

# ON THE WESTERN TRADITION



ARTURO RHEGINI

# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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It took a scholar with the eclecticism and sagacity of Arturo Reghini to claim, not without irony and vis polemica, the existence of a Western Tradition. This short but dense essay, which appeared for the first time in the magazine "Ur" in 1928, begins precisely by contesting the claim, put forward above all by some French esotericists, that Rome did not host a Tradition worthy of the name, as if it were the exclusive prerogative of Greece and eastern countries.

With skill and lightness, Reghini succeeds in reconstructing a dense web of references, symbols and testimonies that attest to the presence in the Roman world of various initiatory doctrines, harbingers of an occult knowledge passed down orally and evolved in multiple forms over the centuries. A text still rich in stimuli for anyone interested in history, myths, Roman legends and "the traces of ancient Italic wisdom".

**ARTURO REGHINI** (1878-1946) was an Italian mathematician, philosopher and esotericist. Particularly active in the Masonic sphere (he was also at the head of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite), he devoted himself especially to the study of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism. He wrote in various journals, from the Papinian

'Leonardo' to those he founded, such as 'Atanor', 'Ignis' and 'Ur'. Despite repression by the Regime, he received prestigious awards from the Accademia dei Lincei and the Accademia d'Italia in the 1930s, especially for his studies on Pythagoras.

Texts

Arturo Reghini

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## Devaluations of the pagan tradition

A French Masonic writer, J.-M. Ragon, who still enjoys considerable authority in certain circles, wrote that 'Rome never possessed but the Small Mysteries' and stated that Pythagoras in 241 B.C. (*sic*) went being initiated by druids in Alesia<sup>1</sup>, the city that together with the initiation Druidic was then to be destroyed by Caesar, "ce barbare digne de Rome"<sup>2</sup>. Equally malevolent in this regard is that of Stanislas de Guaita, one of France's most respected occultists:

Rome, so fertile in abominable necromancers, gave no true disciple of Hermes. One does not object to the name of Ovid. His *Metamorphoses*, so graceful in all respects, testify to an esotericism that is well mistaken, not to say naive. Virgil, an initiate these days (thank goodness), concerned above all to endow Italy with an epic masterpiece, only lets the radiance of his wisdom appear between the lines and by chance<sup>(3)</sup>

These statements by Ragon and Guaita are not isolated; far from it. They are corroborated, for example, by those, just as serious and well-founded, of another French writer, Marco Saunier, author of a book that is very popular in the occult field and also widespread in its Italian version. Saunier, after affirming that Rome was founded by a college of Etruscan initiates, adds, moreover, that "the initiates were soon expelled, and the Roman people wanted to govern themselves, following their coarse appetites, and the impulses of their native brutality". And further on he adds:

The city of the seven sacred hills [...] had become the infamous lair of a bunch of brutes who wanted to impose their force on the world. The cult of Rome was the force, its dream the millstone. There was nothing great and noble in the Roman. The heart did not exist. In him strength alone spoke and intelligence resided in the muscles of his fist. Being busy fighting, he used the slaves to think<sup>(4)</sup>



We will not comment on the soundness and serenity of this view. We only note that in this implacable animosity is found not only the hatred of Brennus (the great thinker of Gaul!) but also the hostility

partisan of Saint Paul<sup>5</sup> and Christians in general against Rome. In fact, according to Saunier, the remedy for so many evils and infamies was brought about by Christianity: "To renew the world, therefore, it was necessary to find a means that would seduce Force and Intelligence together, prepare their alliance, and make their duel cease. And it was Jesus who precisely found it in Sentimentality".

And praise be to Jesus with his Sentimentality, with a capital S: having demolished the Empire and destroyed the *pax romana*, in fact, love for one's neighbour and Christian charity were established, at the mercy of which Christian peoples have lived a world of good and slaughterhouses have all but disappeared, with, one understands, a few minor and recent exceptions.

This systematic denigration of Romanity, and this fierce devaluation of all wisdom and initiatory capacity in the Romans (as if the very word *initia* were not purely and classically Latin), also badly accords with the attitude and statements on the subject of another French occultist, a Freemason and Christian as well, and he too opposed to paganism.

In fact, according to Dr. Gérard Encausse, better known under the pseudonym Papus, pagan initiation has come down to the present day, since, again according to Papus, Providence has had to, now not so much, step in and take the field to thwart it; from which we deduce, it seems to us, that if today the remnants can still be found, there must once have been something more.

Here is what Papus writes as Grand Master of Martinism:

Martinez de Pasqually, then Claude de Saint-Martin, wished to constitute an essentially secular Christian chivalry, entrusted with the task of spreading and disseminating the initiatory tradition of the West and to prepare the great work of Human Reintegration. Providence wanted to oppose a Christian current to the pagan current of Pythagorean origin that centralised part of the work of initiatic dissemination.<sup>6</sup>

It is not clear here whether Papus means to refer to pagan currents of his time, or of Saint-Martin's time, or even to pagan currents of either time.

In France, the Pythagorean movement of Fabre d'Olivet (1768-1825) began in 1813 with the publication of his *Vers Dorés de Pythagore*; and the

re-establishment of paganism had been preached a few years earlier by the pagan hierophant Quintus-Nantius Aucler, clad in the toga of the Roman pontiffs. But these should not be the currents to which Papus alludes, because the first editions of the works of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin date back to 1782, and thus predate both the writings of Fabre

d'Olivet as well as the work of the Aucler<sup>7</sup>; excluding these two pagan and Pythagorean currents, however, we cannot say which other movement Papus intended to refer to, unless he simply wished to allude to Freemasonry in which, along with various other things, it is also possible to trace a Pythagorean imprint and a connection with the builders' guilds of Roman and post-Roman antiquity.

It is not appropriate here to dwell on Papus' highly questionable pairing of Martinez and Saint-Martin, nor on the absence of any mention of this anti-pagan intervention of Providence in the writings of the theosophist from Amboise; moreover, Saint-Martin's letters to Kirschberger, Baron of Liebisdorf, show that he was particularly concerned with what he called the *École du Nord*, and was particularly alarmed by the magical operations carried out in Lyon by the Lodge

Freemasonry of the Egyptian Rite founded there by Cagliostro<sup>(8)</sup>.

It is enough for us to note that if one does not want Papus and Providence to fight windmills, there must have existed at the time of Saint-Martin or at the time of Papus a 'pagan and Pythagorean current that had centralised a part of the initiatory dissemination works'.

Thus the persistence of a pagan Western initiatory tradition is admitted even by its enemies. After this, the consistency and good faith of those martinists for whom the Western initiatory tradition is necessarily and undoubtedly Christian does not seem to us to be overstated. It is true that sometimes it is simply a matter of pure and genuine illiteracy. Thus, for example, during the period in which we write, the Grand Master of the Martinist Order in Italy has given proof of his wisdom and his feelings of Italianism by denigrating, more than his may, Romanity.

Here are his exact words:

The numerals, or rather, the numeration of the Romans had (*sic*) no regard whatsoever for the functions of zero, that is, of spatial infinity, because the Romans remained with the second causes, and did not care to ascend too much (*sic*) to the first cause.<sup>9</sup>

We could quote other passages from this Grand Master, but we feel that the above prose excerpt is more than enough to show how natural it must be for such people to deny and denigrate Romanity and, in return, flaunt their affinity with those "men without letters and idiots" mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>*Rituel du grade de Maître*, p. 75. Elsewhere (*Maçonnerie Occulte*, 1853, p. 537) Ragon places Latium among the great centres of initiation. And so? As for the importance and initiatory character of Alesia, it may be noted that history speaks of Alesia only on the occasion of its destruction. Everything else is a brief legend reported by Diodorus Siculus (Book IV); whereas the Italic School of Pythagoras has a certain and historical importance of the first order. Can the more come from the less?

