitterness sweet. ‘…it is not of the waters but of grace that a man is cleansed’.¹⁰² ‘…water does not cleanse without the Spirit.’¹⁰³ This recalls the cosmogonic waters over which the Spirit hovered as well as the creation of man, into whose body of dust (and, according to Tertullian, of water) God blows His spirit. Despite its natural qualities which make it the perfect material symbol for the sacrament, the Fathers are clear that it is not merely by the agency of the water that one is spiritually cleansed. This is not a “natural” salvation, nor a magical charm or poultice but one wrought by grace. Thus we might say that the qualities of the waters are such that, while not efficacious in their own right, are the perfect receptacle for and vehicle of the baptismal grace.¹⁰⁴ ‘Quiescent with God in a yet unshapen state’¹⁰⁵ the water is pure potentiality, pure receptivity.

¹⁰⁰ St. Ambrose, de mys. 3 (14) Compare Tertullian, de bapt. 9: ‘Again, water is restored from its defect of “bitterness” to its native grace of “sweetness” by the tree of Moses. That tree was Christ, restoring, to wit, of Himself, the veins of sometime envenomed and bitter nature into the all-salutary waters of baptism.’
¹⁰¹ Ex.15.22.
¹⁰² St. Ambrose, de mys. 3 (17)
¹⁰³ St. Ambrose, de mys. 4 (19)
¹⁰⁴ This theological point underlies the gospel distinction between the baptism of John and that of Christ. From Luke’s Gospel: ‘John answered… I indeed baptise you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire…’ (Lk.3:16). John’s baptism is ‘of repentance for the remission of sins’ (Mk 1:4.). This baptism clears the ground, so to speak, and makes one ready for the psychic and cosmic reintegration wrought by the Holy Spirit. John’s prophetic role is ‘to make ready a people prepared for the Lord’ (Lk.1:17). Hence Tertullian equates it with the preparatory phases of Christian baptism: ‘They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all by-gone sins, that they may express the meaning even of the baptism of
Old Testament types of baptism can be multiplied almost indefinitely, as St. Gregory of Nyssa remarks: ‘the discourse would extend to an infinite length if one should seek to select every passage in detail, and set them forth in a single book.’ Nevertheless, these types which we have considered are enough to indicate the fundamental meaning attributed to the waters of baptism. They are waters of death and of new life. Each of our OT types indicate a return to the primordial waters before the primal division of the upper and lower waters and the establishment of the heavens and the earth: an unmaking of the old order, the return to principle, and the going out into the a new beginning. The old man is unmade—that is, dies—and the new man is born.

The old man dies in the waters of baptism, and here the rite may be considered as both a “drowning” and a corpse-washing. From these same waters the new man is born and here it is the fontal waters take the symbolism of the waters of the womb and the cosmogony. The old man is immersed and the new man emerges. Between these two movements of the soul, death to sin and rebirth into eternal life, lies the three days Christ spent in the tomb. It is to the initiate’s participation in this journey through the underworld, and its role in the return to the primordial, that we now turn.

John’ (Tertullian, de bapt. 20). As the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church explains, ‘John’s baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth’ (Catechism §720, p.190).

Tertullian, de bapt. 3.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, bapt. Chr.

This corpse washing motif is also found in the pre- and post-baptismal anointing with oil, which correspond to the anointing of the corpse in preparation for its entombment. See Mk.16:1, Lk.23:56, Jn.19:39-40. Also significant here is the episode of the woman anointing Christ (Mk.14:3-8) with spikenard, and the Johannine parallel where Mary anoints his feet (Jn.12:3-7). Christ explains: ‘she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying’ (Mk.14:8) and ‘against the day of my burying hath she kept this’ (Jn.12:7).
Descent into Hell and Cosmic Ascent

Of this our Saviour the Prophet Jonas formed the type, when he prayed out of the belly of the whale, and said, I cried in my affliction, and so on; out of the belly of hell, and yet he was in the whale; but though in the whale, he says that he is in Hades; for he was a type of Christ, who was to descend into Hades. (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetal Lectures* 14:20)

When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) (Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians, 4.8-10)

From one perspective, the descent of Christ into Hell establishes the trans-temporal nature of the revelation and its salvific effects. Ignatius of Antioch writes:

He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; and rent asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and cast down its partition-wall.108

The covenant of the new *ecclesia* makes available a soteriological gift which is exemplified in the Person of Christ, who made ‘in himself of twain one new man, so making peace’ and which, while enacted in time (for God enters into history in order to redeem history), is trans-temporal in its effects. There is here some analogy between the salvific role of the cross and, in Islamic mythology, Ishmael’s heel, which pierced the sands and opened the channels of the well of Zamzam.109 Further, the well of Zamzam was sealed off until its rediscovery and opening by the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad under heavenly guidance.110 Given that the Ka‘bah is considered to have been built by

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108 Ignatius of Antioch, *epistula ad Trallianos* (Letter to the Trallians) Ch.9, long redaction.
110 Lings, *Muhammad*, pp.10-11
Abraham and Ishmael upon the foundations laid in that same spot by Adam in his construction of the very first shrine to God, it may be surmised that Zamzam is the spring from which the four rivers of Eden flowed. In each of these cases the symbolism is consistent; the well (as the cross) is the omphalos. This centre, and the axial symbolism of which it partakes, is the centre not only the spatial extension of the kosmos but also its temporal extension. Through the revelation of which it is the symbol and vehicle, all epochs are joined together, from Adam, to Muhammad. Likewise, the cross of Christ links all generations of man, from the first to the last, as it pierces the earth and through that channel Christ’s blood flowed and washed the skull of Adam clean of sin.

This is one aspect of the symbolism of Christ’s descent into Hell but it also has a baptismal context. As Mircea Eliade observes, ‘katabasis [the descent into the underworld] is bound up with initiation rites.’

The descent of Christ into Hades is reflected in the rites of Christian initiation and here the symbolism takes a different intent, one of purification (katharsis), liberation from death and sin, and the return to the Edenic state “prior” to the privations consequent of original sin. The initiate participates not only in the death and resurrection of Christ but also His struggle with the infernal powers. ‘It is’ writes Hans Küng, ‘in his own soul that a man must fight for and win his freedom.’

For as Christ after His Baptism, and the visitation of the Holy Ghost, went forth and vanquished the adversary, so likewise ye, after Holy Baptism and the Mystical Chrism, having put on the whole armour of the Holy Ghost, are to stand against the power of the adversary, and vanquish it, saying, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me...

These infernal powers are those which inhere in the soul as a consequence of original sin, and which are perversions of virtues. The

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112 Küng, The Church, p.151.
113 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 21.4.
initiate must come face to face with ‘his own demons’ and vanquish them within the battleground of his own soul. Martin Lings:

The first phase of the spiritual alchemy of repentance is “the descent into hell,” so called because it is first necessary to penetrate into the depths of the soul in order to regain consciousness of the “worst” which by “repenting” is to become once more the best.  

Returning to the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of baptism, we find this same grappling with the infernal powers or lower tendencies of the soul. Fohr notes that the plagues visited upon Egypt are ‘the recapitulation of the lower states of Existence which a person must go through before his spiritual ascent.’

The battle with ‘the dragon of the sea who is laying ... plots against thee” begins in the purifications and exorcisms preparatory to baptism and reaches its climax when the initiate, having died in the waters and participating in Christ’s descent into Hell, enters into combat with the forces of evil. Man may vanquish sin because, having already died in Christ, sin (and death) has no hold over the initiate, as St. Gregory of Nyssa explains:

Now if we have been conformed to His death, sin henceforth in us is surely a corpse, pierced through by the javelin of Baptism... Flee therefore from us, ill-omened one! for it is a corpse thou seekest to despoil, one long ago joined to thee, one who long since lost his senses for pleasures. A corpse is not enamoured of bodies, a corpse is not captivated by wealth, a corpse slanders not, a corpse lies not, snatches not at what is not its own, reviles not those who encounter it.

The Devil is given what belongs to him—death, “the wages of sin.” The initiate, who no longer identifies with that death is free from its tyranny whereas ‘the bad man, even if he reigns, is a slave... of as many masters as he has vices’.  

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118 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *bapt. Chr*.  
119 St. Augustine, *de civitate Dei* (The City of God) 4.3.
enables the supreme act of self-determination which is the *Amen* to God by which the initiate accepts the radical freedom to be saved and reborn. Küng: ‘Over against all compulsion to sin he now has the possibility of acting according to God’s merciful commands.’\(^{120}\) The triple immersion in the baptismal waters is—as well as being a declaration of the Trinity—a symbolic participation in the three days Christ spends in the tomb: ‘For as our Saviour passed three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, so you also ... And at the self-same moment ye were both dying and being born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother.’\(^{121}\) It is a death that liberates one from death.

This is a ritual participation in the salvific economy of Christ, an *imitatio dei*. Christ ‘was made a bait to death that the dragon, hoping to devour it, might disgorg e those also who had been already devoured...’.\(^{122}\)

Since, therefore, it was necessary to break the heads of the dragon in pieces [Ps.74.14], He went down and bound the strong one in the waters, that we might receive power to *tread upon serpents and scorpions* [Lk.10.19]. The beast was great and terrible. ... The Life encountered him, that the mouth of Death might henceforth be stopped, and all we that are saved might say, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory* [1Cor.15.55]?\(^{123}\)

God has entered into death and triumphed over it: ‘Death was struck with dismay on beholding a new visitant descend into Hades, not bound by the chains of that place. ... Death fled, and his flight betrayed his cowardice.’\(^{124}\) Henceforth those who bind themselves to God will be freed from death as an absolute power; or to put it another way, the seeming absoluteness of death will be revealed as a counterfeit absolute; the passage of God through death and beyond it reveals its relativity.

\(^{120}\) Küng, *The Church*, p.152.  
\(^{121}\) St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 20.4.  
\(^{122}\) St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 12.15.  
\(^{123}\) St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 3.11.  
Hence baptism is also known—and since earliest times—as Enlightenment or Illumination; it replaces illusion with true vision.

...thou art about to be called newly-enlightened, because thy light is ever new, ... often a man has seen a coil of rope and has thought it was a serpent, and has fled from an approaching friend as from an enemy, ... which thing also occurs in the case of our soul. For when grace has come, and driven away the darkness of the understanding, we learn the exact nature of things, ... For we no longer fear death, after learning exactly, from this sacred initiation, that death is not death...

