

# **The Heyday of René Guénon's Delusions in "The King of the World"**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyses part of the work of René Guénon (1886-1951), a French esoterist and compulsive comparatist, possessor of a considerable erudition, so he impressed laymen and reasonably informed readers with his writings. However, when examined more carefully, his scholarship was built on the foundations of countless metaphysical and religious beliefs, some quite fanciful, which he collectively termed "Sacred Science" and other exalting terms, so that his erudition is in the same proportion of his credulity, that is, his naivety was as great as his vast metaphysical knowledge, because for him, everything that is metaphysical is more real than what is physical, and if it is symbolic, it is more significant than what is literal, as the following study will try to show.

**KEYWORDS:** René Guénon, Traditionalism, King of the World, Agartha, Primordial Tradition.

## **Introduction**

Many are those who think that erudition and good rhetoric are signs in an author that he is transmitting a safe and reliable knowledge, because he is a sage, so his ideas are true because of his vast erudition and his impressive rhetoric. However, this can be a misleading assessment, because erudition is not synonymous with mastery of a subject, someone may know a subject, but it does not automatically mean that he has mastery over it, nor is rhetoric a sign of reliable knowledge, the way of writing or speaking may be convincing in its expressiveness, but the idea behind the rhetoric may be imprecise or unverifiable at the time of its verification. Abundant scholarship and influential rhetoric impress only uninformed readers or listeners, who must trust the information conveyed, as they do not have the in-depth knowledge to judge what they read or hear.

This is one example, among many others in the esoteric and religious world, of René Guénon (1886-1951), a French esoterist and compulsive comparatist with considerable erudition, so he impressed laymen and reasonably informed readers with his writings. However, when examined more carefully, his scholarship was built on the foundations of countless metaphysical and religious beliefs, some quite fanciful, which he

collectively termed "Sacred Science" and other exalting terms, so that his erudition is in the same proportion of his credulity, that is, his naivety was as great as his vast metaphysical knowledge, because for him, everything that is metaphysical is more real than what is physical, and if it is symbolic, it is more significant than what is literal, as the following study will try to show. Hence, many of his followers became Muslims (Dickson, 2021: 589). His credulity was such that it leads us to suspect his sanity, as he came to the point of believing that he had contact with a Templar Master who died about 600 years ago. "During a séance in 1908, Guénon believed that Jacques de Molay (1243-1314 c. e.), the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, contacted him with instructions to re-establish the Order of the Temple, supplying him with a direct source of initiation" (Dickson, 2021: 592; see also: Sedgwick, 2004: 49). After this event, Encausse (Papus) expelled Guénon from his Masonic Order.

He wrote a lot, about 30 books, if we include published books that collected articles written for magazines at different times in his life. He was already a much more read author in the past, now he is a more forgotten author, still having some influences on a few conservative individuals today. The main proof that his writings fascinate lay people more than they convince specialists was the disapproval of his doctoral thesis at the University of Sorbonne, rejected by the then

important indologist and professor Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935), in 1921 (Sedgwick, 2004: 22-3 and 271). Even with the academic rejection of his thesis, he soon after agreed to publish it, through a Catholic publishing house, with the title of *Introduction Générale à L'étude des Doctrines Hindoues* (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines), 1921, this was his first published book (Guénon, 1921). Because of his questionable scholarship and his fantastical comparisons of doctrines and symbols, his metaphysical and comparative theories have never been accepted in academic milieu, so he is not cited for reasons that will be clarified later.

Sylvain Lévi justified the disapproval of Guénon's thesis on three grounds:

First, it ma[de] light of history and historical criticism, a critique of Guénon's methodology that was in many ways justified. Guénon did not intend to follow the pattern of the academic methods of Indology, (...) his approach was theological rather than anthropological or sociological. For Guénon, Hinduism was a vessel of spiritual truth, not a body of modified beliefs and practices that late nineteenth-century Western research recognized" (Sedgwick, 2004: 22-3 and 271). In fact, his impetus was sometimes so strong that, in some of the more exalted passages, some passages from the book *Introduction Générale à L'étude des Doctrines Hindoues* seem more like a religious preaching than an academic thesis.

Second: “Guénon’s ‘thesis’ held that Hinduism could be reduced to Vedānta. Vedānta is just one of the six Darshanas (Philosophical Schools) of Hinduism, and it especially uses the Upanishads as the end and summary of the Vedas, the most important Hindu scriptures, along with the Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtras. These are among the first Hindu texts to be translated into French and Vedānta became widely known as a result of the inclusion of two chapters from the Bhagavad Gītā in the Cours de Philosophie (Course of Philosophy), 1828, by the popular French philosopher Victor Cousin. . Vedānta was widely appreciated in the nineteenth century west, mainly because it recognized no reality other than the Universal Being, unique and without limiting qualification, a characteristic with obvious appeal to those brought up in a monotheistic culture. For Lévi and other indologists, however, there are many varieties of Hinduism other than Vedanta, that Guénon chose to ignore these (other varieties) was a consequence of the context in which he had first encountered Vedanta” (Ibid, 23).

Third: “Lévi observed that Guénon was very inclined to believe in a mystical transmission of a primordial truth (une vérité première) that emerged in humanity at the beginning of the world, a belief that for Lévi was evidently ridiculous” (Ibid., 23). The following study will show how this belief of Guénon, in an unaltered transmission of a primordial truth until the present day, is difficult to

be sustained, in the face of the conclusions of historical studies, based on documents, even in Guénon's time, when, even more, in the following studies after his death. Even at the time of Sylvain Lévi and René Guénon, there were already sufficient results of historical and literary research, which pointed out the alterations in the oral and written transmissions of the Hindu texts of the past and, consequently, proved the infidelity of the traditional transmission, which is why Lévi called Guénon's thesis of "ridiculous".

Mark Sedgwick observed that "all non-traditionalist researchers who have looked at Traditionalism, since Professor Sylvain Lévi rejected Guénon's thesis in 1921, have come to the same conclusion: these people are not serious. They ignore history, and they ignore everything that doesn't fit their theories. In the words of Antoine Faivre: Traditionalism de-historizes and de-spatializes its ontological predicates. Their propensity to search everything for similarities in the hope of finally finding a hypothetical unity is evidently detrimental to critical-historical research, that is, to empirical research, which is more interested in revealing the origin, course, changes, and migrations of phenomena it studies. As Faivre recognizes: those who set out to know the 'truth' are unlikely to recognize anything unexpected they encounter on the way" (Sedgwick, 2004: 271). In turn, in a later edition, Guénon criticized the historical method and textual criticism in

Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines (Guénon, 1945: 18-20), certainly motivated by S. Lévi's justifications for failing the thesis.