(2) J.-M. Ragon, *Orthodoxie Maçonnique*, Paris 1853, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Stanislas De Guaita, *Au seuil du Mystère*, Paris, 19155, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>Marco Saunier, *The Legend of Symbols*, Ital. ed. 1912, p. 176.

<sup>5</sup>Epistle to the Romans 1:18-32.

<sup>6</sup>Magazine 'L'Initiation', August 1898.

<sup>7</sup>*La Thrécie*, Paris, An, VII.

(8) L. C. de Saint Martin, *Correspondance inédite avec Kirschberger*, Paris 1862.

<sup>9</sup>Sin... in 'O'Thanatos', June 1923, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>Acts of the Apostles 4:13.

## East, West and Christianity

Papus, if he did not create, certainly contributed to reinforcing and spreading the prejudice whereby the Western Christian initiatory tradition is spoken of as not only orthodox, authentic and faithful, but as undoubtedly Western, and indeed the only Western tradition.

Afterwards, and as a result of the disagreements that arose between Papus and H. P. Blavatsky and his Theosophical Society, he set up Martinism against it, "an order of enlightened ones that puts the name of Christ at the head of all its official acts"<sup>1</sup>.

having the purpose of "spreading and spreading the tradition initiatory of the West".

And since the Martinist Order and the Theosophical Society are two pseudo-esoteric organisations that make a great deal of propaganda, it so happened that to the profane eye of most, the antagonism between these two organisations appeared as a reflection or manifestation of a rivalry between the Eastern tradition, represented by the Theosophical Society, and the Western tradition, embodied in Martinism. Of course, this is not the case at all, and it is indeed absurd to think that two orthodox traditions, and therefore linked to the one initiatic hierarchy, could fight each other.

In the latter period, the antagonism between the two movements became increasingly attenuated, thanks to the progressive Christianisation of the Theosophical Society by Besant and even more so by Steiner. The latter came into open disagreement with Besant and founded the Anthroposophical Society on her behalf, claiming to be the heir and representative of the Rosicrucians, that is, according to him, of the Western initiatic tradition, Christian of course. In this way the anthroposophists came closer to the position of Martinism; and indeed we had the opportunity to see an issue of a French Steinerian journal

devoted almost entirely to the figure and writings of the Incognito Philosopher, extolled there as the true precursor of Goethe and Rudolf Steiner.

What the outcome of this attempt to absorb Martinism by Anthroposophy may be, we care little. Whether or not they go hand in hand, Martinists and anthroposophists agree with each other and disagree with us when they make Jesus the central figure, not just of initiation, but of history and the universe, and when they borrow the Christian tradition from the Western initiatic tradition. We, in fact, leaving for the moment unresolved the question of the rightful place of the figure of Jesus in the history of the earth and the history of the universe, clearly disagree:

- 1) the Westernness of Christianity;
- 2) the Christian character of the Western initiatory tradition.

It is first necessary to understand the meaning and scope to be assigned to the terms 'East' and 'West'. Indeed, if one adopts a purely geographic criterion to define their meaning, then strictly speaking East and West become two meaningless words, since, with the exception of the two poles, any point on the earth's surface is simultaneously to the east of the points that with respect to it lie to the west, and to the west of those points that with respect to it lie to the east. Hence the need to adopt other criteria to define what is meant by East and West and to draw their historical geographical dividing lines, moving as far as possible away from the vague and conventional.

Now, since the unification of the West was brought about by and under the empire of Rome, since the modern world, our civilisation, derives, alterations aside, from classical civilisation, and since even the heterogeneous element of classical civilisation, Christianity, has sought in Rome the chrism of catholicity, and in Rome it sees its centre, it seems natural to us to recognise in Rome, if not *Rome Caput Mundi*, at least the centre of the West. And so, in Roman terms, the East includes all of Asia from Anatolia (the Levant) to the Far East, and the West includes Greece and Rome and, today, the whole complex of peoples in Europe and beyond who have been powerfully and predominantly influenced, directly or indirectly, by the civilisation of which ancient Rome was the centre.

This division leaves out ancient Egypt, which straddles the East and the West. The meridian passing through the pyramid of Cheops

could indeed be considered as the dividing line between East and West, thus including the Hellenised coasts of Anatolia in the West. Even in the current sense of the word, Egypt is considered in its own right, distinct from the East. In many respects, in fact, Egypt is closer to the West than to the East. The regal, divine and priestly character of the pharaoh is reflected in the reunion of supreme political and priestly authority in the person of the divine Julius, at once Emperor and Pontifex Maximus. In the Alexandrian period, neo-Pythagorean and neo-Platonic elements merged in mutual interpenetration with purely Egyptian elements, and the hermetic tradition of the Sacred and Divine Art was formed in Egypt; a tradition that was transmitted through the Arabs to Italy, Spain and the West in general, until it became the medieval western hermetic tradition of the Royal Art. Finally, we note that this partitioning of East and West leaves geographically in the West all of North Africa, so that the initiatic schools of Morocco must be included in the West. With this division, however, Judaism and its derivations also remain geographically outside the West.

In determining the boundary between East and West, as in the determination of all boundaries in general, there always remains a certain margin of uncertainty, which leaves room for misunderstandings and allows for solutions in which preferences and arbitrariness can influence the shift in one direction or the other of the boundary line. In this case, it seems to us that one must take into account, in order to include or exclude a region or a people in the East or the West, its homogeneity or heterogeneity with one or the other. If it is permissible, for example, to count Hungarians among Westerners despite their origin, it is certainly not the case to do the same for Jews, whether permanent or nomadic in Europe.

One must not therefore abstract from the heterogeneity between Christianity and the whole of western classical civilisation, from the fact that the Romans and pagans considered Christianity as an oriental sect, arising on the fringes of the empire, outside of Greco-Roman life, customs and mentality. And indeed, while not forgetting and not disavowing the pagan elements grafted into Christianity and more especially Catholicism, one cannot help but recognise the Asian character of this

movement, which arose by a Jew who was born, lived and died in Palestine, and was certainly not Hellenised.

Religious intolerance, whereby heterodoxy of thought becomes a punishable offence, is certainly not a Greco-Roman character. Neither is the holy zeal of propaganda; the subordination of the duties of the citizen to those of the believer, of the interests of the earthly homeland to those of the heavenly homeland; the claim to enclose the truth in the articles of a creed, to make the salvation of the soul depend on the profession of a certain belief and the observance of a certain morality; the anarchic and democratic spirit of universal and compulsory brotherhood, of the likeness of one's neighbour and equality, neither. Do not the Christians themselves exalt their religion because the preaching of the doctrine of Jesus subverted the whole table of values of paganism, giving preference to the poor over the rich, to the last the place of the first, to the folly of the cross and to the despicable and ignoble things of the world<sup>2</sup>the victory over the wisdom of philosophers, to the saving of souls the greatest importance and to the defence and interests of the Empire the least<sup>3</sup>?