Baptism is ‘the participation of light... the perfecting of the mind... Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the Gifts of God.’ In the light of Christ’s Absoluteness, illusion is dispelled and the initiate discerns the Real. ‘The sting of death is drawn by Baptism’ because in baptism the neophyte not only pledges himself to the Risen God but also undergoes that same journey through death. In doing so, he understands the relativity of death.

The judicial symbolism with which Theodore of Mopsuestia explains baptism highlights the role this descent into Hell and the vanquishing of the Devil plays in the symbolic and sacramental return to the primordial.

...we must run with all diligence to the judge and show and establish the title which we possess: that we did not belong to Satan from the beginning... but to God who created us while we were not and made us in His own image.

In overcoming the Devil and escaping his dominion, the Christian initiate returns to his original, divine, “owner” under whose auspices he now dwells. The one baptised is free because he has returned to the Edenic state, prior to the bondage of sin and death, and to his rightful

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126 St. Gregory Nazianzen, *or.* 40.3.  
127 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 3.11.  
owner: ‘We have rightly reverted to our Lord to whom we belonged before the wickedness of Satan, and we are, as we were in the beginning, in the image of God.’\textsuperscript{129} Whatever claim Satan—the adversary and “prosecutor”—has over us, God has a prior and overriding claim. Acknowledging that claim is the return to the Edenic origin and the restoring of the divine image in which man was made.

His bursting from the spicèd tomb,
His riding up the heavenly way,
His coming at the Day of Doom
I bind unto myself today.
- from St. Patrick’s Breastplate

The symbolic placement of the infernal powers under the earth is most commonly known. However, there is also an early Jewish-Christian tradition that places them in the air between heaven and earth.\textsuperscript{130} This is also found in some Hellenic Christian sources and was perpetuated by ‘certain Moslem cosmologists,’\textsuperscript{131} before finally re-entering European Christian baptismal symbolism. Here we are in the presence of two different but complimentary cosmological symbolisms referring to the same reality. They can only be seen as competing or contradictory from a purely material and cosmographic viewpoint which is altogether alien to the symbolic mind. The infernal powers are subterranean insofar as they are sub-human—man living upon the surface of the earth—and man is subhuman insofar as he is under their sway. These same infernal powers may be considered as dwelling in the airy space between heaven and earth insofar as they stand between earthly man and his heavenly abode and impede his progress thence. Similarly, and in relation to the \textit{kosmos} as “man writ large,” if the firmament symbolises the spirit of

\textsuperscript{129} Theodore of Mospuestia, \textit{Liber ad Baptizandos} pt.2, Ch.2, p.30.
\textsuperscript{130} Scriptural support can be found in Eph.2:2: ‘…in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’ and Eph.6, considered below. See Daniélou, \textit{History of Early Christian Doctrine} I. pp.188-92.
man and the earth his body, then the "mid-space" between the two symbolises his soul, which is precisely the battleground upon which Christ—and the initiate following in his wake—wrestles against the infernal forces and it is the soul which is His prize won in victory.

In regards to our current theme, in the latter of these two symbolisms the “descent into Hell” is replaced by the confounding of the infernal forces in Christ’s Ascension,\(^{132}\) which is the symbolic form at work in the symbolism of the “astral journey.”\(^{133}\) The effect in both cases is the same. Christ’s salvific economy makes possible the initiate’s freedom from bondage to infernal powers, whether they be considered as “airy spirits” or subterranean. This effect is described in the \textit{Pistis Sophia}. Christ ascends through the planetary spheres and as a result ‘all the powers of the Heaven fell into agitation’\(^{134}\) and their hold over man is loosened.

\(^{132}\) Daniélou, \textit{History of Early Christian Doctrine} Vol.1, p.192: ‘...in Jewish Christian teaching Christ meets the demons and triumphs over them in the course of his Ascension, and not in his descent to Sheol, which is concerned only with the deliverance of souls.’ Here the microcosm and macrocosm are addressed by two separate Christic ‘movements.’ It is, however, the interpenetration of the two worlds that is of interest to us in this present paper.

\(^{133}\) In accord with this order of symbolism the seven deadly sins are given planetary associations. Lings: ‘Pride... is related to the Sun, avarice... to Saturn, lust... to Venus, envy... to Mercury, gluttony... to Jupiter, anger... to Mars, sloth... to the Moon’ (‘The Seven Deadly Sins,’ p.220). The \textit{Pistis Sophia} identifies the aeons with the constellations of the zodiac and attributes sins to each of them (5.140, pp.303-07). The \textit{gnosis} of the mysteries—and the Gnostics—is the knowledge which enables the initiate to break free of this bondage, to ‘break the spell of the planets, which sought to block one’s entrance to the august celestial realms above’ (H. Koester, \textit{Introduction to the New Testament: History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age} Vol.1, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, p.377). In the Christian context this \textit{gnosis} and its consequent power are conferred sacramentally by the rite of baptism and the noetic content of its symbols.

\(^{134}\) \textit{Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel} 1.3, pp.4-5. Compare 1.15 (p.19) where Christ explains his salvific economy of his ascent through the spheres. ‘And I took from all a third of their power, that they should no more be active in their evil doings and that, if the men who are in the world, invoke them in their mysteries—those which the angels who transgressed have brought down, that is their sorceries,—in order that, therefore, if they invoke them in their evil doings, they may not be able to accomplish them. And the Fate and the sphere over which they ruled I have changed...’. The mention of the transgression of the angels is a reference to \textit{1Enoch}, which identifies astrology as one of the arts taught to men by the fallen angels.
In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes the maleficent works of cosmic influences—archons and kosmocrators—and the initiate’s battle with and escape from their power. He writes:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities (ἀρχὰι), against powers, against the rulers (κοσμοκράτοραι) of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (ἐπουρανίοι).  

This battle, which is the journey to heaven through the planetary spheres to their summit and beyond their influence, is the symbolic complement to the descent into Hell. It is a theme familiar to the spiritual climate of the Mystery religions and Gnostic and Hermetic symbolism but which is also present in orthodox Christian sources—with appropriate qualifications—as the bondage to infernal powers under which man finds himself, having submitted to them in the Adamic sin. As Daniélou remarks, ‘Adam became Satan’s prisoner.’  

Employing this order of cosmological symbolism, baptism is described as the vehicle of cosmic ascent in which the initiate participates in the Ascent of Christ. St. Cyril describes baptism as ‘a

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135 Eph.6:11-12. Translation based upon AV. See also Eph.3:10 and 1Pt.3:22; the latter being cast in a deliberately baptismal context.
136 For Hermetic and Gnostic—as well as some possible early Christian uses of this astrological schema see M. W. Bloomfield, ‘The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins,’ The Harvard Theological Review 34:2, 1941.
138 Origen employs the same order of symbolism in relation to the Magi of the nativity mythos but here it is not the ascent of Christ that breaks the powers of the planets but the descent of Christ towards His Incarnation. ‘The star that was seen in the east [at the nativity of Christ]’ he writes, ‘we consider to have been a new star, unlike any of the other well-known planetary bodies...’ (Origen, contra Celsum 1.58). This star is not of the astrological order but a supervention of the divine into the cosmos. As a result the demonic planetary powers ‘...are overthrown, being unable to resist the light of divinity’ (Origen, Cels. 1.60). Ignatius of Antioch declares the same in his Letter to the Ephesians. He writes: ‘A star shone forth in heaven above all that were before it, and its light was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. ... Hence worldly wisdom became folly; conjuration was seen to be mere trifling and magic became utterly ridiculous. Every law of wickedness vanished away; the darkness of ignorance was dispersed; and tyrannical authority was destroyed...’ (Ignatius of Antioch, epistula ad Ephesios (Letter to the Ephesians), Ch.19, long redaction). As Daniélou notes
chariot (ὄχημα) to heaven\textsuperscript{139} and Saints Basil and Gregory Nazianzen also employ the symbolism of the vehicle of ascent in a baptismal context. This symbolism resonates with platonic and neoplatonic sources; Proclus, for example, uses the Greek ὄχημα to denote the ‘astral bodies which the soul puts on successively in the course of its ascent through the planetary spheres.’\textsuperscript{140} More significant, however, is the incorporation of merkavah symbolism into the baptismal journey. This is accomplished by the identification of the vision of the heavenly chariot and the four “living creatures” of Ezekiel and the fiery chariot by which Elijah is occluded into heaven.\textsuperscript{141} The cosmological aspect of Elijah’s chariot is reinforced by assimilation to the chariot of Helios.\textsuperscript{142} Sedulius, for example, in the fifth century makes a linguistic assimilation between Elijah (Elias-Ἡλιάς) and Helios (Ἥλιος): ‘Elias, shining in name and in merit, is worthy to shed his light on the pathways of Heaven: by the change of one letter his name in Greek becomes “sun”.’\textsuperscript{143} It is the location of the occlusion of Elijah at the Jordan (where Christ was baptised and across which the Hebrews passed into the Promised Land), which provides the link with baptism;\textsuperscript{144} for example, Cyril: ‘Elias is taken up, but not apart from water: for first he crosses the Jordan, then in a chariot mounts the heaven.’\textsuperscript{145}

that there ‘seems to be in this passage an allusion to the domination exercised by the stars over the world, and to the magical and astrological practices that were an expression of it. Nevertheless, the allusion to magic may also in the context refer to the Magi. If so, then it is both the astral powers and the Magi, their ministers, who are stupefied by the appearance of the new star which marks the end of their reign’ (Daniélou, History of Early Christian Doctrine Vol.1, p.221). For Origen and Ignatius, it is the birth of Christ, the descent of Christ from Heaven to His Incarnation that overcame the old cosmological order and thereby renders obsolete the interpretations of the sciences based upon it. The salvific effect, whether it be brought about by His descent to birth or His ascent to heaven, is the same.

