Herman Wirth and the Sacred Proto-Language of Humanity: In Search of the Holy Grail of Meanings – Part 1

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The existence of a single proto-language derives from the very logic of Tradition – attempts at reconstruction

The existence of a single proto-language of humanity derives from the very logic of Traditionalism. If there is a single Primordial Tradition, then the language of this Tradition must have a particular expression. This is obvious to any conscientious reader of Guénon and his followers. In addition, intuition suggests that the languages which modern humanity speaks harbor some strange commonality. When we engage in strict linguistic analysis, this commonality continues to elude us, but some kind of inner conviction does not allow us to cease searching.

Attempts at reconstructing this most ancient language have been constantly undertaken. There are many models of a proto-language which try to reduce existing linguistic and symbolic systems. There is the theory (developed in the Middle Ages) that Ancient Hebrew was the primordial language, and Kabbalistic schools existed which seriously attempted to deduce all other languages (including sacred and non-sacred ones, i.e., historical languages) out of Ancient Hebrew. We also have the “Egyptian theory” put forth in the 20th century by Schwaller de Lubicz and Les Veilleurs. Similar theses had been expressed before by numerous European mystics, such as Heinrich Khunrath, “Egyptian masonry”, etc. All of them tried to restore the proto-language and proto-symbolism on the basis of the Egyptian tradition. There is the famous book by the abbot Johannes Trithemius, Steganographia, which compiled mystical signs as symbols of an angelic language. Trithemius’ disciple, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, produced a whole series of angelic alphabets in his works. Also available are the reconstructions of circular “Atlantic” signs by Paul Le Cour, who published the journal Atlantis. There are also Guido von List’s runic tables which were also claimed to offer an interpretation of all languages through the Ancient Germanic and modern German languages. Baron von Sebottendorf explored the magic of the Arabic language and wrote an interesting pamphlet on the rituals of old Turkish masonry. The idea that all languages descend from Ancient Hebrew was also promoted by Fabre d’Olivet. There are also the only recently published commentaries by young Guénon on Saint Yves d’Alveydre’s Archeometry. The latter was an attempt at creating a universal alphabet that could explain the origin of all languages, traditions, and religious models. Saint Yves d’Alveydre spoke of the existence of a first, primordial language of Vattan in the underground country of Agharta.

There also exists the Brahmanic art of Nirukta (a theologized form of folk etymology), and the cabale phonétique was appealed to by Fulcanelli and the mysterious Grace d’Orsay, one of those astonishing authors who necessitates a separate, detailed discussion.

From the point of view of Tradition, everything necessarily converges to a single formula, a single model. If the world ends (and the end of the world, from the standpoint of Traditionalism, arises out of the infiniteness of its Principle), then finite knowledge about this world should exist. This means that it is possible to know everything all together at once (or almost at once) and forever, to know to the point that nothing in manifested reality is left out of sight. In some sense, absolute knowledge is therefore knowledge of absolute language. The search for such a single, absolute model was particularly actively pursued in the Middle Ages when the holistic approach to reality was widespread among mystics despite the creationist dogmas of official religion. People all at once engaged in mineralogy, theology, medicine, treated peoples and animals, and wrote treatises full of practical advice on smallpox, the names of angels, and the structure of grindstones. All of this comprised a search for integral knowledge, a single formula, a unified model.

The Bible also teaches of a common language of humanity, claiming that one language existed up until the Babylonian dispersion. Christianity also knows of the return to the proto-language, as when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and they spoke in all existing languages at once. The Holy Spirit gave them the special blessing of knowing the original proto-language.