When the apostles and disciples contrast their doctrine and the their vision to that of the Gentiles, of the ethnics as they call them, do they not first establish and recognise, not only the heterogeneity, but even the contrast between Christianity and paganism, between ethnics and Christians, do they not themselves claim to be ethnically foreign to the West?

And if this basic Judaism and this radical heterogeneity are not to be taken into account, and it is argued that original and primitive Judaism has been transcended, that Christianity is that preached by St Paul and that the Gospel is addressed equally to all the peoples of the earth, it is hard to see why, then, it should be considered Western rather than Eastern, Northern or Southern. It is evident that affirming the westernness of Christianity is tantamount to denying or forgetting its catholicity, and vice versa. The quibbles of casuistry do not allow this dilemma to be overcome. And in any case, given and not granted this acquired character of universality, the original character still remains what it is. Perhaps that macaroni, now eaten and appreciated all over the world, has therefore ceased to be a Neapolitan dish?

Christianity therefore, neither because of its historical origin, nor because of any preference or greater importance deliberately accorded to the West over the peoples of other parts of the earth, can rightly claim

western character. On what, then, does the proclaimed Westernness of Christianity rest?

The only semblance of justification for this cliché lies in the fact that the West has become, in a certain sense and to a certain extent, Christian. It is not Christianity that is or has become Western, but it is the West that has in a certain way become Christian. It may sound like a play on words, but these are in essence two profoundly different things. And the confusion and illusion is fostered by the fact that more or less the West alone has become Christian.

In the Far East and the Middle East, indeed, Christian preaching has not really taken root, and in the Near East and North Africa, once Christian, the religion of Jesus has lost ground to Islam: so that, despite all the efforts of proselytism and all the pretensions of universality, even today there is only the minority of humanity that is Christian, even nominally, and even today Christianity is predominantly constituted by the West alone. The Westernization of Christianity is but a misnomer and equivocation to indicate the Christianity of the West.

Of course, in noting the above, we do not think that we have made a great discovery; something which, moreover, does not distress us much because we do not share the enthusiasm of modern people for discoveries. Indeed, in a way, we would be ashamed to have had to state such obvious things, if we did not think it very appropriate to say them in order to dispel the prevailing misunderstandings on the subject. The confusion that we have noted, clarified and deplored, reigns supreme in the thinking of the West, and it seemed to us all the more opportune to insist on such an obvious factual truth since there are those who have an interest in establishing, propagating and perpetuating this misunderstanding.

<sup>1</sup>To tell the truth, it is not the name of Christ but only I. H. S. V. H., i.e. a word that does not exist in Hebrew, but was fabricated for their use and convenience by Christian Kabbalists in the Middle Ages, by inserting an S in the middle of the Old Testament tetragrammaton. On this tetragrammaton *with scin* see Savino Savini's learned study in "Ignis", April-May 1925.

<sup>2</sup>It may not be superfluous to point out that we are merely quoting concepts and terms of St Paul (Epistle to the Corinthians 1:21-28).

<sup>(3)</sup> Rebels and traitors to imperial authority and discipline passed as martyrs to the faith. Such was the case with Saint Sebastian, of whom yesterday's Guelfism wanted to make the patron saint of the fascist militia.



## The initiatic tradition in the West

Let us turn, after this, to the second point of contention, namely the alleged Christian character of the Western tradition or, to be more precise, the claim that a Western initiatory tradition has and must necessarily have a Christian character.

Such a statement implicitly presupposes several others. And they are:

- 1) that the West has become effectively Christianised;
- 2) that Christianity has possessed and maintained intact the deposit of the sacred tradition, as well as the full spiritual understanding of the mysteries of faith by a priesthood worthy of the name;
- 3) that the Christianisation of the West was so general and profound as to make a tabula rasa of every remnant of paganism and so absolute as to exclude in particular any continuity and derivation of the Mysteries and pagan initiation;
- 4) that from the beginning of the Vulgar Era onwards the West remained impenetrable to any other influence.

The thesis we dispute thus comprises a negative part, which excludes the existence in the modern West of any non-Christian centre or tradition, and a positive part, which affirms the existence of an esoteric Christian tradition. Let us examine them both; and let us observe first of all that it is one thing not to know whether a thing exists or not, quite another to know that it does not and cannot exist; and, if this is true in general, with all the greater caution we must proceed with this distinction when we are dealing with a thing whose possible existence may be concealed. This is precisely our case, since we are dealing with esotericism, that is, with something that is by definition secret and mysterious. And, since we are dealing with the specific and particular case of a possible modern, pagan initiatic tradition, at the

occult character, so to speak, peculiar to all esotericism, one must add the contingent and special one deriving from the past and present conditions of the West.

While in fact a possible Christian initiatory tradition could have and could freely and without hindrance assert itself and act, in accordance also with the spirit of Christian proselytism, the position has manifestly been and still is quite different for a pagan tradition and it would be no surprise if no trace of it could be found, even though it existed and still exists.

The concealment of its very existence for a pagan tradition must have seemed opportune, to say the least. One only has to think of the deep and inveterate hatred of the dominant religion in the West against paganism to realise this. Even when attacking each other, the various Christian sects accuse each other of paganism; one would say that, according to their mentality, a more serious accusation could not be found. Protestants, in order to affirm the excellence and genuineness of their Christianity, accuse Catholics of their paganism, and the Catholic Church even recently, in order to condemn the Action Française movement, relied on its alleged pagan character.

This anti-pagan obsession, if on the one hand it indicates by their own confession that it is not then true that, in spite of everything, Christians have managed to make a clean sweep of paganism, on the other hand it shows what vitality and what virulence the deep hatreds and resentments of the dominant religion against paganism still have; and one will have to agree that this widespread and tenacious malice determines a factual condition that is not exactly the most propitious and attractive for an opportune and fruitful affirmation of the existence and manifestation of a pagan initiatic centre. Therefore, even if the silence remained absolute, it could be that it was hermetic or Pythagorean silence, and it would not necessarily or probably be proven to be a grave silence.

In the meantime, we note that, before the victory of Galileo, in the last glorious centuries of the pagan world the existence and work of Apollonius, Plotinus, Maximus, Julianus, is a fairly probative clue to the existence of pagan initiatic centres in the days of imperial Rome. Having made this observation, it seems natural to admit that, having failed in their attempts to enliven the pagan religion, after the violent destruction of the initiatic sanctuaries, after the persecutions and fires of Alexandria, these pagan initiates, faced with

to the unarguable spread of the madness of the cross and the establishment of the vulgar era, had to adopt one of these two courses of action, which are not mutually exclusive:

- retreating and shrouding itself in ever more perfect mystery, in no way analogous to that held today by the Eastern initiatory centres in the face of Western invasion, although the latter is not animated against such centres by the deliberate and ferocious hatred 'that in the heretical dung he beaten' in the ways that everyone knows;
- masquerading under a Christian guise, infiltrating the Church itself, inserting esoteric elements into the doctrine and perpetuating the integral tradition under cover.

In any case, and in such circumstances, it is evident that the pagan initiates must first of all have taken care to ensure the continuity of the tradition at all costs, keeping the deposit of sacred science pure and intact, its understanding full and conscious, and its centre alive even if secret.

We are well aware that it will seem improbable to the layman that this theoretical possibility of the survival and perpetuation of a pagan initiation centre could have been implemented in practice, without offering interruptions, for the duration of fifteen centuries.