The failure of his thesis was a blow to his academic career. Mark Sedgwick observed the following about Guénon's fate after this misfortune: "After Lévi's rejection of his thesis, however, Guénon had to abandon all hope of a regular academic career, the Catholic Institute was then the only forum left for him. Guénon's friends helped him get a job as a philosophy professor (...). The alliance between the Catholic Institute and Guénon could not last long" (Sedgwick, 2004: 30), due to ideological differences. So, in addition to having his thesis failed, Guénon remained an unemployed person, who needed the help of his Catholic friends to get a job, so distant from the brilliant career of those successful academics who are approved in university exams. Their biographies do not mention, however, everything indicates that René Guénon was an inflexible and stubborn student, since, during the doctorate, the doctoral student's chances of altering the arguments of his thesis, with the help of the supervisor, in order to get approval, are many. However, he did not accept to make the necessary changes, with that his thesis was considered "ridiculous".

It seems that the disapproval of his thesis marked a resentment in his later life, because, at one time or another, in his subsequent works, he always took the opportunity to criticize orientalist



and researchers who do not recognize traditionalism as a priority. Consider one of his critiques of the evolutionary mentality: “Among the specifically modern mistakes which we have often had occasion to denounce, one which is most directly opposed to all true understanding of traditional doctrines is what may be called 'historicism' which, even more, it is basically nothing more than a simple consequence of the 'evolutionist' mentality. It consists, in effect, in supposing that all things have their origins in the crudest and most rudimentary way, to subsequently undergo a progressive elaboration” (Guénon, 2002: 72). Obviously, he did not like 'historicism', as it is capable of pointing out the high degree and enormous amount of anachronisms in his speculations. Finally, the historical method triumphed, because since the initial formation of courses in religions in universities around the world, the historical method was adopted and is used until today, Guénon's traditionalist method was ignored, with that he is today considered an outcast in the academia. In conclusion, René Guénon was a frustrated academic, who then set out to write according to his personal interpretations and persuade uninformed readers. In his later publications, he took the opportunity to criticize and discredit the reader about academic studies.

## His Life

His full name was René Jean-Marie Joseph Guénon (1886-1951), after the 1930s, after his interest in Sufism, he adopted the Arabic name of Abd al-Wahid Yahya, when he moved to the city of Cairo, Egypt, in 1930, where he lived until his death in 1951, at the age of 64. His most cited biography is the one written by Paul Chacornac, editor of the magazine *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis), later called *Les Études Traditionnelles* (The Traditional Studies), which published many articles by Guénon, under the title of *La Vie Simple de René Guénon* (The Simple Life of René Guénon), first edition in 1958. However, as will be shown later, his life was not that simple.

He was born on November 15, 1886, in Blois, France, to a Catholic family whose ancestors had settled in that region for years. “From his birth, René Guénon was a person of fragile health (...) his state of health was always delicate. Before him, his mother had already lost a three-year-old daughter” (Chacornac, 1958: 18). A problem that hindered him in his studies, even having to abandon courses due to poor health. “His childhood caused many concerns to his parents, because of his delicate health” (Idem, 20). His health was so poor that, in 1906, he was released from military conscription. During his studies in his hometown of Blois, Guénon was “a brilliant student, always at the top of his class” (Idem, 24),

he even received an award from the Blois Society of Science and Letters. In 1902 he began to study rhetoric, the following year, 1903, he completed his course in philosophy and in 1904 he studied mathematics at a local college, with frequent health problems.

In October 1904 Guénon went to Paris and applied to the École Polytechnique. Although he was a good student in Blois, but in Paris, on the contrary, his new teachers, while recognizing his good will and his ardour for work, made him understand that he should not continue on this path. (...) the slowness of his progress in Mathematics was mainly due to his precarious health, which prevented him from regularly following the courses” (Chacornac, 1958: 27). That is, when in a more intellectual environment, Guénon did not stand out as a brilliant student, as in his small hometown. After trying other means, the teachers told him that he was still far from the exam levels (idem, 27). So, discouraged by the professors, for the time being, Guénon gave up on continuing his academic studies.

From then on, Guénon became involved with esoteric groups, so in vogue in Paris at that time. The first group to join was the Esoteric Christian Martinist Order, led by Dr. Encausse, better known by the pseudonym Papus. But, he soon became disappointed with this order claiming that it “had not received any authentic spiritual transmission”. So, next he joined the Gnostic

Church of France, founded by Léonce Fabre des Essarts (Synesius), which he also did not take seriously. Even so, he was the founder and main contributor to the magazine *La Gnose* (The Gnosis), writing articles until the year 1922. After joining a Masonic lodge, he was initiated in Taoism and also in Sufism. He studied Hinduism, highlighting the Vedanta tradition, which he pointed to as the authentic preserver of the Primordial Tradition. Mark Sedgwick conjectured that Guénon may have been initiated by some Hindus in Paris. However, he doubted and concluded that “Guénon's understanding of Hinduism derived exclusively from his readings of texts and studies then available in Paris. Nowhere did Guénon claim that this was not the case, and he never visited India” (Sedgwick, 2004: 49). The initiation of Guénon by Hindus would be impossible, because, as we will see later, Hinduism is a hereditary religion, therefore Hindus do not initiate Europeans.

Released from military service due to health problems, Guénon returned to study philosophy at the Sorbonne during the First World War. In 1917, he taught philosophy for a year in Algeria. He then returned to Paris and attempted a doctorate at the Sorbonne, but, as already mentioned, it resulted in that disappointing disapproval of his thesis by Professor Sylvain Lévi in 1921. He did not give up his theory and published, through a Catholic publishing house, in the same year, 1921, his

thesis entitled *Introduction Générale à L'étude des Doctrines Hindoues* (General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines).

From 1925 onwards, Guénon became a contributor to a magazine edited by Paul Chacornac (author of his biography) called *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis), and after 1935, under Guénon's influence, this magazine became *Les Études Traditionnelles* (The Traditional Studies). After passing through various occult organizations, Guénon became convinced that “the occult organizations did not hold any serious teaching and were directing their members a false spiritualism that was incoherent and devoid of traditional basis. René Guénon then thought of grouping the most interesting elements of these organizations” (Chacornac, 1958: 34). For example, of Freemasonry, he once said: “Freemasonry has undergone a degeneration, the beginning of this degeneration is the transformation of Operative Freemasonry into Speculative Freemasonry” (Chacornac, 1958: 36). A sign of how he clung to tradition and rejected innovation. It was from then on that Guénon began to gradually develop his theory of the Primordial Tradition which, for him, was the source of all the spiritual wisdom of the world, something like an initial revelation, through a diversified and broad comparative process of doctrines, practices, rites and symbols, extracted from different traditions, that is, a comparative method created by him,

which pointed to a unity behind all doctrines and all truly traditional symbols, a transmission preserved by what he called Traditional Transmission, from the beginning of its revelation to the present day, most commonly found in the East, especially in Hinduism (Dickson, 2021: 589 and 593).

In September 1920, Christian theologian Père Peillaube asked Guénon to write a critique of the Theosophical Society. He accepted and the book *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une Pseudo-religion* (Theosophism, History of a Pseudo-Religion) was published in 1921. This book pleased the Catholic public in France, so two years later the dose was repeated, Guénon published another critic *L'Erreur Spirite* (The Spiritist Error), 1923. He liked to write so much that he even acted as a “writer by order”. In 1927, he published his most read and most repeatedly published book: *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World), in which he prophesies the near end of modern culture. He did not survive to witness it, but, contrary to what he predicted, approximately one hundred years after publication, modern culture remains very vigorous, despite the ups and downs of its trajectory, and the inequality in different peoples, as well as showing no signs of loss of vigour.