The search for the proto-language in modern linguistics

The idea of reconstructing the proto-language has always excited the minds of the most different people. Many have tried to express their specific views on this matter, but few have managed to forge more or less reliable systems. In fact, such quests have been undertaken by profane Western science as well. Besides the classical line of linguistics which is restricted to the study of language in already existing, historical forms, there also exists in modern linguistics another trend (whose founder was the Italian scholar Trombetti) which proceeds from the assumption of the existence of a single proto-language. Trombetti proved this on the level of positivist facts and believed that the proto-language could be restored. For this he was earnestly criticized. Trombetti’s line was continued by Bopp, the Russian scholar Potebnja, the Soviet linguist and academician Marr (who was harshly criticized by another great linguist, Joseph Stalin) and particularly by the outstanding Serbian scholar Illich-Svitych. The latter founded the Nostratic concept which accounted for the criticisms of Trombetti and Bopp’s models. Illich-Svitych therein developed the thesis that languages are reducible to four or six roots. He distinguished the Eurasian group (including Semitic, Hamitic, Indo-European, and Kartvelian languages), the languages of the North American Indians, and the Sino-Tibetan and Paleo-African groups as the four main meta-clusters. Curiously enough, these four groups correspond to the four corners of the world. The far from mystical Illich-Svitych arrived at these conclusions on the basis of an entirely scientific approach, the path of classical, conventional linguistic analysis. This theory was very popular among Soviet linguistics, but remained unknown in the West. This line has since been discontinued, just as science has frozen altogether. This is a pity, as developing this line could have yielded colossal results. It is one of the most promising trends in linguistics.

Individual (unsuccessful) attempts at constructing a proto-language

In the early 1980’s, I myself actively tried to arrive at this language in imitating the (as a rule, unsuccessful) endeavors of predecessors. After all, the necessity of a proto-language’s existence follows from the Guénonian vision of the Primordial Tradition! Admittedly, I made little progress. I know several languages, including several ancient ones (on a rudimentary level). I tried to somehow systematize the roots and phonetic constructs which seemed to me to be similar. In fact, the Russian scholar Potebnja subjected the Russian language to a similar procedure. To this day, I have a mountain of materials devoted to these experiences. There one can find attempts at reconstructing the proto-language through both mystical alphabets and wholly scholarly linguistic theories. All of this was extremely interesting, took up a lot of my time, but the result was, frankly speaking, pathetic. The ends did not meet. One needs to know much more than I did. Some of the models which I tried to use (including those traceable back to Agrippa Nettesheim [2]) did not stand the test of reliable scientific data.

The revelation of Herman Wirth

And then, suddenly everything changed. I encountered the works of a man who is practically unknown – Herman Wirth. No one knows him in our country, nor do the Traditionalists of the West know him. He is the “great unknown”, le grand inconnu. His works were taken from Berlin by the Soviet Army and for years lay in a storage room where they ended up wet and covered with mold. Nobody had touched them since 1945. I tried unsuccessfully to find Wirth’s works in the libraries of several European capitals. Only once, in the Alain de Benoist’s underground library bunker did I see one of Herman Wirth’s books on a shelf. The owner, however, had paid no special attention to it, which is no surprise, as there was such a volume of books that their owner simply had not yet made his way to Wirth.

I spent two years studying Wirth. For two years I was glued to his works, trying to understand at least something. His works are huge volumes including maps. The text is not structured, everything begins in the middle and stops mid-sentence. I think no one really read it. To do so, one would have to be a fanatic. Interestingly enough, Julius Evola, who is extremely popular among European Traditionalists, called Wirth one of his three main teachers (alongside Guénon and Guido de Giorgio) in his autobiographical work, The Path of Cinnabar. But even after the publication of this book, still no one paid attention to Wirth. Such a strange author. As Guénon wrote, “certain things protect themselves.” There are some items that are laying in the middle of the room in plain sight, but we are incapable of finding them. Modern occultists have even evoked the notion of “black holes” existing everywhere. In fact, everything is more complex and subtle.

As was Herman Wirth. Guénon devoted a very important review to him. Nevertheless, Wirth is unknown, and this despite the fact that even the most insignificant authors mentioned by Guénon or Evola have been devoted in the very least separate studies by Western Traditionalists. But no one in these circles has heard of Wirth.