Such a continuity of existence in the most perfect mystery may also seem completely useless, condemned by the very necessity of secrecy to absolute inaction, and equivalent in short to a de facto non-existence. But, to those who have some idea or notion of the modes and level of action and the possibilities available to the initiatic hierarchy, it may not seem implausible that an initiatic centre would maintain the continuity of its existence, even physically, even under the most favourable conditions, for the space of fifteen centuries. For this and other reasons, therefore, we consider it all but impossible and implausible that a pagan initiatic centre survived the collapse of the empire and the destruction of ancient civilisation, maintaining up to us with even physical continuity of transmission.

It is therefore not in vain for us to approach the question. If one wants to consider it from an external, historical and cultural point of view, it boils down to the search for and evaluation of the traces of the existence and action of such a centre and tradition, outside and within Christianity, which can confirm the hypothesis, demonstrating the verisimilitude and probability of the

actual existence, in the past and today, of a pagan initiatic tradition in the West. Of course, in order to ascertain, not only the verisimilitude and probability, but the truth and actuality of such actual existence, external considerations and evidence of a historical nature cannot suffice; such ascertainment can only be the result of experience and direct participation. This is self-evident; the reader will therefore not claim, nor expect, that it is possible for us, by writing, to fully resolve this difficult and important question.

## Roman tradition

What we have said applies in general to the whole pagan initiatic tradition; but since we are dealing with the Western tradition and since Rome was undoubtedly the centre of the West and the whole of Western civilisation draws its origins from Rome, the question of the existence of a Roman initiatic tradition and a pagan initiatic centre in Rome, in the past and present, becomes particularly important.

Those who currently claim to be the heirs and continuators of the Western initiatory tradition do so by reconnecting with either a Celtic tradition or Christianity, and perhaps both together. Recently, 'Les amis de l'Atlantide' have popped up, with the ambition of reconnecting with the tradition of Atlantis, and we would not be surprised if 'Les amis de Glozel' with a Glozellian tradition also popped up one day; where is it that one cannot get to with the help of holy clairvoyance?

No one, however, remembers the existence of Rome. Anthroposophists, martinists, and Jesuits pose as heirs of the true Rosicrucian tradition, or claim to hoard the tradition of Hermeticism; and while looking at it all through the tinted glass of Christianity and while professing an unbounded veneration for the prophet of Bethlem, they claim that this tradition of theirs is the Western tradition.

Is it possible that Gaul, Atlantis and Palestine have something to do with the Western Initiatic Tradition and that Rome, and Rome alone, has nothing to say and nothing to do with it? Could it be that Ragon is right when he asserts that Rome never possessed the Great Mysteries, and therefore, and the inference is worth something, implicitly asserts that a Roman Initiatic Tradition in possession of the Great Mysteries, having never existed, could not have perpetuated itself?

In order to intellectually and initiatically devalue the Romans, they are portrayed as a crude, brutal, warlike people, alien to philosophy, preoccupied with the material and practical problems of life, incapable of any abstraction and ideality. And since, according to theosophical, martinist, and generally Christian and secular prejudices, the true initiate must be incapable of killing a fly, must be consumed with love for his neighbour, must despise and even hate this lowly world, and take care to save his own soul from sin, the wrath of God, weeping and gnashing of teeth, it is then manifest that, by placing not love and charity but *jus, fas* and *mos* as the basis of social life, by fighting *virtute praediti*, by not extending the right hand to those who beat you on the left and vice versa, by tracing roads over all continents, by building bridges over all rivers without caring about philosophy, one proves that one does not possess initiation.

Rome, it is objected, did not have an institution of the Mysteries comparable to the Greek or Egyptian one, indeed it repressed and forbade the Bacchanalia with the famous *Senatus Consultus De Bacchanalibus* (186 B.C.E.), which forbade in Rome and Italy all the Mysteries of Bacchus, with the exception however of some particular cases. Rome expelled the philosophers, opposed the Pythagoreans, issued against the 'mathematicians' and the

'Chaldeans', i.e. against diviners, astrologers and the like, edicts such as those of Claudius and Diocletian. How then can one speak of Roman initiation?

To these objections we reply, firstly, that if initiatory knowledge is unique, it also undergoes, in its manifestations, adaptations according to place and time. It is therefore not necessarily the case that the initiatic hierarchy must use in its expression and action the form of the classical Mysteries. Hindus, Chinese and Jews have never had anything similar, and yet no one thinks of using this reason to deny the existence of Hindu, Chinese and Jewish initiation. One cannot therefore infer from the non-existence of Roman Mysteries of the Eleusinian or Isiac type the non-existence of a Roman initiatory centre and wisdom and tradition.

But, on the other hand, it is not even the case that such non-existence of the Mysteries should really be taken literally; that indeed a purely Italic God, Janus, was the God of initiation into the Mysteries, the one who guarded the doors and in particular opened and closed the door, the *janua* of the initiatory temple, and who had power over the entrance to the heavens (Ovid, *Fast.*, I, 25).

Attributes and symbols of Janus were the key and the ship, and we do not see why, as attributes of Janus, they should have little importance, and material and profane significance, and when instead Christianity appropriates them (evidently for some reason) and makes them the keys and ship of St. Peter, then they should rise to dazzling symbolic significance and value. The very name of Janus, if what Cicero and others after him say is correct, would derive from *eundo*, and thus would also be etymologically related to the voice *initia*, *inire*, a voice that, from a technical, spiritual point of view, says something more than the corresponding Greek words: Mysteries and Τελεται.

With regard to Janus, we note again with Guénon<sup>1</sup> that Janus was simultaneously the God of initiation into the Mysteries and the God of the craftsmen's guilds (*Collegia Fabrorum*), of the guild of masons first. This is enough to give a glimpse of the initiatory character of these guilds, and indeed the art of building, and especially the art of building temples, was a sacred art, based on a sacred and secret science, the traditional echoes of which can be found in the art and science of the English *Freemasons*.

The symbolism of edification is also found elsewhere, for example in the Gospel; but the designation of Pontifex Maximus to designate the high priest predates the Gospel, it is a Roman designation based on Masonic symbolism, well appropriate for one who has the office of establishing communication between the one and the other shore<sup>2</sup>.

The Roman Mysteries, therefore, existed; there were guilds that possessed an initiatory science, and their prestige was such that they survived the ruin of the Empire, placed themselves under the protection of the four Crowned Saints (which brings to mind the figure of Janus Quadrifrons), manifested themselves in the guild of the Magistri Comacini and then in that of the Franks Masons of the Middle Ages.

Even remaining in the purely technical realm of 'Operational Masonry', the knowledge of the ancient Roman builders amazes modern engineers and masons. The Romans knew how to dig tunnels through mountains with the utmost precision in both alignment and slope for water run-off. Some of the secrets of the art have been passed down to our times, and modern Roman masons still build the daring Roman-style vaults, which seem to defy the laws of statics. As for the edict against

Bacchanalia and those against soothsayers, magicians and astrologers, they are in no way incompatible with the existence of an initiatic centre in Rome, since it is inconceivable that, having existed, it should oppose and prevent such edicts out of a sense of solidarity with such corruptions of the Mysteries and Sacred Science. On the contrary. And as for the expulsion of the Greek philosophers and the Romans' lack of passion for philosophy, they prove nothing in our regard, because there is no relationship of affinity between sacred science and profane philosophy; it is true, moreover, that without the need for initiatic enlightenment, it was enough to make use of Roman common sense to properly assess the dangers inherent in philosophical claptrap and tinkering.