In 1930, Guénon left Paris for Cairo, Egypt, where he immersed himself in the Islamic world. He was initiated into a Sufi order, carried out the Islamic declaration of faith, had an oratory in his

house, took Islamic vows, attended a mosque regularly to pray and worship Allah, married a Muslim daughter of a sheikh, educated his children according to Muslim tradition, he tried to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, but was prevented from not having Egyptian citizenship and was buried according to the Muslim rite. Guénon continued as a Muslim until the end of his life in 1951. The intriguing thing is that, when we read Guénon's works, we are struck by his admiration for the Advaita Vedānta of Hinduism, which he pointed out as the tradition that most preserves the Primordial Wisdom, then, instead of converting to Vedanta, which he so highly praised, he became a Sufi. Some of his biographers argue that Guénon once claimed that Islam was the most accessible way for a Westerner to approach Primordial Tradition. Even after converting to Islam, he continued his interest in Hinduism, writing several articles (Guénon, 2002).

The obstacle is that Advaita Vedānta is one of the traditional schools of Hinduism, the latter is not a proselytizing religion, but a hereditary religion, that is, it is not possible to convert to Hinduism, to be a Hindu one must be the son or daughter of a Hindu couple belonging to one of the four castes. Therefore, a Frenchman such as René Guénon could not convert to Hindu Vedanta, as orthodox Hinduism does not accept converts. What he could have done, had he been interested in joining the practice of the Vedanta system, would

be to join some of the New Religious Movements inspired by Vedantine ideas and practices, emerging at that time, such as the Rāmākṛṣṇa Mission, through Swami Vivekānanda's international propagation, Sri Ramana Mahārshi's Ātman Yoga and Swami Shivānanda's Divine Life Society, as all these Advaita Vedānta-practicing groups accept Westerners as they do not follow the orthodox Hinduism of Hindu Dharmashatras, so they are not called Hindu groups, but of New Religious Movements inspired in Hinduism. However, since these are somewhat innovative groups of Hinduism, who reinterpret it, this innovation was not to the liking of Guénon, who did not accept innovations that interrupted the chain of Traditional Transmission. Therefore, for Guénon, these New Religious Movements were degenerations of the Primordial Tradition, for him purity was in orthodox Hinduism, so he was not interested in affiliation (for further details, see: Guénon, 1987b: 291-5, where he comments on the New Religious Movements Inspired by Hinduism). René Guénon died on January 7, 1951, in the city of Cairo, Egypt, at the age of 64. His last years were difficult due to his worsening health.

### **His Work**

In a way, we can divide it into the following themes:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some works were only published after his death in 1951.



1. Works on fundamental metaphysical principles: Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines Hindues (General Introduction to the Studies of Hindu Doctrines, 1921), L'Homme et son Devenir selon le Vêdânta (Man and his Becoming According to Vedânta, 1925 ), Le Symbolisme de la Croix (The Symbolism of the Cross, 1931), Les États Multiples de l'Être (The Multiple Stages of Being, 1932), La Métaphysique Orientale (The Oriental Metaphysics, 1939), Les Principes du Calcul Infinitesimal ( The Principles of Infinitesimal Calculus, 1946) and Études sur l'Hindouisme (Studies on Hinduism, 1967).

2. Works on esoterism and initiation: L'Ésotérisme de Dante (The Esoterism of Dante, 1925), Saint Bernard (St. Bernard, 1929), Aperçus sur l'Initiation (Perspectives on Initiation, 1946), Initiation et Réalisation Spirituelle (Initiation and Spiritual Realization, 1952), Aperçus sur l'éso-térisme Chrétien (Perspectives on Christian Esoterism, 1954) and Études sur la Franc-maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage (Volume I 1964 and Volume II 1965 – Studies on Freemasonry and Fellowship).

3. Works on symbolism: La Grande Triade (The Great Triad, 1946), Symboles de la Science Sacrée (Symbols of Sacred Science, 1962), Formes Traditionnelles et Cycles Cosmiques (Traditional Forms and Cosmic Cycles, 1970), Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme Islamique et le Taoïsme (Perspectives on Islamic Esoterism and Taoism,

1973) and *Le Roi du Monde* (The King of the World, 1927).

4. Works criticizing the modern world and neo-spiritualisms: *Orient et Occident* (East and West, 1924), *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World, 1927), *Autorité Spirituelle et Pouvoir Temporel* (Spiritual Authority and Power Temporal, 1929), *Le Théosophisme, Histoire d'une Pseudo-religion* (Theosophism, the History of a Pseudo-Religion, 1921), *L'Erreur Spirite* (The Spiritual Error, 1923) and *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps* (The Kingdom of Quantity and the Signs of the Times, 1945).<sup>2</sup>

## **The Traditionalism**

There is not just one Traditionalism, but several, that of René Guénon is just one among many. The meaning can be quite broad, ranging from someone with nostalgic ideas and customs, which they may have assimilated in their youth, to an ideological movement, in a narrower sense, that gives preference to specific old ideas and practices over specific ones that replaced them. In short, it is a form of conservatism, that is, preferring stagnation over innovation.

Mark Sedgwick divided the history of 20th century Traditionalism into three stages. The first

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<sup>2</sup> For a brief analysis of his work, see: Chacornac, 1958: 59-80.

stage was until the 1930s, when R. Guénon developed traditionalist philosophy, wrote several articles and books, and gathered a small group of followers. In the second stage, an attempt was made to put traditionalist philosophy into practice in two different contexts: Islamic Sufism, as an example of eastern metaphysics, and European fascism, as an example of revolt. In the third stage, after the 1960s, traditionalist ideas began to merge into the general culture of the West and passed from the West to the Islamic world and Russia (Sedgwick, 2004: 22). R. Guénon's Traditionalism is not, and never was, an institutionalized organization, only an ideological movement, which at one point tried to put some ideas into practice, but survived more as a movement from which each conservative took what interested him, in order to incorporate into other ideologies.

The word tradition derives from the Latin verb “trādēre”, which means “to transmit” (to posterity), “to deliver”, “to entrust”. The most common meaning is “a statement, belief, or practice handed down (especially orally) from generation to generation”. Specifically, R. Guénon's Traditionalism considers tradition in the sense of “a belief and practice handed down from time immemorial, or rather, beliefs and practices which must have been handed down but were lost to the West during the latter half of the second millennium c. e. According to Guénon's Traditionalism, the modern West is in crisis as a

result of this loss of the transmission of Tradition” (Sedgwick, 2004: 21). Strictly speaking, Guénon's contestation is not with the West in the geographical sense, but with the modern, therefore evolutionary culture that is predominant in it. For him, the solution lay in the traditional example of the East (Dickson, 2021: 595), but the West should not be orientalized, that is, absorb oriental ideas and customs, but rather rescue its own tradition, which was lost with the end of the Middle Ages and the rise of the Modern Era. For Guénon, the Middle Ages were a golden age and not a dark one. His thinking, of course, is almost the complete opposite of that of the evolutionists. For example, for him, Astronomy is not a scientific improvement of Astrology, but, contrary to what many historians and scientists consider, its degeneration, as well as Chemistry is not a development of Alchemy, but also its worsening, as many anti-progressive assessments. In short, for him progress is a cultural horror.