“We are in search of the stone with runic or prerunic inscriptions”

What comprises Wirth’s ideas, his message? Wirth deciphered the very proto-language which we have been talking about. He did this in a reliable manner without occultist exaggerations and positivist skepticism. No more nor less. His work is maximally close to this language. No one has done more reliable metaphysical, historical, linguistic, or conceptual (if you will) studies of the language of the Primordial Tradition. In my opinion, Wirth did not know Guénon, and I found no citations of him in his works. He read Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the famous Hindu Traditionalist, and cited him. However, Wirth himself was not a Traditionalist. Rather, he was an idealist, a scrupulous scholar and a German patriot. The fact that he did not share the numerous prejudices of occultists who hurry to discredit serious research, only enhances the significance of his works. Looking at Wirth through the eyes of Guénon, we see all that Guénon did not say, but which undoubtedly follows from what he did. Wirth adds an essential part to Guénon’s Traditionalism [5]. Even Evola did not add anything in particular to Guénon. Evola was original, daring, and active, but this rather aesthetic and existential component brought to Traditionalism in fact contains little substance.

What Wirth brought is a startling revelation – sudden, extremely complex, and demanding tremendous attention. This figure so much changed the picture of modern Traditionalism that ignoring him is simply impossible. It is intriguing that although we live on the outskirts of the Traditionalist world, in the bear corner, we are one of the first to approach such important things. In his time, the mysterious author Otto Rahn wrote a book entitled The Crusade against the Grail [6] and advanced the following hypothesis: perhaps the Grail was not a chalic, but a stone with certain prerunic inscriptions that are a universal key to all religious models, and all knowledge in general. Guénon himself wrote (if I’m not mistaken, in The King of the World [7]) that there indeed exists a view that the Grail is simultaneously a chalice, a book, and a stone. When Guénon studied the Canterbury megaliths, he said that it is possible that the Grail ought to be understood as a concrete object covered in signs, and that these signs probably represent primordial hieroglyphs. In some sense, Herman Wirth’s reconstruction reveals something very similar. In the volumes of research of this German scholar, there is something of a Holy Grail, a Holy Grail of meanings.

Arctida – the cradle of humanity

As a kind of prelude to studying the primordial language, Herman Wirth presents an historical-geographical reconstruction of the first ages of mankind. As a positivist scholar, he draws out a long table of monkeys with different species of animals and geological shifts, but we can disregard this. The most interesting begins at 20,000 B.C. Here Wirth switches over to serious, correct language. He adheres to the ideas of the geologist Wegener.

The modern contours of continents emerged only recently. Continents are not dormant and are not constant masses. They slide along the shelf, and thus the look of the earth was once completely different. There once existed two continents: a Northern one, Arctogaia (Arctida) and a Southern one, Gondwana. Wegener’s chronology, which Wirth partially appropriates, is based on the positivist methods of calculating time and transposing modern physical processes onto ancient times, a method which is rather incorrect. Guénon himself has written much [9] about shifts in the cosmic environment in correlation to the unfolding of the cyclical process. But this is not the point.

Wirth argues that Arctida was the cradle of mankind. This is the starting point in Wirth’s model. He claims that man originated at the North Pole, i.e., humanity is essentially a polar phenomenon. Hence Nordism as a method, as a vision of the particularities of the primordial language, primordial knowledge, and primordial religion. This is not the North Pole as an abstract concept (such as the mountain Meru), but a real pole where the continent of Arcotgaia lay and on which lived amazing people – the Hyperboreans. Contemplating the surrounding world, they developed the proto-language which lies at the heart of the complex of ideas which we have now, many thousands of years later.

This model of Wirth’s perfectly corresponds with Guénon’s holistic views on humanity’s polar origins and the primordial Golden Age. Thus, Wirth’s formally positivist research led him to the Nordic theory of man’s origin which is classic for Traditionalism. But if Guénon limits himself to merely asserting this as fact, then Wirth draws conclusions therein of enormous importance. He reasons that we cannot decipher ancient languages and ancient culture, cannot piece together an adequate view of ancient peoples, nor can we find some, so to say, “antediluvian” remnants simply because we do not accept the notion of the northern origin of humanity, do not take into account the fact that the climate in this northern, polar continent was no harsher than the south of modern France. The North Pole was the point from which the rays of civilization spread South.