The only fact, among those put forward as incompatible with the existence of an initiatic centre in Rome, that would be worth examining at length, is that of the Roman aversion to the Pythagoreans, as would result, for example, from the destruction of the Pythagorean basilica of Porta Maggiore in Rome. But it would take too long to digress, and in any case the fortune of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism among the Romans has already been studied in a valuable book by Alberto Gianola, to which we refer.

We will limit ourselves for the moment to recalling the legend of the links between Numa and Pythagoreanism, a legend that, according to Gianola, should be accepted as responding to verisimilitude<sup>3</sup> and that certainly could not have

persist in the tenacious manner deplored by Cicero, if he had not found at least the appearance of a confirmation in the Pythagorean character of Numa's own institutions.

The prejudices raised against the very possibility of the existence of an initiatic centre in ancient Rome therefore have no real foundation; therefore, without allowing ourselves to be impressed by the difficulties of the question and the prejudices of all kinds surrounding it, let us quickly review the still visible traces of Roman initiatic wisdom.

<sup>1</sup> R. Guénon, *Le Roi du Monde*, Paris 1927, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Varro derives *pontifex* from *ponse facere*, because of the construction by the pontiffs of the *Ponte Sublicio*; but the word *pontifex* is very ancient, and since in ancient times *pons* meant *way* (Curtius, *Princ. Etym.*, I, 323), as the sea is called *ponto* for that reason, pontiffs were those who "they 'made the streets'.

<sup>3</sup> Alberto Gianola, *La fortuna di Pitagora presso i Romani*, F. Battiato, Catania 1921.



## Roman Initiatic Wisdom

Before we embark on an examination of Roman and Italic history, myths, and legends in order to search for and exhume traces of ancient Italic wisdom, it is appropriate to briefly preface some caveats. First of all, let us observe that the difficult questions of historical criticism around ancient Roman history, which have been debated with intense ardour and with varying degrees of incident by the two critical and traditionalist tendencies for about a century, can only be of secondary importance and, therefore, of secondary interest to us. However, and without going into matters relatively unrelated to our subject, we believe that Niebuhr, Mommsen and in general the German or German-inspired critics have really gone too far with their denial of the reliability of the Roman tradition for the entire royal period and the early days of the Republic; instead of declaring the Roman tradition false with a systematic angry and quite *curious* animosity, it would have been better to simply limit oneself to reservations; the sceptical attitude would have been more scientific than hostile, arbitrary and authoritarian denial. Time, however, is doing justice to this anti-Roman bias, and, especially since the discovery in the Roman Forum of the *lapis niger*, spoken of in the ancient mocked tradition, and the archaic stele beneath it, the assertors of the truthfulness and reliability of the ancient Roman Tradition, handed down to us by the Latin writers, have gained and are continually gaining ground.

With this, we do not deny all right and value to historical criticism, but we do affirm that criticism can and should also be made of criticism. This is, of course, from a purely historical point of view. But, for us, it is not of vital interest to ascertain whether an account of an event has a historical or a legendary character; we are interested in whether, in one case or the other, in

that tale includes elements or aspects in which an initiatory or esoteric value or meaning, whether manifest or reposed, is recognisable. Thus history and legend, for our assumption, have, more or less, the roughly equivalent value of source and material.

The other caveat we need to preface is the following: we have no reason to accept the dogmas and postulates of the creation and evolution of the Earth and humanity, the postulate of *primitive*, necessarily savage peoples from which civilisation has 'progressed'; and in general we do not feel obliged to accept the *myths* of contemporary religion, philosophy and science. Consequently, neither do we accept the corollary of these postulates, whereby *savants* see in the myths and legends of ancient peoples, primitive and savage by force, nothing but a constant and poetic personification, admirably naive, of the forces of nature.

We know that wisdom is a very different thing from culture (as well as from theories, beliefs and devotional-hysterical sentiments); and that the possibility of attaining wisdom is inherent to mankind, and is in no way linked, as is ordinarily believed, to the evolution of mankind from forms of life and social organisation 'primitive', nomadic, pastoral, agricultural, to the more recent forms, called 'civilised' par excellence.

On the contrary, we think, or rather, we know from experience, that the demands, complexity, restlessness and intrusiveness of modern civilisation, far from leading mankind towards wisdom, are increasingly distancing it even from the pure ability to conceive what it is, and are also making the task increasingly difficult for individuals, adding artificial rather than superfluous obstacles to those that by their very nature the task undertaken by those who aspire to wisdom imposes. That is why we do not feel compelled to resort to naturalistic, solar, meteorological, totemistic, etc. interpretations to explain myths and legends; and we consider it possible that elements and traces of traditional initiatory wisdom may also be found in them.

Tradition, as the word itself says, is by its very nature 'oral', even today. Readers of these monographs are quite familiar with the how and why of this character of Tradition, so we will not insist. Assuming, then, that the presence of traditional wisdom is not irreconcilable with the pastoral and agricultural social stage of ancient

Italic and Latin populations, and on the assumption that traditional wisdom can only be transmitted 'orally' and expressed only allegorically, we propose to trace the symbolic expression of traditional wisdom in the myths and legends of ancient Rome and, more generally, in the 'fables of paganism'.

## The Legend of Saturn

Everyone knows the Greco-Latin tradition of the four Ages: in chronological order, the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages. The earliest, the Golden Age, had been the most beautiful, the blissful age, lamented and sung about by the poets, and the world had been continually deteriorating since then.

The Latin tradition identified that happy time with the *Saturnia Regna* (Virgil, *Aen.*, IV, 6; VI, 41; XI, 252), because the tradition recounted that Saturn, ousted by Jupiter and expelled from heaven (Ovid, *Fast.*, I, 292), had landed in Italy by taking refuge and hiding in Latium, where Janus, king of Italy, received him and reigned with him during the Golden Age.

He gave his name to Italy, which is known as *Saturnia Tellus* (Virgil, *Aen.*, VIII, 329; I, 569; *Geo.*, II, 173; Ovid, *Fast.*, I, 232; Macrobius, I, 7; Festus, ed. Teubner, p. 430); and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Antiq. Rom.*, I, 34) says that 'all of Italy was sacred to this deity and was called Saturnia by the inhabitants (*incolis*), as is stated in the *Sibylline Carmi* and also in other oracles rendered by the gods'.

The ancients said that Latium was also so called because Saturn had hidden himself there (*latere*, Virgil, *Aen.*, VII, 322; Ovid, *Fast.*, I, 232). The correct etymology is probably from *latum*, 'broad, side'; but the erroneous etymologies of the ancients are still of great importance, because they are not arbitrary but are intended to confirm events and facts connected with the thing. To this we shall return. Returning to Saturn, he settled at the foot of the Capitol, called for this reason (Festus, p. 430) *Saturnius Mons*; there stood his temple, one of the oldest in Rome. The first modest sanctuary had been dedicated to him by Tullus Hostilius, on the occasion of the institution of the *Saturnalia*; Tarquinius conceived the project of replacing it with a temple, and the Republic two or four years after the fall of the

tyrant actually built it on the spot he had chosen, dedicating it to Saturn. It was restored in the time of Augustus and eight imposing Ionic columns still remain. Legend has it that this altar on the Capitoline hill was dedicated to him before the Trojan war (Festus, p. 430); and that a city of Saturn stood on the Sabine hill of the Capitol (Dionysius of Alic., I, 34; VI, I, 4).