\textsuperscript{139} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Procatechesis 16.
\textsuperscript{141} Ez.1; 2Ki.2. See Daniélou, ‘Elias’s Chariot,’ pp.76-83.
\textsuperscript{142} Daniélou, ‘Elias’s Chariot,’ pp.85-87.
\textsuperscript{143} Sedulius, Paschale Carmen 1.186 quoted in Danielou, ‘Elias’s Chariot,’ p.87.
\textsuperscript{144} As Daniélou notes: ‘The connection between Elias’s ascension and the Jordan must be noticed; it has contributed to the bringing together of his chariot with baptism’ (‘Elias’s Chariot,’ p.80).
\textsuperscript{145} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 3.5.
In Gnostic terms, while the archons, kosmocrators, or planetary influences, are beholden to the higher authority of their maker, the true God, they ignore or forget that indebtedness and relativity and hence operate contrary to the will of God. Establishing itself as an exegesis on the passage from Ephesians 6, The Hypostasis of the Archons, found amongst the documents at Nag Hammadi, declares of ‘the authorities of the universe and the spirits of wickedness’ [i.e. the archons], that ‘their chief is blind; ... he said “It is I who am God; there is none [apart from me].’” This chief archon is called Samael ‘which is, “god of the blind.”’ Similarly, in On the Origin of the World, Yaldabaoth, whom Pistis Sophia caused to arise from the primordial waters, surveyed the kosmos over which he was chief and ‘boasted continually, saying... “I do not need anything. ... I am god and no other one exists except me.” But when he said these things, he sinned against all the immortal ... ones. These archons or kosmocrators are ‘blindly dedicated to power over matter’ and ‘dedicated to keeping man on the material plane, subjecting man to law and bondage’. These ‘starry governors’ have power over the fleshy (somatic) man (in Orphic terms, the Titanic aspect) and insofar as man is somatikoi he is bound by their kosmocratic power. The Gnostic enterprise was, like the Orphic, an attempt to disassociate oneself from the mortal, somatic aspect and identify with the spiritual or noetic. Insofar as one fails to fully achieve this, he remains bound by the archonic powers and his ascent to the Pleroma is hindered. Free of the soma, the pneuma or nous may ascend to the truly divine, having penetrated through the ignorance and illusion in which the archons are both bound and perpetuate. In orthodox terms, the Christic grace overcomes the order of fallen nature, not as a “release” from the body but rather as its transfiguration and regeneration free from the limitations of the seperative, fallen state. Man is henceforth free to “ascend” beyond the astral or planetary

146 Whatever specific term is used, they refer symbolically to the same thing.
150 Churton, The Gnostics, p.27.
151 Churton, The Gnostics, p.44.
The Ascension of Christ (detail), from the Kebran Manuscript (Ethiopian, c.1420). Here Christ ascends in the heavenly chariot, surrounded by the four beasts of Ezekiel’s vision, which are identified with the four evangelists. Note the coincidence of the square and the circle—a symbolic equivalent of the octagon discussed later in this paper.

(Ethiopia: Illuminated Manuscripts, UNESCO World Art Series, NY Graphic Society & UNESCO, 1961, Plate XXI. Photograph by the author.)
powers of the archons, to pass through their “spheres of influence” because he is freed from the sins they represent and the opacity of their seeming absoluteness. From this position of microcosmic transfiguration, the kosmos is understood in its divinely appointed aspect and is, as it were, itself transfigured. Using zodiacal symbolism, St. Zeno of Verona describes to the newly baptised the new cosmic order ruled over by Christ and the freedom of the new man. The former zodiacal powers are annulled because the natal bonds of the old man are broken. He exclaims:

Behold! Boys, youths, young men and seniors of each sex, you who were guilty, you were also not beautiful. By a beautiful birth, however, you are now free from all guilt, you are beautiful children and—which is amazing and pleasing—by one sudden movement you have become of equal age in differing ages.

All are born again during their Easter baptism. But what of their new nativity? ‘Perhaps you may ask from us... by what sign your mother has... brought you forth... I shall open up the secrets of the sacred horoscope with all briefness.’ Reborn at Easter, they fall under the sign of Aries, to be understood, says Zeno, not as the Ram but the

154 Compare Küng: Man ‘becomes a slave of the created world, which cannot give him the strength to live or the norms to live by. ... The turning away from God to the created world, to the powers of this world and to human strength, and the disobedience towards God’s will and enmity towards God himself which follows is what we mean by sin’ (Küng, The Church, pp.151-52). St. Augustine rejects the practice of consulting astral powers for insights into the future precisely because it involves treating them as absolute principles. It is, in short, a form of idolatry and leads man ‘either to the worship of idols, or to worshipping creation or its parts instead of God’ (de doctrina christiana [On Catholic Doctrine] 2.23 (36)).

155 St. Zeno of Verona, Tractatus 43: Ad neophytos post baptisma. De duodecim signis (To Neophytes after baptism: on the twelve signs) in PL XI. 493A. I am indebted to the work of Mr David Kennedy, who assisted me greatly in translating this tractate from the Latin. Any inaccuracies in the translation, due to the attempt to render it into good English, are mine.

156 St. Zeno of Verona, Trac. 43. 494A.

157 Compare St. Augustine, Epistle 55. 8 (14): ‘None of us gives any consideration to the circumstance that, at the time at which we observe Easter, the sun is in the Ram, as they call a certain region of the heavenly bodies, in which the sun is, in fact, found at the beginning of the months; but whether they, choose to call that part of the heavens the Ram: or anything else, we have learned this from the Sacred Scriptures, that God made all the heavenly bodies, and appointed their places as it pleased Him; ... If,
Lamb who ‘was first to receive you... who clothed your nakedness with the snowy whiteness of His own fleece, who indulgently, into you lips wide with wailing, poured His own blessed milk.’ In similar vein he treats the other zodiacal signs, given them new symbolic meaning in the light of Christ. Taurus, the stubborn bull becomes the meek sacrificial calf, Gemini signifies the two testaments of Scripture and Pisces the two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, brought into one. The scales of Libra follows the sign of the Virgin because from the Blessed Virgin ‘fairness and justice had been brought into the lands.’ Here the kosmos has become entirely Christic. What has been said above—that baptism reveals the relativity of death, removing from it the illusion of absoluteness—applies equally here, the theology underpinning these two symbolic orders being identical. All of this is summed up in the account of the nativity of Christ given in the Protoevangelum of James: ‘And the Magi said: We have seen a star of great size shining among these stars, and obscuring their light, so that the stars did not appear’.

however, the name of Ram could be given to that portion of the heavenly bodies because of some correspondence between their form and the name, the word of God would not hesitate to borrow from anything of this kind an illustration of a holy mystery...’.

158 St. Zeno of Verona, Trac. 43. 494A-495A
159 St. Zeno of Verona, Trac. 43. 495B. Similarly, the Clementine Recognitions calls Christ ‘the accepted year of God’ and the twelve apostles ‘His twelve months’ (Clem. recogn. 4.35. On this theme and for other sources, see J. Daniélou, ‘The Twelve Apostles and the Zodiac’ in Primitive Christian Symbols, London: Burns & Oates, 1964. Daniélou notes that this is an adaption of a Jewish attribution to the twelve patriarchs—pp.131-35. See also hom. Clem. 2.2). The role of the twelve Apostles and of the seven deacons—described in the book of Acts—also corresponds to an astral symbolism: ‘...the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:1-4). The “twelve”—the Apostles—are unchanging in their activity just as the twelve constellations are fixed and unchanging and the object of their activity, the word of God, is unchanging. The seven deacons are appointed that they might engage with the “daily ministration” that changes according to the changing conditions of the people. In the same way the movements of the planets—who “wander” in relation to the fixed stars—reflect and respond to the conditions of flux that predominate on the terrestrial plane: the planets particularise the qualities of the constellations.

160 Protoevangelum of James 21.2.
This macrocosmic symbolism describes not only cosmic powers but the “psychic landscape” of fallen man. Lings:

...the perverted sense of the Absolute ... may be said to lie at the root of all deadly sin. ... avarice is the deification of a material object, ... anger, like the sins of envy and pride, implies a certain deification of the ego, its endowment with rights that belong only to the Absolute...  

The initiate, having broken the power of sin in their own soul, finds those same psychic elements returned to their proper place. The quasi-absoluteness of these created powers dispelled, their true nature is revealed: Aries the ram becomes Christ the Lamb. Sin is replaced by virtue. Indeed, sin is revealed to be virtue deformed; the opacity of sin—its illusion of Absoluteness—becomes the translucence of virtue. Sin is the relative considered Absolute and when this illusion is dispelled the planetary spheres as the seat of demons become instead the place of the angelic choirs. In the light of the Christic Star, ‘all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star’. In other words, they were oriented to their true metaphysical centre. While the seven deadly sins correspond to the seven planetary spheres, Lings explains:

...[it] would be wrong... and even sacrilegious, to invert this manner of expression and to say that the sins are actually represented by these celestial bodies after which, in virtue of their exaltation and luminosity, the very heavens themselves are named. All that can be said is that the planets are symbols of

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162 Clement of Alexandria calls it theft claiming that those who ‘attribute growth and changes to the stars as the primary cause,’ are ‘robbing the Father of the universe’ (Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis [Miscellanies]’ 6.16).
163 Ignatius of Antioch, Eph. 19, long redaction.
164 Compare St. Augustine, de civ. 5.1: ‘They, however, who make the position of the stars depend on the divine will, and in a manner decree what character each man shall have, and what good or evil shall happen to him, if they think that these same stars have that power conferred upon them by the supreme power of God, in order that they may determine these things according to their will, do a great injury to the celestial sphere, in
what is “best” in the soul; and when these *optima* are corrupted, they still continue to be related to the planets, just as they still continue to bear the seal of seven.\(^{165}\)

The power of the demons is broken, dispelled by the light of the angelic spheres that enlightens the initiate. The layers of bondage become instead a ladder of ascent. The archons of the seven planetary spheres are replaced, so to speak, by the seven archangels.\(^{166}\) Instead of ‘spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (*ἐπουρανίοι*)’, God ‘hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places (*ἐπουρανίοι*) in Christ Jesus’.\(^{167}\) The cosmic (and psychic) powers that obscured the Absolute (claiming ‘I am god and no other exists except me’) now declare to the one who seeks God ‘I am not He, but He made me’ and ‘We are not thy God, seek higher than we.’\(^{168}\) The *kosmos* becomes translucent and, by the heavenly light that shines through, the initiate passes from knowledge to knowledge in his gnostic ascent to God.\(^{169}\)

Having ascended through the *kosmos*, the initiate has, with the power of the divine name, broken through the malefic aspects of manifestation, the illusion of its absoluteness, and has reintegrated it into the pattern of the truly Absolute. This reintegration, born of the

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\(^{165}\) Lings, ‘The Seven Deadly Sins,’ p.220. St. Augustine describes this same relationship between sin and virtue—the former as perversions of the latter—and the reversion to the proper state wrought through Christ: Seeing, then, that man fell through pride, He restored him through humility. We were ensnared by the wisdom of the serpent: we are set free by the foolishness of God. ... We used our immortality so badly as to incur the penalty of death: Christ used His mortality so well as to restore us to life. ... To the same class of opposite remedies it belongs, that our vices are cured by the example of His virtues’ (St. Augustine, *doctr. chr.* 1.14 [13]).