The theory of Traditionalism that higher wisdom was revealed in a very distant past and preserved by a few surviving traditions, therefore it is a traditional knowledge, in a way that cultural progress is the enemy of ancient wisdom, is against the explanation, by historians, that the evolution of religious culture followed the evolution of human culture over many centuries (for more information, see: Bellah, 2011). René Guénon's traditionalist theory represents a challenge to the

theory of the evolution of religious culture expounded by Robert N. Bellah in his landmark book *Religion in Human Evolution: from the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Axial, 2011. René Guénon said the following about evolutionism: “Evolutionism, despite multiple more or less important divergences, has become a true official dogma; it is taught as a law, which is forbidden to discuss, which in reality is nothing more than the most gratuitous and the least founded of all hypotheses” (Guénon, 1987a: 29). He admired the following phrase: “Western science is an ignorant knowledge” (Idem: 37).

The essential elements of Guénon's traditionalist philosophy are found in four of his books published between 1921 and 1927. The first was *L'introduction Générale à L'etude des Doctrines Hindoues* (A General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines) published in 1921. This was the book based on Guénon's doctoral thesis, which Sylvain Lévi failed in 1921. Therefore, it was in this first book that Guénon coined the expression Perennial Philosophy, as synonymous with a tradition that crossed all history to finally survive unchanged in few current traditions, especially in the Vedānta tradition of India (Dickson, 2021: 589), more specifically, in the Advaita Vedānta current of Adi Shankarāchārya (788-820 c. e.). This thesis Sylvain Lévi understood it as historically absurd. In the words of Mark Sedgwick: “Then, in the nineteenth century,

Perennialism was revived in a slightly modified form, with the newly discovered Vedas being regarded as their surviving textual expression. It was in this form, (...), that Guénon found Perennialism, and it is this form of Perennialism that is presented in the book *Introduction Générale*, which was rejected by Lévi, and is central to *Traditionalist Philosophy*” (Sedgwick, 2004: 24).

In this book, in the later revised and expanded edition, among the many theories of Guénon that were never confirmed, is his criticism of Gregocentrism, through his claim that the ancient Greeks absorbed ideas from the eastern peoples, especially the Indians, even before the Greek occupation of the region of Bactria (present-day Afghanistan) by the troops of Alexander the Great, where a fertile Greek culture thrived. His conviction was such that he went so far as to say that: “After Aristotle, the signs of Hindu influence in Greek philosophy became more and more rare, to the point of disappearing, because that philosophy (the Greek) closed itself in a sphere more and more limited and contingent, more and more distant from any real intelligentsia. (...) It was only among the Neoplatonists that eastern influences made their appearance again and it is there, in fact, that certain metaphysical ideas, such as that of the Infinite, can be found for the first time among the Greeks (Guénon, 1945: 51).

Another important book by Guénon on Traditionalism is *Orient et Occident* (East and West), from 1924, a warning for saving the West from collapse through the Eastern tradition. In the first half of the book, Guénon systematically attacked the illusion of materialism and the superstitions of progress, reason, change, and sentimental moralization. In the words of R. Guénon in *Orient et Occident* (p. 19): “Modern Western civilization appears in history as a true anomaly, among all those that we know more or less completely, this civilization is the only one that has developed an purely material culture, and this monstrous development, the beginning of which coincides with what is conventionally called the Renaissance, has been accompanied, as it should inevitably be, by a corresponding intellectual regression (...). This regression has reached such a point that Westerners today no longer know what pure intellectuality can be, and they no longer even suspect that such a thing could exist, hence their contempt, not only for Eastern civilizations, but even for the European Middle Ages...” (Guénon, 1987a: 19). For him, perfection was in the beginning, evolution was decay: “It is in the beginning that everything that appears in the spiritual and intellectual realms is found in its state of perfection, from which it has only subsequently fallen through that 'obscuriation' which necessarily accompanies each cyclical process of manifestation” (Guénon, 2002: 72).

By “pure intellectuality”, Guénon meant something close to metaphysical intelligence, which was replaced by a superstitious cult of reason, which values what is worthless. Strictly speaking, Guénon was not attacking Western civilization, in the geographical sense, but modern civilization, so the title of the book, instead of “East and West”, should be Tradition and Modernity. For, “what Guénon opposes is not the West, but the modern world, and what he hopes is not the triumph of the East, but the restoration of its proper traditional civilization to the West” (Sedgwick, 2004: 25). For Guénon, the “proper traditional civilization” of the West took place during the years of the European Middle Ages. And he prophesied the immediate end of modern civilization: “The West is in grave danger, because it is based on nothing more substantial than industrial superiority, without a spiritual foundation. Western civilization is in immediate danger of cataclysmic collapse into barbarism and consequent extinction through assimilation by more solidly founded civilizations” (Idem, 25-6 and Dickson, 2021: 595). R. Guénon, who died in 1951, did not survive to testify that his prophecy did not come true, since the triumph of modern civilization in the West was even greater in the second half of the 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, despite some setbacks. No modern nation has been assimilated by another “more solidly founded civilization”, that is, by a traditional civilization. The Islamic State's



expansionist attempt to found a global Islamic empire was only a dream. The closest thing to this happened was that in some countries, which were already Muslim, they were taken over by a more radical Islam, while other countries preserved a moderate Islam. In countries that were once traditional, traditionalism gave way to secularism, and they became the countries with the highest degrees of civility, human development, schooling, quality of life and social equality (Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Japan, Korea, Singapore and others).

The second part of the book is dedicated to explaining how this collapse could be avoided, through an oligarchic solution. For him, what was needed was the formation of an “intellectual elite”, to receive the traditional teaching, through an assimilation of Eastern doctrines, in case the Western forms could not be found, in order to push the West towards the restoration of a traditional civilization.

Another book even more important for understanding Guénon's Traditionalism is *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (The Crisis of the Modern World), from 1927. This is his best-known and most read book, it has been reprinted repeatedly since its initial publication and it is possible to be found even today. Mark Sedgwick regarded it as Guénon's masterpiece. The book is an improvement on *Orient et Occident* with some

changes in terminology, style, and clarity.<sup>3</sup> For example, in this book the expression “pure intellectuality”, used in *Orient et Occident*, has been replaced by “sacred science” (Sedgwick, 2004: 28).