Affirming this concept, Wirth with ease explains the hang-ups of paleo-anthropology and ancient history. He explains why there are no remains of Nordic man: firstly, because burial forms for Nordic people were different (as was the very quality of their lives), and the lands which they inhabited either shifted or sank. Wirth conducted very interesting research on the shallows of Dogger between Holland and England, where he sought the remains of Arctida which, from his point of view, existed as centers of civilization up to historical times. These explorations yielded colossal results, most of which are, alas, beyond our scope.

The first hieroglyph – the Nordic Year

Now about the primordial language. In Wirth’s view, the main key to understanding this language, and all existing languages and traditions, is the year. The year and man, the year and God, the year and nature, the year and time, the year and space are, in Wirth’s view, synonymous concepts. Man is the embodiment of condensed time. Time in and of itself is a divine manifestation.

The northern, polar cycle is the highest knowledge and, as follows, everything else is to be explained through the calendar. Special attention should be paid to the natural features of the North Pole. We know that a day there lasts not 24 hours, but six months, as does a night. For example, such a notion as the “midnight sun”, which is addressed in many of the Dionysian mysteries and is a generally important element in multiple sacred theories, acquires an entirely natural sense in Arctida – natural-magical meaning. This is the sun that shines at midnight at the North Pole during the summer solstice. Indeed, there is sun, and there is midnight. The memory of this midnight sun, like the memory of the primordial homeland of our ancestors, has been preserved in traditional models and been passed down from generation to generation in the form of legends and stories.

There is a fundamental difference between the daily and yearly cycles. We, living south of the polar latitude (22 degrees North), imagine the year as divided into days. But the man of polar origin saw the year differently. The day of the gods was equal to a year of people, which means that the difference between the divine and human was erased. There was no difference to be distinguished between the created and uncreated; there was no difference between subject and object or divine and natural revelation. Nature was a fact of the Divine, and the Divine was an inner dimension of nature. There existed a kind of “polar-paradisal worldview” in which the spirit was to be found at both the center and the periphery.

Wirth employed the structure of the polar year, or the year as a set of natural phenomenon characteristic of the northern, polar regions, as a universal instrument for interpreting all other elements. The first people were not comical, semi-finished products from classical evolutionary textbooks, and they did not see the world as primitive and flat. This was something completely different. The most diverse concepts, objects, creatures, situations, scenarios, and rituals boil down to a single paradigm. For Wirth, such a method of explaining everything through the paradigm of the year – the polar year – was the starting point of his ambitious studies.

The first calendar model

This is the basic model of the annual polar cycle. It might seem that there is nothing special here. The only particularity is that the South is identified strictly with winter, the East with spring, the North with summer, and fall with the West. In the annual circle, the sun goes in a different direction than in the daily one.

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Figure 1: “N – summer, E – spring, S – Winter, W – autumn”; Figure 2: “N – day, E – morning, S – night, W – evening”

In this, in Wirth’s view, is contained great historical and historic-gnoseological drama.

Ancient humanity, according to Wirth and Tilak, moved south for a number of reasons. For example, in the Bundahishn (the sacred Zoroastrian book), it is said that “the red serpent of Ahriman sent cold to the blessed country of the Aryans and the city of Vara where the primordial white people lived, and they were forced to leave their homes.” So what happened then?

The polar cycles’ yearly phenomenon stop below the 22 degrees northern latitude. Man no longer plainly sees evidence of the primordial calendar-topographical model and does not understand the direct meaning of what was so obvious before. He loses the key to interpreting certain signs and schemes in which movement towards summer and movement upwards mean movement northwards.

Everything is inverted in the ordinary daily cycle, and all the phenomena that lie at the heart of the primordial language and the primordial proto-religion are obscured. Accordingly, mythological elements, and language itself, are now interpreted differently. There is an overlap between at least two cycles. In one – the annual, global, Nordic cycle – movement is counter-clockwise, whereas in the other – the daily one – movement is clockwise. It is by virtue of this that these two sacred paradigms (the daily and yearly) change places and (pay attention to how serious this is!) there is a transition from God to man and from the day of gods to the day of people.