\(^{166}\) Note however, the Areopagite describes not seven archangels but seven (of the nine) orders of the “celestial hierarchy” as ruling over the planets. The details differ but the underlying intent of the symbolism remains the same.

\(^{167}\) Eph.2:6.

\(^{168}\) St. Augustine, *Confessiones* 10.6 (9)

\(^{169}\) As St. Augustine describes: ‘...we [he and his mother, St. Monica], lifting ourselves with a more ardent affection towards “the Selfsame,” did gradually pass through all corporeal things, and even the heaven itself, whence sun, and moon, and stars shine upon the earth; yea, we soared higher yet by inward musing, and discoursing, and admiring Thy works; and we came to our own minds, and went beyond them, that we might advance as high as that region of unfailing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth’ (St. Augustine, *conf.* 9.10 (54)).
struggle with the infernal powers either subterranean or “airy spirits” takes place within the soul and in the *kosmos* and results in both the rebirth of the *kosmos* and the rebirth of the soul that is wrought in the initiate who emerges from baptism. The symbolism of the astral journey emphasizes the ascendant nature of the redeemed soul, which is “lifted up” to higher states of existence as well as the macrocosmic aspect of this transfiguration.

The font is symbolically identified as the still centre of the *kosmos*, the *omphalos* from whence the *axis mundi*—the Cross—ascends into Heaven and from which the initiate makes his cosmic ascent. A medieval layer of symbolism incorporating the symbols of the evangelists into the ornamentation of baptismal fonts revivifies and strengthens the ancient Judeo-Christian chariot symbolism discussed above, drawing upon the cosmological lore passing into Europe through Muslim Spain.

The four “living creatures” of Ezekiel’s vision,\(^{170}\) which also appear in the Book of Revelations,\(^ {171}\) are interpreted to represent the entirety of the created order. As Charbonneau-Lassay remarks, “these four animals, or rather these four “living creatures” are the epitome of the creation, because of all living creatures they are the noblest.”\(^ {172}\) They are all of creation “recapitulated in Christ,”\(^ {173}\) which is to say, in the light of its true nature, which is rescued, revealed and sealed in Christ. The four living creatures are quickly assimilated to the four evangelists (and their Gospels): man (St. Matthew), lion (St. Mark), ox (St. Luke), and eagle (St. John)\(^ {174}\) such that Irenaeus can justify the restriction of the canonical Gospels to four on the basis of this symbolic correspondence: ‘For the living creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel is quadriform,  

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\(^{170}\) Ez.1.  
\(^{171}\) Rev.4:6-7.  
\(^{173}\) *Catechism* §1138, p.295.  
\(^{174}\) This is the traditional order, as ascribed in St. Jerome while Irenaeus (3.11.8) swaps the lion and the eagle (St. John and St. Mark) and Augustine and Bede swap the lion and the man (St. Matthew and St. Mark).
Symbols of the four evangelists, in a cruciform arrangement, upholding the baptismal font of Stephanuskirche, Krummhörn-Pilsum, Ostfriesland (Hinrik Klinghe, bronze, 1469).
as is also the course followed by the Lord.’  Thus it ‘is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are...’.  The four beasts represent the structures of the whole of the created order, the summation of the creatures which dwell within it and the salvific activity of the Christ. Zodiacally, they correspond to the signs Aquarius, Leo, Taurus and Scorpio.  In medieval and later traditions the corners of the font bear the symbols of the four evangelists. The four zodiacal signs to which they correspond are the fixed or kerubic signs and together form the fixed cross. The kerubic signs preside over the stable points of the year, when there is the least change—the greatest equilibrium—in the velocity of the sun from one day to the next.  The fixed cross describes points of maximum stability within the annual solar cycle of the kosmos. The four signs of the fixed cross are four “still points” and in their cruciform arrangement their intersection is a centre of stillness and, comparatively, a fixed point in space and time, through which passes the immutable axis that binds all of transient reality together.  The qualities of the kerubic signs themselves emphasise this for the fixed cross is a symbol of everlastingness. The medieval astrologer Michael Scot advises that for a

175 Irenaeus, haer. 3.11.8.
176 Irenaeus, haer. 3.11.8  The tetramorph is also a summation of the Person of Christ, representing a fourfold manifestation in his incarnate and salvific economy. Irenaeus: ‘For, [as the Scripture] says, “The first living creature was like a lion,” symbolising His effectual working, His leadership, and royal power; “the second [living creature] was like a calf,” signifying [His] sacrificial and sacerdotal order; but “the third had, as it were, the face as of a man,”—an evident description of His advent as a human being; “the fourth was like a flying eagle,” pointing out the gift of the Spirit hovering with His wings over the Church’ (Irenaeus, haer. 3.11.8).
177 ‘The eagle of St. John is the eagle of Scorpio, which sign (alone of the twelve) has two images, the eagle the symbol of the redeemed and spiritualised Scorpionic nature, the scorpion its fallen, unredeemed and earth-bound nature’ (F. Gettings, The Secret Zodiac, London: Routledge & Kegan, 1987, p.43).
178 It is worth noting that this is not a measure of the length of day and night, the equilibrium of which is marked by the equinoxes and the maximum disequilibrium by the solstices. From that perspective, the cardinal cross holds both in its unity.
179 It may be remarked that this attribution is somewhat arbitrary. From the geocentric perspective (which is alone under consideration here), the zodiacal band forms a circle around the earth and any cross formed from any four equidistant signs within that band share the same centre as the two other possible zodiacal crosses. This is not to be denied but it is the particular significance of this particular cross that concerns us here.
building to endure the ravages of time it should be erected ‘when there is an emphasis in the fixed signs of the zodiac.’

By incorporating the evangelical beasts into the symbolism of the font, the font is recognised as the material aspect of baptism as the vehicle of cosmic ascent. The four evangelical beasts corresponding to the signs of the fixed cross emphasize the enduring nature of the baptismal grace—‘We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’—and the imperishable spiritual character it imparts to the soul. Entering this fixed centre in space (the font) and in the soul the initiate enters the “chariot to Heaven” and undertakes an ascent to the summit of the kosmos, passing through and integrating in his own hypostasis ‘all the powers under heaven.’

Here the symbolism of the return to the centre—to Eden—is replaced by a symbolism of ascent to the summit. The first is a symbol of horizontal integration and the second vertical. They can be viewed as two stages of the same journey or as two interchangeable sets of symbols. This interchangeability becomes clear when one considers “Adamic” to refer not only to the earthly if Edenic creature but to what Jewish mysticism calls Adam Kadmon. It is also present in Dante’s Divine Comedy: the Terrestrial Paradise (Eden) lies at the summit of the mount of Purgatory. Further, the seven planetary spheres may be symbolically equated to the seven days of creation. Thus the centre and the summit both symbolise Eden as well as the first stage of creation.

Baptismal Oil: Essence of the Tree of Life

The symbolism of the baptismal oil brings together the symbolic currents we have so far considered: the battle with infernal powers and the regeneration or reintegration of the human person that is both re-creation and return to Eden. The Areopagite considers the pre-baptismal anointing with which he was familiar as a preparation for the battle with infernal powers, which he describes in the language of the athletic contest. It is, he explains, by ‘the sacred act of the unction’ that the neophyte is:

\[\text{180} \text{ Gettings, } \text{The Secret Zodiac, p.50.}\]
\[\text{181} \text{ Following the metaphor of St. Paul: ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing’ (2Tim.4:7-8).}\]
summoned... to the sacred contests which, with Christ as his trainer, he must undertake. For it is Christ who, as God, arranges the match... defending their freedom and guaranteeing their victory over the forces of death and destruction. ... He [the initiate] will follow the divine tracks established by the goodness of the first of athletes. In trials that imitate the divine he will do battle with every activity and with every being which stand in the way of his divinization. By dying to sin in baptism one could say mystically that he shares in the death of Christ himself.182

The grace of the Holy Spirit, which enters into the neophyte,183 enables him to traverse the passage made by Christ as the “pioneer” of salvation and to share in His conquest over the infernal powers, before which “natural man” is impotent. Cyril:

Thou art coming to a great trial, to a great muster... thy soul will be enlightened, thou wilt receive a power which thou hadst not, thou wilt receive weapons terrible to the evil spirits; and if thou cast not away thine arms, but keep the Seal upon thy soul, no evil spirit will approach thee; for he will be cowed; for verily by the Spirit of God are the evil spirits cast out.184

This seal is the sign of the Cross, which is:

...the Sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils: for He “triumphed over them in it, having made a shew of them openly” [Col.2.15]; for when they see the Cross they are reminded of the Crucified; they are afraid of Him, who “bruised the heads of the dragon”[Ps.74.13].185

The sphragis, the sealing (with oil) of the sign of the cross, is a mark of ownership, a brand such as the Roman soldier or livestock receives. This last may seem demeaning but it is, as Gregory Nazianzen makes clear, a

182 EH 2.6. 401C-404A.
183 Cf. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 17.35: ‘...approach the Minister of Baptism, but approaching, think not of the face of him thou seest, but remember this Holy Ghost of whom we are now speaking. For He is present in readiness to seal thy soul, and He shall give thee that Seal at which evil spirits tremble’.
184 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 17.36.
185 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 13.36.
mark of safety: ‘for a sheep that is sealed is not easily snared, but that which is unmarked is an easy prey to thieves’.\textsuperscript{186} It is equivalent to the brand received by the initiate into the Mithraic mysteries, the fire being replaced here by its symbolic equivalent, oil. It marks the Christian as Christ’s own. The one baptised is, then, free because he has returned to the state prior to bondage and to his rightful owner: ‘We have rightly reverted to our Lord to whom we belonged before the wickedness of Satan, and we are, as we were in the beginning, in the image of God.’\textsuperscript{187}

It is not, however, merely the sign of the Cross which is relevant here, but also the oil with which it is made. The Logos is Christ because: ‘Him first God anointed with oil’ and his followers are Christians because ‘He Himself also, according to the appointment of His Father, anoints with similar oil every one of the pious when they come to His kingdom...’. The efficacy of this oil lies not only in its use by the Father in anointing the Son, but also because it ‘was taken from the wood of the tree of life’\textsuperscript{188} and is, as it were, the very essence of that tree.