In this book, Guénon reinforces and deepens his thesis of an imminent collapse of the modern world: “... in other words, that a more or less profound transformation is imminent, that a change of orientation must inevitably take place soon. (...) because, for me, putting myself in a more general point of view, it is the whole modern era, as a whole, that represents a period of crisis for the world” (Guénon, 1927: 10). Later he said: “This end is certainly not the end of the world, in the full sense in which some would like to understand it, but it is at least the end of a world; and what must end is Western civilization in its present form” (Guénon, 1927: 16). About a hundred years have passed since Guénon predicted the end or the “more or less profound transformation and a change of orientation” in the Modern World, yet these events have not happened. What happened was the opposite, the Modern World has strengthened since then, which heroically endured waves of strong oriental and

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<sup>3</sup> When we compare both books, we notice that *Orient et Occident* displays a much more confusing writing and, to make matters worse, with extensive paragraphs of up to three pages, which prevents the reader from resting more often.

mystical influences, such as the Counter Culture Movement and the New Age Movement, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and did not collapse.<sup>4</sup> If the Modern World were really so close to a civilizational collapse, as Guénon insisted, it would not have resisted the above movements, which proposed the transformation to a greater spirituality of the West, with many elements of the culture and traditional practices of the East, especially from India and China. This was the time when the greatest immigration of gurus to the West took place.

A feature frequently present in his works, both in books and in articles, is the precariousness of historical documentation, which, sometimes, is completely omitted and, when used, is selected with those quotations that only support his metaphysical theories. Therefore, his books and articles contain very few citations of works by other researchers and historians, sometimes none, and consequently never include a bibliography at the end. The results of archaeological explorations, already flourishing in his time, are never cited, as well as historical and linguistic studies, and when

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<sup>4</sup> The oriental influence was so strong that even the most popular rock band of the time, the Beatles, became involved with Indian mysticism, when its members became disciples of the then unknown guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, instructor of Transcendental Meditation, who, after meeting in India, he became known worldwide and with a large following, which led him to move to the USA.

cited, it is to criticize their validity or point out their inferiority in the face of the teachings of Traditional Culture. All this based on his idea that material knowledge is below and, therefore, subordinated to metaphysical knowledge. In short, his works are addressed to a gullible audience, which believes in the primacy of metaphysics and automatically accepts the subordination of science. With that, conservatives of different currents absorbed his ideas, in whole or in part, which, in turn, naturally, were destined to be ignored by the academic world and, among the most debauched, ridiculed by sceptics.

### **The Infidelity of the Hindu Tradition**

Tradition necessarily depends on transmission, that is, there is no tradition whatsoever without transmission from one generation to another, from this one to the next, and so on, until a tradition disappears. In the past, the transmission of knowledge was done orally, then the written form, today we have the electronic form. Before the electronic inventions of voice and image recording, the fidelity of oral transmission was almost impossible to verify, since the event was not recorded, unlike today, when we have instruments for recording the human voice. In the case of Hindu culture, whose primordiality is highlighted in the books of René Guénon, the first texts were composed and transmitted only orally in

Antiquity, only after a few centuries were these texts passed to written form. An indication that these ancient texts were extracted and memorized from oral expositions is the number of pronouns that indicate the use of signs by the speaker during dialogues, especially in the Upanishads, such as “this”, “that”, “these”, “those”, etc. , which results in a lack of definition for current translators and in discussions between interpreters.

Therefore, it is not possible to know precisely the degree of fidelity or change in the oral transmission of this period. What is possible to know are only the surviving traces in the different written versions, after the passage of these texts to written form. That is, the amount of textual and editorial differences, when comparing the recensions of the same text, indicates that, at the time of written transcription, the texts already differed due to changes or omissions that occurred during the long period of oral transmission, especially when we compare the same text transmitted in different regions and at different times. Differences can be in the length of the text, in the arrangement of chapters, in the order of paragraphs or verses, in the writing, in euphony, in the meter, in the greater or lesser presence of archaisms and in the linguistic style.

These large amounts of textual differences require the prior comparison of many manuscripts of the same work, in order to find the text closest to the original, obviously when we do not have the

autograph manuscript, in order to arrive at the critical edition. This work is known as Textual Criticism. However, few works of Hinduism have been published through this prior process of critical preparation, by comparing as many manuscripts as possible before editing. Most of the times, the work is published using only a single manuscript or a few manuscripts. So, when this extensive work of comparing many manuscripts is done, before the publication of the critical edition, many surprises emerge, as it is discovered that many previous editions do not correspond to the closest version of the probable original text, or that this version is the most altered among the manuscripts compared (see: Olivelle, 1998b: xv-xix and Witzel, 2014: 56-62).

In order to avoid that this study becomes too extensive, we will limit it to just a few points of the Hindu tradition, so admired by René Guénon. In the Vedic Antiquity of India, the different recensions of the Vedic texts led to the formation of several Vedic schools (shākhās). So, in Patanjali's Mahābhāshya there are mentioned the existence of 1,131 shākhās (Vedic Schools) in the past, being 21 from the Rig Veda, 101 from the Yajur Veda, 1000 from the Sāma Veda and 9 from the Atharva Veda. While the Muktika Upanishad (I.01.07-14) mentions 1,180 schools (shākhās) as follows: "The Vedas are mentioned as being four in number, their schools (shākhās) are many. So also the Upanisads. The Rig-veda has 21 shākhās, the

Yajur-veda 109 shākhās, the Sāma Veda 1,000 and the Atharva Veda 50. In each shākhā there is an Upanishad” (Aiyar, 2003: 01 and 209). “The Caranavyūha, a Parishita<sup>5</sup> of the Yajurveda, lists five schools (shākhās) of the Rig Veda: Shākala, Bāskala, Āshwalayana, Shankhāyana and Māndūkāyana. Other sources provide a greater number of Rigvedic schools. There are seven according to the Atharvaveda Parishita (Brereton, 2014: vol. I, 16).<sup>6</sup>

However, of these schools (shākhās), only 13 Samhitās (hymn collections) have survived to the present day: 03 from the Rig Veda (Shākala, Āshwalāyana and Shānkhāyana, the latter also called Kaushītaki),<sup>7</sup> 05 from the Yajur Veda (04

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<sup>5</sup> Supplementary text to the Samhitā (Collection of hymns). Each Veda has its Parishitas, the quantity is always changing as new texts are discovered, the most numerous collection of Parishitas is the Atharvaveda with more than 70 Parishitas.

<sup>6</sup> See the schemes with the names of the achāryas (masters) of these schools (shākhās) mentioned in the Purānas in Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, 04-6.