To the inhabitants of Latium, Saturn taught agriculture and the art of navigation; legend has it that he eventually vanished from the earth (Macrobius, *Sat.*, I, 7). There was also talk in Rome of an ancient Saturnian population inhabiting the countryside and the city; and of those who, having remained faithful to ancient customs, lived by the cultivation of the fields, it was said that they were the only ones left of King Saturn's race (Varro, *R. R.*, 3, 5). These, in short, are the salient features of the legend, the arrival, refuge, reign, apotheosis and teaching of Saturn in Italy.

This Latin legend of Saturn is connected to the traditional doctrine of 'cycles', and only with the existence of an original traditional doctrine can one plausibly explain the evident concordance between the four Ages of the classical tradition and the four Yugas of the Hindu tradition.

The legend, linking the Golden Age (Virgil, *Aeg.*, II, 538) Saturn to the Golden Age, makes his teaching archaic, and tells us that Saturn with his teaching hid in Latium. Saturn's teaching is thus connected to the 'primordial tradition'; having found refuge in Latium, it is *occultly* transmitted there.

The moral of the fable, from our point of view, is this: *the Roman Wisdom tradition derives from the primordial tradition of the Golden Age, and exists occultly in Latium.*

The legend acquires a precise meaning for those who have reasons to recognise the existence above or below the earth of a supreme initiatory centre, in the past and today. This connection and derivation from the supreme initiatory centre is clearly stated and confirmed by Virgil (*Aen.*, VIII, 319): 'Primus ab aetherio venit Saturnus Olympo, and by Ovid: *caelitibus regnis a Iove pulsus erat*' (Ovid, *Fast.*, I, 292).

Saturn gives men riches, prosperity and freedom; his festivals, *the Saturnalia*, were celebrated in December (sacred to Saturn, as the following month was sacred to his host Janus); they were the festivals of abundance, licence and unbridled joy, which gave freedom (the 'freedom of

December') even to slaves. This orgiastic, popular character of the Saturnalia is known to all; and, ordinarily, it is not thought that the Saturnalia might have had another character as well. The analogy with Orphism and the Bacchanalia should, moreover, already arouse suspicion.

What we have noted about the initiatory character of Saturn and its connection to the 'primordial tradition' and Olympus, makes it logically probable and likely that there must have been such a character of the Saturnalia. And indeed, so it turns out. This is made known to us by a Latin writer, Macrobius, who (*Sat.*, I, 7) says that the

it is permitted to reveal not that origin of the Saturnalia which refers to the arcane nature of the Deity, but that which is mixed with fabulous features, or that which physicists teach the vulgar. For not even in the initiatory ceremonies themselves [in ipsis quidem sacris] is it permitted to narrate the occult and emanating reasons of the source of pure truth [ex meri veri fonte]; and if any one attains them he is commanded to contain them protected within the consciousness.

By means of Saturn *hoc prince* and by the science '*of the good arts*,' says Macrobius (l.c.), 'from an uncultivated and gloomy life we are brought forth almost to the light'. For this merit, Janus ordered that Saturn be honoured '*majestate religionis, quasi vitae melioris auctorem*'.

It should also be noted that the Italic Saturn is a God of the Depths, an underground God, a peculiarity entirely in keeping with the tradition of the *underworld* where the initiatic hierarchy is hidden and remains, as reported by Saint-Yves d'Alveydre and Ossendowski from different sources.

Tradition therefore from the earliest times, from Saturn's landing in Italy, gives an occult character to his stay in Latium and together with what Macrobius says, shows that this initiatory centre and its teaching have had an occult character ever since. And since tradition states that Saturn taught the inhabitants of Latium agriculture, the *peritiam ruris* (Macrobius, I, 7) and the art of navigation in which he excelled (Virgil, *Aen.*, V, 799), the suggestion arises spontaneously that this doctrine, or teaching, should be sought under the agricultural and seafaring symbol.

## Etymology of Saturn

The primarily agricultural character of Saturn was confirmed, according to the Ancients, by the very etymology of the name. Saturn is a very ancient name and already appears in the Carme of the Salii: 'Qui deus in salianaribus Sateurnus nominati' (Festus, ed. Teubner, p. 432). The suffix *urnus* that is found in *di-urnus*, *noct-urnus*, *Volt-urnus*, undoubtedly suggests a similar formation and derivation of Saturn from a *sat* or *sate* radical; it would be, as for diurnal and nocturnal, a kind of adjective or characteristic attribute of the god or king Saturn, capable of constituting its characteristic designation, which then became its name.

For Varro (*L. L.*, V, 64) Saturn is thus called *ab satū*. *Satus* is the action of sowing or planting; and it is a voice, let us note, also used in the figurative sense (cf. Cicero, *Tusc.*, 2, 13). Saturn would thus be the *sator*, the cultivator par excellence.

This etymology was accepted until a few decades ago. Today it is no longer. Schwegler (*Röm. Gesch.*, p. 223) derives Saturn from *satur* = πληρωτής πάσης ευδαιμονίας, the source of all happiness.

Regnaud's *Dictionnaire étymologique du Latin* (1908) instead derives Saturnus from a hypothetical archaic voice: *svaurun-us*, from which the other, always hypothetical voice (*s*)*veter-nus* linked to *vetus*. Saturnus would be the veteran of the gods, and thus the father, the creator of the universe; Regnaud validates this etymology with the analogy with the Greek Κρο-όνος, the creator, the antecedent of all things. Chronos was in fact confused with Chrono (Κρόνος); and this was one of the causes why Chronos, and then the corresponding Latin Saturn, from an agricultural deity became the God of time; and consequently the sickle, Saturn's agricultural attribute, became the sickle of time.

The *Pauly Real Encyclopaedia* (ed. 1923, p. 188) says, on the other hand, that the name of the subterranean god Saturnus, of which the ancient form *Sateurnus* also exists, is undoubtedly identical with the name *satre* of the corresponding Etruscan deity, and reports Herbig's opinion, who from the proximity of the two Latin and Etruscan forms is led to trace a common root *sav* (from the name Σάβας) in an Asia Minor language.

These modern etymologies are not very satisfactory, and we take the liberty of proposing another. The similarity with the Etruscan *satre* already makes it plausible to look for the etymology of Saturn outside Latin; all the more so since the similarity with the Anglo-Saxon *saeter* should also be taken into account. Now, as is well known, the planet for the Ancients furthest from the Earth also bears the name Saturn. Because of its spatial distance Saturn is the first planet, followed by Jupiter, as Saturn's reign was the oldest in time and preceded Jupiter's dominion. The ancient German called the planet Saturn *Satjâr*; and when the use of the week was introduced at the end of the Republic, the days of the week were named after the planets and their deities. Similar names were given to the Anglo-Saxon week, and comparison shows how the Anglo-Saxon *saeter* was considered a deity equivalent to Saturn, to whom the planet Saturn was dedicated (*Saturni stella*; Virgil, *Georg.*, I, 336, II, 406) and the Saturday, the *Saturni dies* of Tibullus (I, 3, 18).