The anointing imparts the ‘priestly and royal’\textsuperscript{189} gift that Adam was denied because of his disobedience. Knowing Good and Evil, man was removed from Eden and knew death: he was removed from the presence of the Tree of Life. This death, “the wages of sin,” is overcome by the Christ and the initiate following in his wake, both infused by the oil—the essence—of the Tree of Life. In the pre-baptismal anointing, man is prepared for the battle through death and, emerging from those waters, he is signed with the \textit{sphragis}, anointed with the sign of the Cross. Henceforth, man is protected for the rest of his life by ‘not a perishable but a spiritual shield,’\textsuperscript{190} which ‘preserves us, and is moreover the indication of Dominion.’\textsuperscript{191} Gregory Nazianzen assures us of the protective value of baptism, which equips the Christian with what he needs to overcome Satan throughout the rest of his life.

\textsuperscript{186} St. Gregory Nazianzen, \textit{or.} 40.15.
\textsuperscript{188} Clem. recogn. 1.45.
\textsuperscript{189} St. Gregory Nazianzen, \textit{or.} 40.4.
\textsuperscript{190} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{cat.} 1.4. Compare \textit{cat.} 17.37: ‘All thy life long will thy guardian the Comforter abide with thee; He will care for thee, as for his own soldier, for thy goings out, and thy comings in, and thy plotting foes.’
\textsuperscript{191} St. Gregory Nazianzen, \textit{or.} 40.4.
If after baptism the persecutor and tempter of the light assail you ... you have the means to conquer him. Fear not the conflict; defend yourself with the Water; defend yourself with the Spirit, by Which all the fiery darts of the wicked shall be quenched. ... Say to him relying on the Seal, ‘I am myself the Image of God; I have not yet been cast down from the heavenly Glory, as thou wast through thy pride; I have put on Christ; I have been transformed into Christ by Baptism; worship thou me.’ Well do I know that he will depart, defeated and put to shame by this; as he did from Christ the first Light, so he will from those who are illumined by Christ.\textsuperscript{192}

The neophyte undergoes the baptismal death and rebirth and the struggle with infernal powers that takes place between the two and is victorious because of the power conferred upon him by Christ in the Holy Spirit and the protection afforded by the ‘breastplate of righteousness’ and ‘the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.’\textsuperscript{193} He has returned to the state prior to the Fall, and hence the Devil has no dominion over him. The baptismal oil plays a double role: it both perpetually seals the gift of baptism upon the neophyte, and is thus conferred after the immersion in the waters and is also, in the ancient practice, conferred upon the neophyte prior to the triple immersion in the waters so that he might be strengthened so as to emerge victorious from the battle which takes place “under” the waters and within the infernal realms between death and rebirth. In this he is sacramentally restored to the “image and likeness” of God in which Adam was made but which was marred by the primordial sin.

Anointed with the oil of the Cross, which is the Tree of Life, the Christian is returned to the image and likeness of God and to the presence of that primordial, Edenic Tree. It is to this aspect of baptismal symbolism that we will now turn.

\textsuperscript{192} St. Gregory Nazianzen, \textit{Or}. 40.10.

\textsuperscript{193} Eph.6:14, 16.
The Return to Eden and Autochthony

In Paradise was the Fall, and in a Garden was our Salvation. From the Tree came sin, and until the Tree [i.e. the Cross] sin lasted. ‘In the evening, when the Lord walked in the Garden, they hid themselves’; and in the evening the robber is brought by the Lord into Paradise.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetal Lectures* 13.19)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings … that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD…

(Isaiah 61:1, 3)

Natural man, as St. Augustine asserts, is born into the disequilibrium of original sin which affects not only the external conditions of the *kosmos* in which he finds himself but also his psychic, interior disposition. This disequilibrium predisposes him to compound and confirm the primordial sin. Baptism “unmakes” the Adamic decision to sin and returns the initiate to the Edenic state which Theophilus of Antioch describes as a state of potentiality:

Was man made by nature mortal? Certainly not. Was he, then, immortal? Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, Was he, then, nothing? Not even this hits the mark. He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal. For if He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both.

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194 Compare Theodore of Mospuestia, *Liber ad Baptizandos pt. 2*, Ch.2, p.21: As a result of Adam’s disobedience ‘death entered, and this death weakened (human) nature and generated in it a great inclination towards sin.’

195 Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* (To Autolycus) 2.27. This theologically important passage continues: ‘so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God; but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free, and with power over himself. That, then, which man brought upon himself through carelessness and disobedience, this God now vouchsafes to him as a gift.
The choice of sin and separation determines the conditions of human existence such as they are, bound to mortality and death. The one baptised returns to the state of Adamic potentiality and is no longer bound by the consequences of the primordial choice; the gates of Eden are once more opened and man may again enter in, as Cyril of Jerusalem remarks: ‘A fiery sword barred of old the gates of Paradise; a fiery tongue which brought salvation restored the gift.’ Jensen notes the prevalence of garden motifs in the symbolic ornamentation of fonts; trees (‘palms, fig, and apples, and olives’), flowers, birds as well as a number of fontal pavements showing ‘harts drinking from streams of living water’. The one who enters into the font enters into the Garden of Eden and the Presence of the Tree of Life.

St. Ambrose describes a baptism ritual in which foot-washing—a ritual participation in Christ’s actions on Holy Thursday—plays a part. For Ambrose, the baptismal immersion remits personal sin but does not remove the stain of original sin. That, he says, is the role of the pedilavium.

Peter was clean, but he must wash his feet, for he had sin by succession from the first man, when the serpent overthrew him and

through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death upon himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. For God has given us a law and holy commandments; and every one who keeps these can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption.’

196 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 17.15.
197 Jensen, ‘Womb, Tomb, and Garden’ Pt I. Sec. D.
198 Jn.13. On the place of this text and its meaning in the Johannine community, including a survey of scholarship on this subject, and the role of Jewish practise and symbolic interpretation, see H. Weiss, ‘Foot Washing in the Johannine Community,’ Novum Testamentum 21. 4, 1979. Weiss notes that the identification of this passage as the baptism of the Apostles by Christ is quite early but is unconvinced that it had such a sacramental signification for the Johannine community (pp.317, 323). Weiss sees the ritual as a preparation for martyrdom—drawing on parallels between the Johannine corpus and the use of its symbolism by Ignatius of Antioch as he prepared for his own martyrdom but notes that the significance of the foot washing outside this community developed along different lines (pp.323-25). It certainly carries a sacramental import for St. Ambrose beyond addressing the question of whether Christ himself ever baptised, the polemical purpose to which Weiss attributes its sacramental interpretation (p.317).
persuaded him to sin. His feet were therefore washed, that hereditary sins might be done away... 199

Idiosyncratic it may be 200 but the symbolism underlying it is significant as it points once more to the restoration of Edenic purity. Amongst the curses that accompany the expulsion from Eden and which constitute the nature of the fallen state is the following addressed to the serpent: ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.’ 201 It is precisely original sin symbolised as a wound to the foot that is removed, according to St. Ambrose, by the pedilavium. Again, what is indicated here is the undoing of the lapsarian determinations and the return to Edenic purity.

The immersion in the waters is the dissolution of the form (as we have already considered in relation to the cosmogonic waters, the waters of the Deluge and those of the Red Sea and the desert of the Exodus mythos) determined by the Fall. It is the return to the state of pure potentiality. With this dissolution of form comes the dissolution of the bonds of death and separation by which this form is held. The Areopagite writes: ‘...it is quite appropriate to hide the initiate completely in the water as an image of this death and this burial where form is dissolved.’ 202 It is the “death and dissolution” of what is opposed to God. 203 The initiate is stripped of the ‘rough garment of... [his] offences’, 204 the “coats of skins” of Genesis 3:21—the manifestation of his determination to sin—and returned to the state symbolised by unabashed Edenic nudity, which is his primordial integrity: ‘O wondrous thing! [in baptism] ye were naked in the sight of all, and were not ashamed; for truly ye bore the likeness of the first-formed Adam,

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199 St. Ambrose, de mys. 7 (31-32).
200 In de sacramentiis 3.1.4 Ambrose acknowledges and defends this idiosyncrasy of the Milanese Church against its critics.
201 Gen.3:15. This is one aspect of the changed relationship between man and the kosmos he inhabits (one might also say the kosmos he is). The curses upon Adam and upon Eve reveal other aspects of this changed relationship.
202 EH 2.7 404B p.208.
203 EH 2.5 401B p.206.
204 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 1.1.
who was naked in the garden, and was not ashamed.’205 St. Gregory of Nyssa:

No longer shall Adam be confounded when called by Thee, nor hide himself, convicted by his conscience, cowering in the thicket of Paradise. Nor shall the flaming sword encircle Paradise around, and make the entrance inaccessible to those that draw near, but all is turned to joy for us that were the heirs of sin...206

The return to Eden and the return to the cosmogonic waters both symbolically indicate a return to the primordial state of potentiality. Narratively of a different order, the Edenic mythos anagogically plays out the same cosmogonic movement from potentiality or formlessness to actuality or formality and this anagogic relationship is signalled by Genesis 2.6, 10: ‘...there rose a fountain (πηγή) out of the earth, and watered the whole face of the earth. ... And a river proceeds out of Eden to water the garden.’207

The baptismal oil is, according to the Clementine Recognitions, the essence of the Tree of Life. Man was removed from the presence of the Tree by his expulsion from Eden. Baptism returns man to his former proximity to the Tree, which is also the Cross of Christ: ‘Adam by the Tree [of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] fell away; thou by the Tree [of Life] art brought into Paradise.’208 In a sense the initiate becomes the Tree of Life and is ‘planted in the invisible Paradise.’209 Here the Edenic symbolism is autochthonous. Gregory Nazianzen, urges those postponing baptism to receive the sacrament, promising that he ‘will

205 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 20.2.
206 St. Gregory of Nyssa, bapt. Chr.
207 LXX. The Vulgate gives “fons,” which the Douay version rightly translates as “spring” while the AV gives “mist” for the Hebrew ’ed. While both are references to water (and we have already considered the use Tertullian makes of this and its connection to the cosmogonic waters), the LXX and Vulgate are to be preferred here as the stronger indicators of this symbolic relationship: synonyms, they both emphasis the function as archē, source, or principle and furthermore indicates the perpetual presence of the principle in its manifestation.
208 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 13.31. See also St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 13.2: ‘And if because of the tree of food they were then cast out of paradise, shall not believers now more easily enter into paradise because of the Tree of Jesus?’
209 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 1.4.
baptize you and make you grow.’ St. Gregory Nazianzen, or. 40.41 (Oration on Holy Baptism)

210 St. Gregory Nazianzen, or. 40.41 (Oration on Holy Baptism)

Blessed is he that soweth beside all waters, and upon every soul, tomorrow to be ploughed and watered, … And blessed is he who … is watered out of the House of the Lord; for he is made fruitbearing … and produces that which is for the food of man… 211 St. Gregory Nazianzen, or. 40.27.