<sup>7</sup> B. B. Chaubey informed us that “the tradition of reciting the Āshwalayana Samhitā is completely lost and there is only one pandit, at the moment, in India, who is able to recite it in the way that it could have been recited in the past. However, with Kaushītaki (Shankhāyana) we are in a more fortunate situation as we have at least three pandits (...). They know the traditional technique of recitation well and know a handful of Sūktas and Mantras by heart, though not the entire Samhitā by heart, just by reading” (Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, VII).

from the Yajur Veda Black: Kathaka, Kapisthala, Mantrāyaniya and Taittiriya and 01 from the White Yajur Veda: Vājasaneyi), 03 from the Sāma Veda (Ranayaniya, Kauthuma and Jaiminiya) and 02 from the Atharva Veda (Shaunaka and Paippalada)<sup>8</sup> (see: Botelho: 2018: 02-3). The Rig Veda's Āshwalayana Samhitā has 209 more verses than the Rig Veda's Shākala Samhitā recension (Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, xi). S. W. Jamison and J. Brereton understood that the losses of some recensions of the Samhitā (collection of hymns) of the Rig Veda do not represent that much damage, due to the textual similarities between them, so “there is no need to regret the loss of these recensions” (Brereton, 2014: vol. I, 16).<sup>9</sup>

On Guénon's proposal that the Veda embodies a perpetual wisdom and was transmitted through the Vedanta Tradition, thus preserving the Primordial Tradition, below are the conclusions of some of the leading Vedic scholars of the present and recent past on the transmission of the Veda to nowadays. For example, Jan Gonda, in his landmark work *Change and Continuity in India*

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<sup>8</sup> These numbers are eventually changed, due to new discoveries of supposedly lost texts.

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth study of six Rgvedic Shākhās Samhitās (Collections of Hymns from the Rgvedic Schools – Āśvalāyana Samhitā, Shākala Samhitā, Bahvrcha Samhitā, Māndūkeya Samhitā, Bāshkara Samhitā and Shānkhāyana Samhitā), from the surviving data, see: Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, 01-146.



*Religion*, concluded just the opposite; “...notwithstanding the fact that the study of the Veda was a duty for all men belonging to the three upper classes of society, a proper understanding of that body of literature was lost at a still very distant time, a philological study of it, atrophied in the course of time, and the works of medieval commentators are, in their efforts to interpret the ancient texts formally and materially, ample evidence of ignorance and false notions, misunderstanding the meaning of the texts and the intentions of their authors, and providing anachronistic, subjective or symbolizing explanations. There is every reason to argue that India had a very incomplete and inadequate knowledge of the Veda before it was discovered by European research” (Gonda, 1997: 09). Then, next, this author went on to point out and analyse dozens of changes that took place from the Vedic period to late Hinduism. Above all, critical remarks on the theories raised to explain the numerous changes between the ancient Vedic culture and Hinduism, since the problems faced in studying the history of India are much more complicated than certain archaeologists, linguists and historians of religions<sup>10</sup> suppose, and that many hypotheses based on a predominant influence of a permanent

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<sup>10</sup> And even more so for delusional speculators like René Guénon and others.

substrate are simplistic and ill-founded, due to the numerous innovations.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the habit of interpreting the Upanishads on the basis of medieval commentators (Shankarāchārya, Rāmanuja, Madhwāchārya, etc.), Michael Witzel and Stephanie W. Jamison noted the following problem: "...the study of these texts has largely been based on the very late commentaries of Shankara (seventh century c. e.) and others. The time, place, and cultural and religious background of the commentators are as far removed from the authors of the Upanishads (c. 500 b. c. e.) as are today's western readers of the Upanishads commentators. Furthermore, Shankara and the other medieval Advaita writers took the ancient Upanishads as a whole and used them as scriptural supports for the monistic philosophy of their day" (Witzel, 1992: 26). See Erich Frauwallner's remarks: "In order to understand the philosophy of the Upanishads, it is not necessary, above all, to introduce late things into them.

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<sup>11</sup> Gods that have survived in the Hindu tradition for many centuries have undergone so many syncretisms and so many alterations that their initial characteristics are sometimes almost unrecognizable. This is the case of the god Shiva. Therefore, for the development of the concept of the Hindu god Shiva, from Vedic Rudra to more recent concepts, see: *The Concept of Rudra-Śiva Through the Ages* by Mahadev Chakravarti. Also, for the development of the concept of Īshwara (Director God) in Hinduism, since the first mentions in the Atharva Veda Samhitā, see: Gonda, 1997: 131-63.

Especially, it is not necessary to interpret them through the monistic idealism of Shankara, as Deussen has done. Shankara's doctrine is separated from the ancient Upanishads by a period of over a thousand years, and it relies entirely on other presuppositions and opinions that were created only in the transitional period. Furthermore, there is no uniform and harmonious philosophy in the Upanishads. Only the late Vedanta system created an artificial unity. The ancient Upanishads present only a number of isolated texts, which were individually recited as independent texts. They were broadcast repeatedly in different contexts and this proves their independence. The task science now faces is to understand these different doctrines in their originality, order and organize them, as well as explain their origins and development" (Frauwallner, 1997, vol. I: 358-9).

Furthermore, it is not accurate to consider that everything in the Veda is a primordial revelation, as Guénon imagined, since archaeological, linguistic and historical studies currently point to the fact that the Veda, in reality, is an offshoot of Indo-Iranian culture and religion, the latter also being an offshoot of Indo-European culture. S.W. Jamison and J. Brereton have clearly summarized the researchers' current conclusions that the Rgveda "stands at the end of a long tradition of Indo-Iranian and Indo-European praise poetry, most of which is mirrored in the Ancient

Avestian Gāthās attributed to Zarathustra". And further on, "The Rgveda is part of a long tradition of Indo-European praise poetry, going back to the Indo-Iranian period with roots in the Indo-European period. The Rgveda is just the surface of a very deep tradition" (Brereton, 2014: 04-5). Abundant linguistic and historical studies have shown that Vedic culture was brought to the Indian continent by the Aryans, a people derived from the Indo-European people, who moved towards Central Asia, and some groups later migrated to Iran and to the India. The Rgveda narrates the battles between these Aryan invaders, represented mainly by the Aryan god Indra, with the natives Dasas and Dayus (for more details, see: Keith, 1989: part I, 32-6; Erdosy, 1997; Brereton, 2014: Introduction and Witzel, 2001 and 2014). Now, on the other hand, if everything that is innovation is degeneration, as Guénon taught that innovation or progress is a degeneration of a tradition, then the Veda was certainly an innovation in relation to the Indo-Iranian religion, therefore a degeneration; in the same way, the Indo-Iranian religion was an innovation in relation to the Indo-European religion, therefore also a degeneration of the same and, also, the Indo-European religion could be an innovation in relation to the religion of some people before it, therefore also a degeneration, as well as the religion of this previous people could be an innovation of the religion of a people of primitive humanity, therefore also a degeneration and so *ad*

*infinitum*, in short, we will never know what the Primordial Tradition was.

### **The Infidelity of Textual and Redactional Transmission**

This is a frequent occurrence in the ancient texts of almost all traditions. However, here we will limit ourselves to a few examples of textual and redactional differences in the transmission of texts from the Hindu tradition, for which Guénon cultivated great admiration and pointed her out as a conservative of the Primordial Tradition. For, as differences in transmission arise, different recensions or versions of the same text appear. Sometimes, two recensions of the same text are so different that they even seem like two different compositions, which researchers sometimes prefer to call versions of the same work.

Also, sometimes the same verse is quoted in different texts, but with differences in wording. Dr. S. R. Sehgal pointed out, in the introduction to Ralph T. H. Griffith's English translation of the Atharvaveda, in 1985 edition, the fallibility of the Vedic tradition as follows: "Critical studies have confirmed the opinion that the Vedic tradition is not infallible, although it is protected by such aids as swara,<sup>12</sup> padapātha,<sup>13</sup> kramapātha,<sup>14</sup> etc. It (the

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<sup>12</sup> Accentuation.