If we count the days of the week by twos, proceeding with odd numbers, they occur in the same order as the planetary system of the ancients: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. To the *Lunae-dies* corresponds the English *Moon-day*; to the *Mercuri-dies* the Wednesday, the day of Woden (Wotan) Odin; to the *Veneris-dies* the Friday (*Frigedaeye*, from the divinity Freya); to the *Domini-dies* the Sunday, the day of the Sun; to the *Martis-dies* the Tuesday, day of Tyr (gen. Tys), etymologically akin to the *div* of *diovis*; to the *Jovis-dies* the Thursday or *Thorsday*, ted. *Donners-tag*, day of the god Thor, day of (Jupiter) thundering (eng. thunder = ted. *donner* = thunder); and to the Saturday (Hebrew entry), the *Saturni-dies*, corresponds the Saturday, ancient a.s. *Saeter-tag*. The correspondence, if not perfect, is always such as to identify the Latin *Sateurnus* and the German *Saeter* and to indicate a common derivation.

Now we have seen that the four Ages of Greco-Latin antiquity correspond to the four Yugas of the Hindus. A similar correspondence is therefore also possible in the name Saturn. There is no correspondence



is for the name of the planet, which in Sanskrit is *Shani*, meaning 'low' and indicating the lowest, most distant planet; but there is a correspondence, much more important for us, with the Sanskrit designation of the Golden Age. The first of the four Yugas has in fact two designations, both of which are of interest to our question. They are *Kṛta-Yuga* and *Satya-Yuga*. *Kṛta-Yuga* is the perfect age (*perfectum*), from the root *kra* = to do, to accomplish, from which, according to Curtius, the Greek name Cronus of Saturn is also derived; *Satya-Yuga* is the good age, the true age. The adjective *satya*, true, is connected to *sat*, being, and thus the real, the true. *Satya-Yuga* is the age of *Sat*, the age of 'Being'.

The affinity between *Satya* and the German *Satyr* is obvious: *Saeter-tag* is the day of the true God, as *Donnerstag* is the day of the thundering God. The Latin *Sate-urnus*, the German *Saeter*, the Etruscan *Satre* would all point to the true, real God par excellence. The derivations of these three names from the *Sat* of *Satya-Yuga*, and those of the Greek Cronos from the *Kṛta-Yuga*'s *kr*, correspond and corroborate each other. And just as the Sanskrit suffix *ya* joined to *Sat* gives the name of the Golden Age, so the Latin suffix *urnus* joined to *Sat* gives the name of the golden Saturn, the king of the Golden Age.

With this etymology, the doctrine of *Saturn* comes to be the true doctrine, the doctrine of 'being'. We thus find another confirmation of the connection between this archaic Latin tradition and the primordial tradition; that is, from the very beginning of this difficult investigation of ours, we find the titles of the 'spiritual orthodoxy' of the Roman tradition.

The presence in Latin and ancient Italic languages of this archaic Indo-European *sat* voice may perhaps seem to some a strange and isolated fact. But it is not so. Another example is given by the voice *Acca*, the name of Acca Larentia, the nurse of Romulus and Remus, and the mother of the first twelve Arvali brothers, which in Sanskrit (*okkâ*), as Preller notes (*Les Dieux de l'ancienne Rome*, Paris 1865, p. 291), means 'mother'. Another example, this one not yet recognised, is given by the voice *anna* (root *ad*, Latin *edo*), in Sanskrit 'nourishment', which reappears as such in Anna Perenna, the mythical Roman food of immortality, equivalent to the ambrosia of the Greeks.

## Addenda

There is much more to be reported and observed about Saturn and Kronos. A distinction must certainly be made between the Greek Chronos and the Latin Chronos, but, according to what we have seen, Saturn and Chronos, both reigning in the Golden Age, are etymologically related to the two Sanskrit designations of the Golden Age, and this shows that the identification of the Latin Saturn with the Greek Chronos, later made by the Romans, had its deep reason for being in the common connection with the archaic *Sat* and the *Santya-Yuga*.

However, for their significance and esoteric importance, we observe that:

- 1) Chronos is the son of Uranus and Gaia (heaven and earth); it is the characteristic of the twelve Titans (Hesiod, *Theog.*, 133), of the Cyclopes (the beings endowed with third sight, cyclic sight), as well as of the Orphic initiates, who take advantage of their genealogy to invoke the right to drink from the fountain of Mnemosyne, to overcome that of the Lete, and from mortals to become immortal by that means. And in the Roman tradition, Saturn, son of heaven and earth, does not die; he vanishes at once, like Enoch and Elijah in the Jewish tradition.
- 2) Plutarch mentions a legend according to which the dethroned Chronos sleeps on an island in the northern seas (*De Delf. Orac.*, 18); this is why the sea to the north of Asia, according to the geographer Dionysius, was called the glacial sea or Saturn. This legend links Saturn with the tradition of the Hyperborean initiatory centre, equivalent to the primordial tradition itself.
- 3) The legend of the 'betylus' swallowed by Kronos with all its developments.

But since we are primarily interested in the archaic Italic character of Saturn, we prefer not to resort to Greece to prove its exotericity; likewise, we will not deal with the consecration to Saturn of the planet Saturn in astrology, the day of the week in the calendar and lead in the hermetic tradition.

We consider it not without interest, however, to observe how other traditions also attribute to Saturn the teaching of agriculture understood allegorically. This is the case in an ancient tradition contained in the *Agricoltura Nabatea*, a poem archaic poem translated into German by Daniel Chwolsohn from an ancient Arabic version of the Chaldean text. The author or amanuensis Qu-tâmi, on the first page of his revelation, says that the doctrines contained in the text were originally taught by Saturn... to the Moon, who communicated them to his idol, and the idol to his devotee, the writer, the adept-scriba of the work Qu-tâmi (cf. H. P. Blavatsky, *Sec. Doct.*, II, 474). Chwolsohn places the first Arabic translation at 1300 BC. We cannot tell what the Chaldean word translated as Saturn was, but it would seem to be the planet. In any case, the presence of this character is curious agricultural in Saturn also among this ancient Semitic tribe.

As for the eminently agricultural character of the archaic Italic Saturn, it is indisputable. All agricultural inventions go back to him; that of grafting, for example, and that of manure, the *laetamen* that gladdens and makes the earth fertile. Saturn's symbol is the scythe, which is used to clear the soil of bad weeds, prune the plants and reap the harvest. Festus says that Saturn presided over the culture of the fields, 'quo etiamfalx est ei insigne', and Macrobius (*Sat.*, VII) makes the sickle the emblem of the harvest. However, its agricultural character must be associated with its occult character, a combination that also occurs in other Italic agricultural and chthonic deities. Among these we note Numa's Musa Tacita (Plutarch, *Numa*, 8), Tatius' Goddess Muta (Ovid, *Fast.*, II, 583), the Goddess Angeronia of the Velabro represented with a finger over her mouth and in a silent attitude (*ore obligato signatoque*).

The association of Saturn's agricultural and seafaring character also reappears in other Italic deities. 'The Land-Goddesses of Italy [writes André Piganiol in *Essai sur les origines de Rome*, Paris, 1917, p. 112] are very frequently at the same time Goddesses of sailors. Fortuna holds a rudder and Venus, like Aphrodite, protects the ports'.