This is the symbolism of the seed that is buried in the earth, seeming dead, and which—having laid dormant for a time—bursts forth in new life. 212 Cf. Jn.12:24: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.’

Irenaeus, haer. 3.21.10. To recapitulate and redeem the lost one, the saviour must also participate in the nature of the lost: He must be qualitatively one with the divine and also with the human. Christ came not to save one man, or even a select group of men, but all men: Man as such. And so He recapitulates the archetypal man, who was born without human father and outside the bounds of natural generation; his miraculous birth “preserving the analogy.” The point made here is strictly Pauline; see Rom.5:12-19 and Heb.4:15-17. It is a point also made by Theodore of Mopsuestia, who declares that ‘by His union with our nature He became to us an earnest of our own participation in the event [of his life, death, resurrection and ascension]’ (Liber ad Baptizandos pt. 2, Ch.2, p.20).
wholly earthy.\textsuperscript{214} Symbolically, this indicates that the regeneration of baptism is not only the return to the Edenic potential but also the \textit{remaking} of the primordial decision.

Baptism is not merely a rite of dissolution and return to principle. Its pattern is, rather, that of the alchemical \textit{solve et coagula}. The dissolution and return to principle—the death of the old manifestation—is followed by a reformation or re-manifestation—the regeneration of baptism—in a higher state: manifestation perfected.\textsuperscript{215} The neophyte, having returned to the state of the cosmogonic waters—or of Eden—once more takes form. Having shed the “garments of sin” and returned to Adamic nudity, the initiate is dressed in white robes

\textquote{...as a sign that you were putting off the covering of sins, and putting on the chaste veil of innocence, of which the prophet said: “Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed, Thou shalt wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow.”\textsuperscript{216}}

This redetermination does not, as it did for Adam, involve leaving Eden. The Christian initiate is, rather, confirmed in Eden. The Christian life into which one is baptized is life “as it was in the beginning” and the

\textsuperscript{214} Here we are dealing with a different order of symbolism, to a different purpose, than that of Tertullian who insists on the role of the waters in the creation of Adam.

\textsuperscript{215} Discussion of alchemical association with baptism would take us too far beyond our scope, which is large enough already. We must, therefore, be satisfied with a few indications for the interested reader. St. Cyril of Jerusalem provides an association between baptism and the refining of gold which would later inform alchemical meditations on the subject: ‘Suppose thou hast gold unwrought and alloyed, mixed with various substances, copper, and tin, and iron, and lead: we seek to have the gold alone; can gold be purified from the foreign substances without fire? Even so without exorcisms the soul cannot be purified’ (\textit{Procatechesis} 7); ‘For in like manner as those who are skilled in the goldsmith’s craft throw in their breath upon the fire through certain delicate instruments, and blowing up the gold which is hidden in the crucible stir the flame which surrounds it, and so find what they are seeking; even so when the exorcists inspire terror by the Spirit of God, and set the soul, as it were, on fire in the crucible of the body, the hostile demon flees away, and there abide salvation and the hope of eternal life, and the soul henceforth is cleansed from its sins and hath salvation.’ (\textit{Procatechesis} 9). The spiritual aspect of the alchemical arts is explored in detail and with insight in T. Burckhardt, \textit{Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul}, tr. W. Stoddart, Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1997.

\textsuperscript{216} St. Ambrose, \textit{de mys.} 7 (34).
initiate is called to live perpetually in this primordial state. This primordial state is both the beginning and the telos (end and perfection) of the created order.

Confirmed in Eden: Gnosis and the Catechumenate

Adam “begins” in the state as one who does not know evil or death. As Staniloae remarks, his ‘innocence was that of one who had not tasted sin; it was not the innocence acquired by one who has repelled temptations.’ Choosing to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he chose to know what he previously knew not and by this act of will the potential of separativeness and death is made actual. Knowing Good and Evil, the post-lapsarian man is required to choose between them, and the Christian initiate chooses Good, in doing so re-enters Eden and gains the gifts of the Tree of Life, being, unlike Adam, ‘confirmed in this purity and in this good.’ The “Teaching of the Two Ways” (such as we find in the Didache, Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas (amongst others) and hinted at in Justin Martyr as part of the preparation for baptism) presents man once more with the Adamic choice but whereas Adam chose in ignorance, the new man chooses from experience and knowledge of Good and Evil, a knowledge

217 Christ’s determinations on the indissolubility of the marriage covenant carry the same force of a return to the primordial state, hence Matthew’s Gospel: ‘Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so’ (Mt.19:4-8).


221 On the history and influence of the teaching of the Two Ways, see R. E. Aldridge, ‘Peter and the “Two Ways”,’ Vigilae Christianae 53.3, 1999.

222 Justin Martyr, 1 apologia (1 Apology) 61.
imparted in the catechetical instruction of the Teaching of the Two Ways. In choosing baptism, he chooses Good.\footnote{In this sense, two things make salvation possible: divine mercy and Adamic ignorance. While he sinned he did not know the sin itself. The fallen angels, on the other hand, are perpetually damned. As Aquinas notes, they chose evil in full knowledge of good and evil and thus their choice is immutable (St. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{summa theologica} 1.64.2). To which we might add that, according to St. Augustine, the angels are created but eternal. Thus, their choice to abide by God or to separate themselves from Him is likewise eternal. In this sense, the mutability/temporality of man is a blessing that makes salvation possible.}

Man is therefore, not only able but required to make again that choice between mortality and immortality.\footnote{‘Therefore do not refuse, when invited, to return to your first nobility; for it is possible, if ye be conformed to God by good works. And being accounted to be sons by reason of your likeness to Him, you shall be reinstated as lords of all’ hom. Clem. 10.5.} Confronted with that primordial choice, the Christian initiate is he who chooses immortality, hence choosing and actualising the perfection which remained unactualised in Adam. It is in this context that we are to understand the interrogatives of the baptismal rites. Returned to a pre-formal state in the waters of baptism, man must again proceed from potential to actual, having shed the garments of sin—that first Adamic determination—and returned to Edenic nudity, he takes a new garment. As the Areopagite explains, ‘order descends upon disorder within him. Form takes over from formlessness. Light shines through all his life.’\footnote{EH 2.8. 404B, p.208.}

This decision made by the neophyte is grounded in the knowledge of Good and Evil that Adam took upon himself and which knowledge cannot be undone. It is symbolised, according to Theodore of Mopsuestia, by the preparations for baptism in which the neophyte stands barefoot and stripped of his outer garments in a posture of supplication—‘in order to show in... [himself] the state of the cruel servitude in which [he] served the Devil... according to the rules of captivity’\footnote{Theodore of Mospuestia, \textit{Liber ad Baptizandos pt.2}, Ch.2, pp.31-32.}—and repentance, standing ‘also on garments of sackcloth so that... you may remember your old sins and show repentance...’.\footnote{Theodore of Mospuestia, \textit{Liber ad Baptizandos pt.2}, Ch.2, p.32.} These ceremonial aspects were, in Theodore’s experience, repeated at the beginning of the baptismal rite proper ‘in order that you may all the better know the nature of the things which you cast away and that of
the things to which you will be transferred.’ This indicates the importance of *gnosis* in the sacrament of baptism; by the teaching of the Two Ways and by their ritual enactment is indicated the role that proper discernment must play: ‘let us’ urges Gregory Nazianzen in his oration on baptism, ‘kindle for ourselves the light of knowledge’.

The rites of baptism both presuppose this knowledge—in the catechesis by which the neophyte is instructed in the distinction between Good and Evil, the way of life and the way of death—and provide it in the symbolic content of the rite itself. Hence baptism is also called Enlightenment:

> It will be worth your while to apply your minds to what we say, and to receive our discourse on so important a subject … [as Baptism] with ready mind, since to know the power of this Sacrament is itself Enlightenment (φωτισμός).

The baptismal response to the discernment of good and evil by the neophyte takes a solar symbolism related to the traditional orientation of church buildings and the symbolism of *Sol Invictus* assimilated to Christ. The neophyte faces to the west and renounces Satan, and then turns to the east and accepts Christ. The symbolism at work here is grounded in the common human experience of the daily cycle of the sun: it is a turning from darkness into light. The neophyte turns away...

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228 Theodore of Mospuestia, *Liber ad Baptizandos pt.2*, Ch.3, p.36.
231 Patristic sources for this practise are commonplace. Typical of these is St. Cyril of Jerusalem: ‘First ye entered into the vestibule of the Baptistery, and there facing towards the West ye listened to the command to stretch forth your hand, and as in the presence of Satan ye renounced him’ (*cat.* 19.2) This turning from west to east—symbolising the renunciation of Satan and acceptance of Christ—is still practiced in the Orthodox Church.
232 Lactantius explains that God, in creating the world, established this symbolic duality: ‘…the east is assigned to God, because He Himself is the fountain of light, and the enlightener of all things, and because He makes us rise to eternal life. But the west is ascribed to that disturbed and depraved mind, because it conceals the light, because it always brings on darkness, and because it makes men die and perish in their sins’ (*Divine Institutes* 2.10). This is confirmed by Cyril: ‘Since the West is the region of sensible darkness, and he being darkness has his dominion also in darkness, therefore, looking with a symbolical meaning towards the West, ye renounce that dark and gloomy potentate. What then did each of you stand up and say? ‘I renounce thee,
from the darkness of sin, death, and ignorance, and turns to the ‘light which enlightens every man’. This summarises the entire dramatic movement of baptism. The neophyte begins in darkness, outside the Church proper (where a separate baptistery is present) or at the westernmost parts of the church. After the ministration of baptism he is brought ‘into the light’; processed eastwards down the nave and to the altar: the fullness of the divine light.\(^{233}\) This symbolism is enforced by the ancient practise of baptism at Easter. Citing Peterson,\(^{234}\) Scroggs and Groff note that the baptismal rite took place in the context of the Paschal vigil, with the baptism itself enacted at (or prior to) the dawn of Easter day.\(^{235}\) This dawn not only coincides with the dawn Resurrection of Christ—and its attendant solar symbolism—but also emphasises the darkness that the neophyte is leaving behind and the new day of the new life. Turning to the east, the neophyte faces the solar aspect of Christ as it rises on Easter day.