Vedic tradition) has been affected and still has been perversely commented on by commentators. Padapātha recitation, which serves a dual purpose, namely, purity and exposition, has to some extent undergone (alterations) in the course of oral tradition. Memory failures have caused variations” (Griffith, 1985: vol. I, xxviii-xxix). He then showed some examples of redactional differences of the same verse in different Vedic works. We will mention here just one example from S. R. Sehgal: the verse I.115.01 of the Rg Veda is repeated in the two recensions of the Atharva Veda (Shaunaka and Paippalāda), whereas in the Shaunaka recension XII.02.35, there is a redactional difference in the first word of the third pāda. The repetition of the same verse in different works is a common occurrence in Vedic literature, as well as in Hindu literature in general, and the verse is sometimes reproduced with textual or redactional changes, as well as with omissions and additions. These differences may have emerged during the period of oral transmission, when errors occurred in recitation, due to memory failures, and then these textual and editorial differences were recorded in writing. Also, there may have been voluntary changes due to ideological preferences.

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<sup>13</sup> Recitation without the use of euphonic linking rules between words (sandhi rules).

<sup>14</sup> Recitation of Vedic verses through word pairs in the order they are in the verse, with the aim of increasing memorization.

S. R. Sehgal has also provided a complete table comparing the different orders of chapters, hymns and verses in the Shaunaka and Paippalāda recensions of the Atharva Veda (Griffith, 1985: vol. I, 408-24). As for the modifications from one text to another, J. Brereton and S. W. Jamison observed: “In the Rgvedic hymns, which also appear in the Atharva Veda, the latter not uncommonly shows a different order in the verses, and in both the Samavedic and Atharvavedic versions of the verses, rgvedic hymns, there may be differences in wording and grammatical forms. In these cases, with few or no exceptions, the Rgvedic version of the hymn is the oldest and the versions of the other Vedas are modifications” (Brereton, 2014: 18).<sup>15</sup>

Also, no less divergent in texts, wording, grammar, meter and interpretations are the Upanishads, texts that are sources of the Vedānta system. The variants have increased over time that even a very short Upanishad like the Īshāvasya Upanishad, with only 18 verses, according to the Kānva<sup>16</sup> and Mādhyandina recensions, shows differences in the arrangement of the verse order,

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<sup>15</sup> For the textual differences between the Shānaka and Āshwalayana recensions of the Rg Veda, see Chaubey, 2009: vol. I, XI-XVI and for the names of the achāryas (masters) of the Rgvedic shākhās mentioned in the Purānas, see the schematics on pages 04-06 of this same work.

<sup>16</sup> This was the review commented on by Adi Shankaracharya.

the wording and the number of verses (Madhwāchārya recension has 20 verses instead of 18 from the Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions), when comparing one recension with the other. So far it has been possible to find four recensions: Kānva, Mādhyandina, that of Madhwāchārya and that of Suddha Dharma Mandalam. The Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions coincide in verse order only up to verse 08, that of Madhwāchārya coincides with Kānva up to verse 16 and that of Suddha Dharma Mandalam coincides only with Kānva in verses 01, 02, 15, 16, 17 and 18.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Kānva and Mādhyandina reviews present considerable redactional differences, as well as some meter problems and grammatical errors (to know these textual differences and these redactional errors, see: Vadekar, 1958: Vol. I, 01-5; Olivelle, 1998b: 611-3 and Botelho: 2022: 51s).

When we turn to the longer texts of the Upanishads, obviously, the textual differences between the recensions increase. A long Upanishad, such as the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad, also preserved in the Kānva and Mādhyandina recensions, has many variations in arrangement in the order of sections, chapters, and paragraphs. Patrick Olivelle prepared and published a complete comparative table of the

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<sup>17</sup> Consult the comparative table of verse orders between these four recensions in Botelho, 2022: 38-9.



arrangements in the order of sections, chapters and paragraphs among the Kānva, Mādhyandina and Shatapatha Brāhmana recensions, of which the Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad is the final part, as well as a long section of notes, with 45 pages, on the textual, redactional, grammatical, euphonic and metric differences between the two reviews (Olivelle, 1998b: 33-5 and 487-532). The notes section on all 12 Upanishads edited and translated by him totals 167 pages, which shows the large amount of textual, redactional, grammatical, euphonic and metrical variants occurring in the Major Upanishads, which demonstrates that the traditional transmission is not as faithful as many think. In these notes, he pointed out and commented, among many other observations, on redactional amendments made by Western editors in an attempt to correct the incorrectly worded passages in the Upanishads. He claimed that it does not seem right to him to correct these irregularities in the editing of the text, as some Western editors did, especially Otto Böhtlingk, but only to maintain the traditional wording and note the defects in footnotes (for further details, see: Olivelle, 1998a), thus confirming, once again, that changes exist and are plentiful. These are a few examples of textual and redactional infidelity in the transmission of Vedic texts, far from being all cases, only a few examples mentioned here.

## The Differences in Exegesis

More problematic than the variants in the textual and editorial transmission are the divergences in the interpretations, since each current claims to be the heir of the original tradition, which makes it impossible for us to identify which is the true one. Pointing out all the interpretive differences in Hinduism would be a monstrous work, so here will be shown just one example of a tradition Guénon was so fond of, Vedānta, with its source text, the Brahma Sūtras.

Due to his admiration, Guénon overemphasized the monistic tradition of Vedānta (Advaita Vedānta) as the main current among all Vedantine traditions, for him Advaita Vedānta was the Vedānta par excellence (Guénon, 1945 and 2001). More broadly speaking, the Advaita current is just one among many other Vedantine traditions, whose textual source is also found in the Brahma Sūtras (also known as Vedānta Sūtras) authored by Bādarāyana (dates in dispute). See below the list of the main classical commentators of the Brahma Sūtras and founders of interpretive currents of Vedānta with the names of their respective theological interpretations:

1. Shankarācharya (788-820 c. e.)  
Nirvisheshādwaita
2. Bhāskara (1000 c. e.) Bhedābheda
3. Yādavaprakasha (1000 c. e.) Bhedābheda
4. Rāmanuja (1140 c. e.) Vishishtādwaita

5. Madhwācharya (1238 c. e.) Dwaita
  6. Nimbārka (1250 c. e.) Dwaitādwaita
  7. Shrikantha (1270 c. e.) Shaivavishistādwaita
  8. Shrīpati (1400 c. e.)  
Bhedābhedātmakavishistādwaita
  9. Vallabha (1479-1544 c. e.) Shuddhādwaita
  10. Shuka (1550 c. e.) Bhedavāda
  11. Vijnānbhikshu (1600 c. e.)  
Ātmabrahmaikyabhedavāda
  12. Baladeva (1725 c. e.) Chintyabhedābheda.<sup>18</sup>
- Therefore, the Advaita current of Adi Shankaracharya is just one among other Vedantine currents.