## Agricultural symbolism in Rome

Virgil, the initiated poet, calls the earth 'magna parens frugum, Saturnia Tellus' (*Georg.*, II, 173; *Aen.*, VIII, 329) and calls the fields the "Saturnia arva" (*Aen.*, I, 569). "Ar-vum quod aratum nec satum est" (Varro, *R. R.*, I, 12), is the ground worked, *ar-ed*. The root *ar*, whose older meaning is difficult to determine, simply means to work; plough is the instrument of this work, which has the effect of opening up the bowels of the soil and exposing the clods to solar action.

The profound connection between agriculture and worship is already apparent from the fact that the archaic altar (from the Old Latin *asa*), the altar in its primary sense of an altar for lighting the sacred fire on it (*ara turaria*), was made of a simple clod of earth and was called *altaria* when it was high above the ground; Festus tells us that "altaria ab altitudine dicta sunt", because the Ancients made sacrifices to the superior gods in buildings a *terra excitatis*, to the terrestrial gods in the earth, to the underworld gods in *effosa terra* (in a pit).

The altar was also often a simple graminaceous altar (e.g. in Virgil, *Aen.*, XII, 118; Ovid, *Met.*, VII, 241; etc.); but originally it was a clod of earth; and, as Vico says (*Principi di Scienza Nuova*, II), "the ploughed lands were the first altars in the world". And since, as Varro attests (*L. L.*, V), Saturn is fire, so much so that this identification of Saturn and fire explains (*ibid.*; Macrobius, *Sat.*, I, 7) the custom of sending wax candles to the "upper Saturniums" during the Saturnalia, the altar is doubly linked to Saturn: because it is made of a simple clod of earth, and because it is used to light the sacred fire.

The voice *ara* is not the only one that rises from its primitive agricultural meaning to become a term of religious worship. Traces of the allegory of agricultural symbolism still appear today in the Neo-Latin languages. Thus the culture of the fields, the

Culture of the soul and religious cult are designated by closely related words, derived from the Latin *colere*. G. B. Vico (*Principles of the New Science*, II) writes: "The first worship that arose in the world of mankind was the cultivation of the earth; and the first worship was to erect such altars, to light such first fires on them, and to make sacrifices on them, as we have just said, of ungodly men (the *Saturni hostiae*)".

It was called 'cult' as much that of the fields as that of the gods. Virgil sings together of the 'arvorum cultus et sidera caeli' (*Georg.*, I, 1); and he invites farmers to learn 'propeios cultus' (*Georg.*, II, 47); Horace confesses himself as 'parcus deorum cultor'. 'Uncultivated' still indicates both the uncultivated land and the uncultivated man. For just as it is necessary to cultivate the earth in order to obtain the fruit that it would not yield by itself, so it is necessary to cultivate man in order to obtain the fruit that does not ripen by itself.

This assimilation of man, and more particularly of the human body, to the ground is very old and widespread. According to Brail and Bailly's dictionary, it is not impossible that the word *homo* itself designates man as an inhabitant of the earth. From *homo* (*hominis*) is usually derived *humanus*. In such a case *humanus* would be indirectly connected to the earth, but would not be connected with the phonetically so close voice *humus*, a voice that designates the moist earth (*humor*, *humour*) and therefore cultivable, in contrast to the dry, arid and parched earth (*tersa* = earth *pel rotacism*).

Therefore, the connection between *humus* and *humanus* seems to us to be anything but excluded; its plausibility is proven by the existence, which also has its importance, of a similar parallelism in other languages and traditions, and by the existence in Indo-European languages of words etymologically related to these Latin words, and having a similar meaning. E. Boisacq's *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (1923, p. 104) links the Homeric dative χαμαί (on the ground) to a hypothetical i.e. *ghmmai*, from which the Latin *humi* (dative = on the ground) and the hypothetical voice *homos*, *humus*, *humilis*, the Latin v. *hemonem*, the Oscan *humuns* (men), the Umbrian *homones* etc., are derived. and to this root i.e. also the other root *ghom*, *ghem*, which, with the loss of the aspirate, is found in the German *gam* in *Bräutigam*, English *bridegroom* (antic. *bruidegom*), clues and residues disseminated in the various Indo-European languages of an archaic assimilation between man and earth. Assimilation, which has its parallelism in Hebrew, where *adamah* means earth, as element, matter, and *adam* means man, and is the name of the first man, formed by God, according to Genesis, from the mud of the earth.

However, explicit identification between body and earth is categorically made by two ancient Latin writers, Ennius and Varro. Varro says (*L. L.*, V, 59): 'Haec duo, Caelum et Terra, quod anima et corpus. Humidum et frigidum terra eaque corpus, caldo coeli et inde anima'. That is, 'Heaven and earth are the same as soul and body. The body has for its elements the damp and cold that are the earth, and the soul has for its essence heat or heaven'. And a little further on: 'Humores frigidae sunt humi'. Then Varro (*L. L.*, V, 60) writes: "Pachuvius is right when he says: "Animam aether adjudat" [the ether couples the soul]"; and Ennius: "Terram corpus quae dederit, ipsam cepere, neque dispendi facere hilum" [The earth itself, i.e. the body takes what (the soul) gave it, nor does it make the slightest loss with it]". "The separation - continues Varro (*L. L.*, V, 60) - of the soul from the body is for living beings an exit from life [*exitus*]; as death [*exitum*] is called'. [cf. ital. esiziale] and birth 'initia' because the body and soul 'in unum ineunt'.

According to Ennius and Varro, therefore, just as the earth opens thanks to the plough in order to receive the seed sown by the cultivator and make it bear fruit, so the body opens in order to conceive the soul, *matter* thus becomes the soul's *mater*; and the clear and not casual reference to the Mysteries (*initia*) makes it clear that the comparison has value and should be referred not only to the case of human birth, but also to the case of initiatory rebirth (*palingenesis*), the birth to 'new life'.

Varro and Ennius, therefore, use the symbolism of agriculture in a spiritual and even initiatory sense. On the other hand, let us place this passage by Varro next to the one quoted above by Macrobius about the character and esoteric significance of the Saturnalia, and let us see if the two passages do not complement and clarify each other, and if together they do not give us confirmation of the existence, and persistence in classical times, of a Roman initiatory tradition connected to and deriving from the primordial tradition of the Golden Age. Let us see if it is not legitimate, even limiting ourselves to a simple cultural investigation, to see in the culture of the fields over which Saturn presided, the symbol of culture in the spiritual field, and in the *peritia ruris*, in the art of cultivation, taught to the Latins by Saturn, the doctrine and art of cultivating man, the traditional, primordial doctrine, which Saturn, the true God, the *Satya-Deva*, brings from ethereal Olympus, and occulted in Latium in the Golden Age.

Of course, we do not claim with what we have found, illuminated and framed, to persuade all our readers. On the contrary, to the sceptics by system we honestly declare that we do not possess the cinematic documentation of King Saturn's landing on the shores of Latium; and to those who are derisive of our pagan myths, because they believe in exotic *good tidings*, we say nothing, just because we are not allowed to tell them what they deserve. To those, on the other hand, who will at least in part adhere to what we have written, we *must* point out that the present is the *first* exposition of this view of Roman esotericism; and *we must* invite them not to alter it in taking it and representing it, and *to remember*, without reticence or pretence, to cite the source. We say this not out of paltry human ambition, nor in the name of propriety and morality, but rather to avoid misunderstandings.

It is, on the other hand, our duty to recognise and declare that if we are allowed to *pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas*, it is not solely our own doing and merit, but is also due to some important indication promptly and 'hierarchically' transmitted to us.

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