This turning from west to east is also a turning towards Eden, which is “eastward” because it dwells in the light and “at the beginning.” Cyril:

> When therefore thou renouncest Satan, utterly breaking all thy covenant with him, that ancient league with hell, there is opened to thee the paradise of God, which He planted towards the East, whence for his transgression our first father was banished; and a symbol of this was thy turning from West to East, the place of lights...\(^{236}\)

The initiate is reborn at the birth of the day (or in expectation of it), the moment of Christ’s Resurrection. He has returned “to the beginning.”

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\(^{233}\) Compare St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat. 19.11:* ‘And these things were done in the outer chamber. ... in the succeeding lectures on the Mysteries we have entered into the Holy of Holies...’


\(^{236}\) St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat. 19.9.*
Victorinus provides a set of cosmogonic, Edenic and Christic correspondences to the weekly cycle:

...on the same day on which the dragon seduced Eve, the angel Gabriel brought the glad tidings to the Virgin Mary; that on the same day the Holy Spirit overflowed the Virgin Mary, on which He made light; that on that day He was incarnate in flesh, in which He made the land and water; that on the same day He was put to the breast, on which He made the stars; that on the same day He was circumcised, on which the land and water brought forth their offspring; that on the same day He was incarnated, on which He formed man out of the ground; that on the same day Christ was born, on which He formed man; that on that day He suffered, on which Adam fell; that on the same day He rose again from the dead, on which He created light...237

These correspondences establish the recapitulation of the primordial—cosmogonic and Edenic—that Christ “lives out” and makes available to the Christian initiate, a return that is sacramentally achieved through baptism.

The man born of baptism is not Adam, he is greater than Adam because he has achieved what Adam did not. He has achieved the return to the first created principle and the re-emergence of its manifestation, not as the dualism of “original sin” which is the governing principle of the conditions of human existence and which reduces man to an isolated monad,238 but as a dyadic unity that transcends both its terms, terrestrial and celestial. This transcendence of

237 Victorinus, ‘On the Creation of the World.’ Compare St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 14.10: ‘And this is the season, the first month with the Hebrews, in which occurs the festival of the Passover, ... This is the season of the creation of the world: for then God said, Let the earth bring forth herbage of grass, yielding seed after his kind and after his likeness. And now, as thou seest, already every herb is yielding seed. And as at that time God made the sun and moon and gave them courses of equal day (and night), so also a few days since was the season of the equinox. At that time God said, let us make man after our image and after our likeness. And the image he received, but the likeness through his disobedience he obscured. At the same season then in which he lost this the restoration also took place. At the same season as the created man through disobedience was cast out of Paradise, he who believed was through obedience brought in. Our Salvation then took place at the same season as the Fall...’.
238 An existential condition so forcefully played out under the auspices of modernity.
dualism is what Moses and the Hebrews accomplish in the crossing of the Red Sea; as Fohr notes, the walls of water through which they pass ‘symbolise the dualistic view of reality. ... The Egyptians, who can be said to represent a person tied to the lower tendencies and hence immersed in dualism, do not make it through.’ This dualistic state is also that through which the ark brings its inhabitants safely to the primordial unity.

Not only are the “garments of sin” taken off and Edenic nudity restored but the new garments of heavenly radiance are donned. Manifestation is no longer seen through the illusory, separative mode (The knowledge of Good and Evil) but rather its unitive mode (The Tree of Life). Indeed, the seeming polarity between these two “trees” or poles of manifestation evaporates; “either-or” paradigms become meaningless. Adam chooses the Tree of Good and Evil and thus imposes upon himself the separative either-or conditions whereby he is deprived of the Tree of Life; the Christian initiate participates in the “both-and” paradigm of Christ’s Incarnate Person and knows both Good and Evil and also Life. By his autochthonous rebirth from the united upper and lower waters of the cosmogony he is, so to speak, amphibian: earthly and heavenly, transcending the boundaries between the two just as Christ in His Incarnate Person united these two natures and ‘in His burial... made peace between heaven and earth, bringing sinners unto God’. Christian baptism, therefore, is two-fold: baptism in water and the Spirit: answering to both these aspects.

For since man is of twofold nature. soul and body, the purification also is twofold, the one incorporeal for the incorporeal part, and the other bodily for the body: the water cleanses the body, and the Spirit seals the soul; that we may draw near unto God.

These two—water and Spirit, earth and heaven—interpenetrate in what the Latin theologians would call the communicatio idiomatum and the

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239 Fohr, Adam & Eve, p.170.
240 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 14.3.
241 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 3.4.
Greeks *perichoresis.* Thus ‘...the spirit is corporeally washed in the waters, and the flesh is in the same spiritually cleansed.’

Here the Edenic and the cosmogonic symbolisms converge as two faces of the same symbolism. The Edenic symbolism describes a process of horizontal reintegration (a return to the manifested centre) and the cosmogonic symbolism describes vertical reintegration that links together and reconfigures the hierarchy of the created order, the “seen and unseen.” By linking these two orders of symbolism together, the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm is established and the two are synthesized in the unified *hypostasis* of the initiate. In baptism, therefore, man returns to the created first principle—the waters called “abyss” in the Septuagint—of which the heavens and the earth are formed. The waters of the womb/font and those of the cosmogony are one. From thence the initiate is remade and in himself remakes the *kosmos.* The microcosm and the macrocosm are linked together; what is true of one is true of the other, as Guénon observes: ‘...the being reintegrated into the centre of the human state is by this very fact ready to rise to the superior states and already dominates the conditions of existence in this world of which it has become master’. Fohr notes in relation to the Hebrews having passed out of Egypt through the waters and passed beyond dualism, ‘they symbolise a person who has reached the Terrestrial Paradise’, the perfection and end (*telos*) of the created order. “Eden,” the original “place” from which Adam was removed, has become the Heavenly Jerusalem into which the Christian enters. It is the end of this fallen *kosmos* and the beginning of the new.

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242 *Communicatio idiomatum* is employed primarily to describe the relationship between the two natures of Christ and *perichoresis* the relations between the persons of the Trinity. *Perichoresis* can nevertheless be applied to the two natures of Christ as the ‘both-and’ paradigm of the two natures in the Incarnate Person (Definition of Chalcedon) recapitulates in the one Person the relations of the Three. As the Christian participates in and reflects the Christic nature then the application of these terms to the initiate is not improper, provided one does not lose sight of the qualification that for the human it is “by grace” rather than “by nature.” In his divinization or *theosis,* man is united to God without ceasing to be creature.


The Eighth Day: The Kosmos Perfected and New Beginnings

Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this, ] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens. (Epistle of Barnabas Ch.15)

Archaeological evidence points to a range of different shapes employed in the early church for forms of baptismal fonts and all are symbolic in one sense or another. The fontal symbol which would come to predominate, however, is that of the octagon, a symbol of the cosmic reintegration which is the entry into the Terrestrial Paradise.

The octagon symbolises, in the first instance, the eighth day, the day of Resurrection which is the eighth day of Holy Week. It is a number of regeneration and completion, of new beginnings. Old Testament types include the circumcision on the eighth day and the eight members of Noah’s family who, as the Fathers say, were borne safely by the wood of the Cross upon the waters of the Deluge. This latter is specifically related to baptism in 1 Peter: ‘...the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’ The eighth day is that which lies outside the cycle of time, symbolised by the weekly cycle of seven days. The eighth is not simply the beginning of the next weekly cycle but lies outside of time altogether. It is the eternal day of the Lord upon which the sun never sets. Victorinus explains that the eighth day is the day of ‘future judgment, which will pass beyond the order of the sevenfold arrangement.’ The ‘totality of time,’ explains St. Gregory of Nyssa, is measured ‘through the circle of seven days... [but] once time represented by the number seven comes to a close, the octave succeeds...

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246 This is a common identification, but see, for example, St. Augustine, Ep.55.
247 1Peter 3:20-21.
248 Victorinus, ‘On the Creation of the World.’
It is, says St. Basil: ‘the holy Lord’s day honoured by the Resurrection of our Lord.’ It is, he describes, a day without evening, without succession and without end … it is the day that the Psalmist calls the eighth day, because it is outside this time of weeks. Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea.250

It is the “day” ‘no longer subject to numerical succession.’251 Entry into the eighth day requires the breaking of the sevenfold cycle which Victorinus understands to be symbolised by the Lord’s breaking of the Sabbath252 as well as the holy Sabbath breakers of the Old Testament, such as Joshua and Isaiah. Thus Christians observe as holy not the seventh day, that of the Jewish Sabbath, but the eighth day, ‘as signifying the resurrection’.253 Accordingly the eighth day, which is the first day of the week, represents to us that original life, not taken away, but made eternal.254 The eighth day is the return to the first day of creation and hence symbolises the new creation in Christ, as is also true of the musical octave; the eighth note repeats the first, only at a “higher” level.