As follows, the symbolic details of the primordial code, the primordial language and paradigm of religious knowledge change places. We lose the key to understanding them. This, according to Herman Wirth, is the Babylonian dispersal of languages. We lost the ciphers of the Nordic worldview, and the miasma of the southern seas begin to penetrate our consciousness. We increasingly become mere people to the point that we reach today’s dismal, critical state. There is probably no lower.

Also important is the hieroglyph of the Celtic cross, the circle with four orientations, which is the first calendar.

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Figure 3: “N – summer, E – spring, S – Winter, W – autumn”

The very notion of a calendar is a very sacred thing. A calendar is a visual model which condenses and clearly displays two concepts: time and space. In a calendar, time is displayed synchronously and simultaneously. What man is given in progressive development is given in a calendar, and only in a calendar, as a possibility of simultaneous setting. Thus, contemplating over the Nordic calendar, meditating on it is one of the most direct ways of making contact with Eternity. When man looks at the calendar, he grasps all time together as his internal quality, and the nature of perceiving the most simple objects changes. He sees a circle, how time turns into space, and how space, thanks to time, acquires orientation. This is very important, because space itself has no orientation without such a calendar; it is insufficient. The cross which establishes these orientations can thus be depicted anywhere.

Thanks to this calendric perception of the world, what happens in this space undergoes some kind of relativization. In the first lecture, we spoke of the transition from qualitative (sacred) space to quantitative (non-sacred, profane) space. Sacred space, furnished with qualitatively meaningful orientations, arises out of the most complex Nordic operation of bringing time into space (“spatializing time”, so to speak).

The main compass of these sacred, qualitative orientations is the calendar.

The point of the North is one, the South point is another, the point of East the third, and the point of the West the fourth. Each of these points of space corresponds to a certain, strictly fixed sign. If we impose the circle of time onto this space, then it shows all possible mutations of space as if grasping the eternal movement of the four directions in one fixed picture.

Interestingly enough, the problem of squaring the circle and perpetuum mobile (“perpetual motor”) which recently completely puzzled the best men of science, is in fact a distant echo of this Nordic knowledge expressed in this simple figure.

Today football fans wear the Celtic cross on their scarves without knowing what colossal meaning this symbol has. It is also depicted on targets for shooting. In the 1960’s, the Belgian Jean Thiriart made the Celtic cross the emblem of his Young Europe (his pan-European national movement) which was later adopted by football fans and skinheads, since which he has been constantly present in their symbols.

Take another look at the Celtic cross.

The sequence is built into the cycle. The line becomes the circle. Eternal movement is provided by the representation of all time at once. It cannot end and cannot be stopped. It cannot disappear. It is some kind of absolute paradigm, the essence of being, expressed graphically.

Such was Herman Wirth’s first step towards revealing the structure of the proto-language.

Already at this stage we can arrive at numerous conclusions of incredible value. Can every situation, every event, and every mythological tale or everyday scenario be dissected using this model?

How do we act, how do we live? Under the sign of the North? Or under the sign of the West? Under the sign of the East? Or under the sign of the South? Along the downward arc or the rising one? Towards what are things gravitating? Towards the sky and summer or towards winter and earth?

Upon applying this paradigm to the most complex cults and theological constructions, we will always find whole layers of meanings, the existence of which we knew nothing of before. Even if Wirth had stopped here, this alone would have already been very serious and very much, as we would be given a clue. But he went further…

Part two coming soon…

Footnotes:

[1] R.Guénon, “Le Roi du Monde”, Paris, 1993, “Le Regne de la Quantite et les Signes des Temps”, Paris, 1995, “Formes traditionnelles et cycles cosmiques”, Paris, 1995.

[2] H.C.Agrippa, “La philosophie occulte”, Paris, 1981.

[3] J.Evola, “Il camino del cinabro”, Milano, 1972