The octave or ogdoad is the day of eternity, the new creation: ‘Another sun makes this day, the true sun which enlightens; since this sun enlightens once and for all..., sunset no longer hides it, but it enfolds all things in its own brilliant power.’255 It is the created order reintegrated such that it actualises the Edenic potential previously lost. It is the return to the first day, the primordial day, the Edenic state, ‘not taken away but made eternal.’ This Edenic state ‘not taken away but made eternal’ is the Heavenly Jerusalem of St. John’s apocalyptic vision:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I

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249 St. Gregory of Nyssa, Homilia in Ps.6 (On the Sixth Psalm, Concerning the Octave), tr. R. Mc Cambly, http://www.sage.edu/faculty/salomd/nyssa/octave.html.
250 St. Basil, In Hexaemeron 2.8.
251 St. Gregory of Nyssa, Ps.6.
252 Mt.12:1ff.
253 St. Augustine, Ep.55.13 (23).
254 St. Augustine, Ep.55.9 (17).
255 St. Gregory of Nyssa, Ps.6.
John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 256

The relationship between the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden is signified by the position of the Tree of Life in both:

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, ... Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. 257

The octagon is also linked with the symbolism of cosmic ascent. It is, as Clement of Alexandria understands, the ascent through and reintegration of the seven heavens, or planetary spheres, to rest in the eighth, the sphere of the fixed stars, which is the summit of the created order; 258 ‘...after the wandering orbs the journey leads to heaven, that is, to the eighth motion and day.’ 259 This day is the consummation of history in the apokalypsis—and a number of the Fathers have considered the eighth day in millennial terms 260—and the final repose of the soul, the perfection and integration of the human person. 261

256 Rev.21:1-2. It is tempting here to read the phrase ‘and there was no more sea’ as symbolising the fullness of the actualised state. Potential (the sea) is no more, the kosmos, like God, is pure act: there is nothing unrealized in it (evil being not a thing but a privation). I know, however, of no Patristic source for this reading. The sea is also understood symbolically as the dwelling place of the monster that must be vanquished, the ‘great dragon of the sea,’ and this must also inform the symbolism at work in this phrase.


259 Clement of Alexandria, str. 5.14.

260 Such as Victorinus. For a more detailed examination and a survey of fourth century sources for and against, see Daniélou, The Bible and Liturgy, pp.282-85.

261 ‘These spheres’ of the planets and fixed stars, observes Burckhardt, ‘symbolize the higher states of consciousness and, more exactly, the modalities of the soul which, while still contained within the integral individuality, are more and more irradiated by the Divine Spirit’ (T. Burckhardt, ‘The Cosmological Perspective’ in Mirror of the Intellect: Essay on Traditional Science & Sacred Art, Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987, p.20.) The passage continues: ‘It is the Empyrean, the threshold between time and non-time, that represents the extreme limit of the individual or formal world.’ This last point, which
'who purified us from sin next cleansed the universe and utterly destroyed from creatures everything that is bloody, sordid, and uncircumcised.' And thus the cosmic and psychic worlds interpenetrate. The ogdoad or octave is “on the far side” of the judgement, the *kosmos* is cleansed of its disorder as the soul is cleansed of its impurities, which are its privations. Both have entered into the fullness for which they were created. Thus the octagon symbolises the state of cosmic integration gained through the mystical or gnostic ascent through the spheres of the seven planets to the eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars. This state is one free from bondage, symbolised by the planetary influences, and symbolises the realm of the spiritual or noetic archetypes: the unchanging ideas, which the planetary motions manifest and particularise in the world of flux. As Burckhardt observes (in reference to the symbolism of the western doors of Chartres cathedral) the signs of the zodiac ‘belong to the unchanging heaven of fixed stars and thus represent the kingdom of the Divine Spirit... The seven planets, on the other hand, govern, according to the ancient viewpoint, the world of the soul.’

The eighth, eternal and perfect day is the macrocosmic and eschatological correspondent of the baptised state. It is the synthesis of the terrestrial and celestial and the octagon symbolises this synthesis of heaven and earth. The solidity of the earth is symbolised by the square—being the four elements, the points of the compass (and hence horizontal extension), the four winds and the “four corners” of the globe. The heavens are symbolised by the circle, which describes the movements of the heavenly bodies within the firmament as (to use Plato’s phrase) a “moving image of eternity.” The octagon is the mean between these two extremes, participating in and synthesizing both. This is most obviously seen in the straight sides of the octagon—as sides...
of the square—and in its more circular aspect.\textsuperscript{264} This symbolism is also apparent in the practice of constructing the octagon.\textsuperscript{265} The octagon arises from the intersection of the square and the circle, earth and heaven respectively. It is, therefore, the synthesis and perfection of these two realms. It is the earth remade in the light of heaven and the heavens descended to earth. In the context of baptism, therefore, the octagon symbolises—in the first instance at least—not an intermediary state\textsuperscript{266} but the perfection and synthesis of all manifest states. Eight is, as Guénon remarks, the number ‘of equilibrium’.\textsuperscript{267}

This baptismal perfection can be considered intermediary, however, in relation to the Eucharistic feast, for which it is a preparation. St. Cyril makes the relation between these two sacraments clear: ‘Begin at once to wash your robes in repentance, that when called to the bride-chamber ye may be found clean.’\textsuperscript{268} The garments of rebirth are also wedding garments, following a passage in Isaiah:

\begin{quotation}
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.\textsuperscript{269}
\end{quotation}

This symbolism is that of the soul wedded to God. Baptism is the preparation for the wedding feast of the Eucharist, in which man and

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{264} Compare Guénon: ‘The octagonal form is... really closer to the circle than to the square, for the more sides a regular polygon has, the nearer it comes to the circle. ...the circle can be considered as the limit towards which a regular polygon tends...’ (Guénon, \textit{Fundamental Symbols} §44, p.185)
\textsuperscript{265} Beginning with a square, a compass is placed at each corner and an arc drawn which passes through the centre point of the square (the intersection of diagonals from each corner to its opposite, forming a cross) and through both sides of the square adjacent to the compass point. Repeated from all four corners, the result is eight intersections of the perimeter of the square which, when joined, form an octagon.
\textsuperscript{266} See A. Snodgrass, \textit{The Symbolism of the Stupa}, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1985, p.322 and Guénon, \textit{Fundamental Symbols} §44, pp.184-87. We do not reject the symbolic interpretation of the octagon as intermediary outright but rather consider another aspect of the symbol more pertinent to its employment in Christian usage in the baptismal context.
\textsuperscript{267} Guénon, ‘The Secret Language of Dante—II,’ p.53.
\textsuperscript{268} St. Cyril of Jerusalem, \textit{cat.} 3.2.
\textsuperscript{269} Isa.61.10.
\end{footnotes}
God are united. We cannot, however, say that the baptismal state is transitory. While, in liturgical terms, the initiate surpasses it in the movement to the altar, he does not leave it behind. The state of cosmic perfection is permanent and a precondition for the sacramental theosis of the Eucharist. In the first instance, baptised man is “amphibian” because in his perfected state he reintegrates the created orders of heaven and earth. In the second instance, Eucharistic man, is also amphibian, in that he integrates in himself the created heavens and earth, unified in his hypostasis through baptism, with the uncreated life of the Divine Trinity.

The octagon of baptismal fonts marks the initiates’ participation in the eighth day of Holy Week, the day of Resurrection. It also symbolises the climax of his passage through the celestial spheres to the summit of the created order, the eighth sphere, where he is enthroned in the cosmic perfection of his baptism—the summit of the kosmos and its centre being interchangeable symbols here—which is the final perfection and synthesis of heaven and earth. It refers to both the salvific perfection of the human microcosm and also the apocalyptic perfection of the macrocosm, both re-centred in the Absolute.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. ... And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it.270

Conclusion
The theology of baptism anchors and informs its symbolism and the symbolism of baptism enlivens and declares its theology, pushing it beyond the limits of dialectic by which the theological statements are bound. The two are inextricably linked as two faces of the same coin. Neither is explicable without the other.

The mysteries of baptism—and hence the mysteries of the font—are of a cosmological order, as demonstrated by the cosmogonic and Edenic

symbolism that permeates the rites. The reintegration of the elements of the human hypostasis, and by analogy the kosmos, is the precondition of salvation. Cyril:

For my part, I have ever wondered at the curiosity of the bold men, who by their imagined reverence fall into impiety. For though they know nothing of Thrones, and Dominions, and Principalities, and Powers, the workmanship of Christ, they attempt to scrutinise their Creator Himself. Tell me first, O most daring man, wherein does Throne differ from Dominion, and then scrutinise what pertains to Christ.  

The baptismal grace sacramentally confers this psychic and cosmic gnosis and integrity and its symbols expound the nature of the creation and the path whereby it enters into the proper relationship with the Absolute. It is, according to the Christian vision, the state conferred by baptism and this state alone, that enables one to enter into the mystery of the divine Person Himself. Thus the “robe without blemish” of the newly baptised is the wedding garment of the soul, which it assumes as befitting the wedding banquet that it is about to enter as bride of Christ.

He has commanded us to go forth to preach, and to invite you to the supper of the heavenly King, which the Father hath prepared for the marriage of His Son, and that we should give you wedding garments, that is, the grace of baptism; which whosoever obtains, as a spotless robe with which he is to enter to the supper of the King...  

The font, like the altar, marks a fixed point as the unmoving centre of a kosmos in revolution. It also marks a fixed point in the kosmos who is the initiate. The grace conferred upon the initiate by baptism establishes

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271 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, cat. 11.12.
272 Mt.22:11-13: ‘And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
273 Clem. recogn. 4.35.
itself as a fixed point in the soul around which the orbits of the soul’s elements—interior “planets” if you will—are reordered. The soul that grows into its baptism—that takes on the Cross of Christ which is the *axis mundi*—grows in harmony and achieves and confirms the primordial equilibrium of Eden that was disrupted by the Fall and hence has entered the Heavenly Jerusalem. It is in this state of primordial harmony, affirmed by the overcoming of sin, that he approaches the altar.

Drawing upon a wide arrange of sources from across the ancient Christian world, and despite variations in the particulars of the baptismal rites and symbols, we nevertheless find a consistent emphasis upon baptism as the return to the Primordial in both macrocosmic and microcosmic “aspects.” It is the unmaking of the fallen manifestation by the return to the principle beyond form and the remaking of the human *hypostasis* in the fullness of the potential denied by Adam.

The movement that is begun at the font—by the western portal—is fulfilled at the altar. The journey down the nave to the altar is, as it were, the mysteries of the font in dynamic mode. At the altar the journey reaches its metacosmic perfection in union with the Trinitarian Godhead and the sacramental *theosis* by which ‘we are made by grace what Christ is by nature’ in participation in the Eucharistic Presence.
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Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) studied botany and geology at London University, graduating with a doctoral degree in mineralogy. He lived between Ceylon, India and England, during which time he studied the traditional arts and crafts of Ceylon and founded the Ceylon Social Reform Society, aimed at reviving traditional values and expressions in Ceylonese culture and countering the negative effects of British colonialism. Moving to the USA, he became Curator at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Scholar, linguist, social thinker and prolific writer, Coomaraswamy has claim to be one of the intellectual giants of the modern era and is one of the foremost exponents (along with Rene Guénon and Frithjof Schuon) of Traditional metaphysics this century.

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