### **Coincidences and Divergences in Translations**

In the same way, every confessional translator thinks his or her translation is the closest to the original text. Sometimes the translation of the same verse or the same paragraph of the same work is so different from another translator's translation that it seems as if they were translated from different verses. The Hindu texts with the most divergent translations are the Vedas. It is very difficult to find a translation of a verse from the

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<sup>18</sup> For studies on each of these classical commentaries and each of these theological interpretations of the Brahma Sūtras, consult the comprehensive studies of Ghate, 1926; Radhakrishnan, 1960; Sharma, 1971, 1974; 1978 and Hirst, 2006. In addition to these can be included the numerous recent commentaries in English by contemporary authors.

Rg Veda, for contemporary languages, that coincides with each other, so some researchers claim that the Vedas are untranslatable, since it is no longer possible to identify the meaning that those ancient composers-poets had in mind at the time of composition. See below the translations of the three verses, chosen at random, from the hymn X.12 of the Rg Veda, and compare the coincidences and divergences:

Devanāgarī Text:

ऋतं च सत्यं चाभीद्धत् तपसोऽध्यजायत् ।  
 ततो रात्र्यजायत ततः समुद्रो अर्णवः ॥ १ ॥  
 समुद्रादर्णवादधि संवत्सरो अजायत ।  
 अहोरात्राणि विदधद्विश्वस्य मिषतो वशी ॥ २ ॥  
 सूर्यचन्द्रमसौ धाता यथापूर्वमकल्पयत् ।  
 दिवं च पृथिवीं चान्तरिक्षमथो स्वः ॥ ३ ॥

Transliteration:

1.Rtam cha satyam chābhīddhātāt  
 tapasoadhyajāyat  
 Tato rātryajāyata tatah samudroarnavah  
 2.Samudrādarnavādadhī samvatsaro ajāyata  
 Ahorātrāṇi vidadhadvishwasya mishato vashī  
 3.Sūryachandramasau dhātā  
 yathāpūrvamakalpayat  
 Divam cha prthivīm chāntarikshamatho swah

The translation by H.H. Wilson (1850):

1. Truth (of thought) and veracity (of speech) were born of arduous penance, hence the night was generated, hence also the ocean of waters.
2. From the ocean of waters the year was then produced, ordering nights and days, the ruler of each moment.
3. Dhatri in the beginning created the sun and the moon, the sky, the earth, the firmament and the happy (sky) (Wilson, 1990: vol. VI, 518-9). .

Ralph T.H. Griffith's translation (1896):

1. From the fervour raised to its height, the Eternal Law and the Truth were born. Hence the night was produced, and hence the raging sea deluge arose.
2. From the same deluge of raging sea, the Year was next produced. Ordainer of days and nights, Lord over all who close their eyes.
3. Dhātar, the great Creator, then formed the Sun and Moon in due order. He formed in order Heaven and Earth, the regions of air and light. (Griffith, 2018: 984).

Wendy Doniger's translation (1981):

1. Order and Truth were born from the heat when he rose. From him the night was born, from this heat the raging ocean was born.
2. From the raging ocean the year was born, which arranged the days and nights, ruling everything that blinks its eyes.
3. The Organizer placed in their proper place the sun and the moon, the sky and the earth, the

middle realm of space and finally the light of the sun (Doniger, 1981: 34).

Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton translation (2014):

1. Both truth and reality were born from the heat when it was kindled. From this, night was born, and from this, the undulating sea.
2. From the undulating sea, the year was born, which distributes days and nights and exercises its will over everything that blinks (mortals).
3. The Ordainer arranged, according to their own orders, the sun and the moon, the sky and the earth, the middle space and the light of the sun (Brereton, 2014: 1660).

Below are the translations of some important words, that is, how each translator translated the same term or the same expression:

ऋत – Rta

H.H. Wilson: “Truth of Thought”

Ralph T.H. Griffith: “Eternal Law”

Wendy Doniger: “Order”

S. Jamison and Joel Brereton: “truth”

सत्य – Satya

H.H. Wilson: “veracity of speech”

R.T.H. Griffith: “truth”

W. Doniger: “truth”

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: “reality”

तपस् - Tapas

H.H. Wilson: "Hard Penance"

R.T.H. Griffith: "Fervour"

W. Doniger: "heat"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "heat"

समुद्रो अर्णवः – samudro arnavah

H.H. Wilson: "ocean of waters"

R.T.H. Griffith: "Flood of Rough Seas"

W. Doniger: "rough ocean"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "undulating sea"

मिषतो वशी – mishato vashī

H.H. Wilson: "ruler of every moment"

R.T.H. Griffith; "Lord over everything that closes its eye"

W. Doniger; "ruling over all that blinks"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "will over everything that blinks"

धाता – Dhātā

H.H. Wilson: "Dhatri"

R.T.H. Griffith: "the great Creator"

W. Doniger: "Organiser"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton: "Orderer"

अन्तरिक्ष – antarīksha

H.H. Wilson: "firmament"

R.T.H. Griffith: "air regions"

W. Doniger: "middle realm of space"

S. Jamison and J. Brereton” “middle space”

See also below how the 13 translations of the first verse of the Īshāvāsya Upanishad may coincide or differ from one translator to another:

Devanāgarī Text:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत् ।  
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् १ ॥

Transliteration:

Īshāvāsyamidam sarvam / yatkincha jagatyām  
jagat /  
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā / mā grdhah kasya  
swiddhanam // 01 //

Translations:

“This whole world must be enveloped by the Lord, whatever living being there is in the world. So you must eat what has been forsaken; and do not covet someone's wealth.” (Patrick Olivelle)

“All this, everything that moves on the earth, must be hidden in the Lord (I). When you have renounced all this, then you can enjoy. Do not covet any man's wealth.” (F. Max Müller)

“This entire universe is permeated by Lord Hari. He (the universe) also depends on the primordial nature which, in turn, is also permeated by Him (Hari). Only He (Hari) is thus independent. For this reason, enjoy all that He has given you, and do not seek wealth from any other source.” (Shrishra Rao)



“Absorb this universe in God and in everything that lives on earth. He who renounces, really enjoys. Do not desire the goods of others.” (Paul Deussen)

“All this, anything that exists in this universe, must be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation. Do not wish any man wealth.” (Swami Nikhilananda)

“All this is for the indwelling of the Lord, everything that is individual universe of movement in universal movement. With this renunciation you must enjoy, do not desire the possession of any man.” (Sri Aurobindo)

“All that is changeable in this ephemeral world, all this must be enveloped by the Lord. With this renunciation (of the world), sustain yourself. Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Swami Sarvananda A)

“All that is changeable in this ephemeral world, all this must be seen as permeated by the Lord. So enjoy the world after renouncing the desire for these ephemeral things. Do not covet for possessions.” (Swami Sarvananda B)

“Behold the universe in the glory of God, and everything that lives and moves on the earth. Abandoning the transitory, find joy in the Eternal, do not place your heart in the possessions of the other”. (Juan Mascaró)

“All this must be enveloped by the Lord (Īshā). Every moving thing in the mobile world. With this renunciation, you must enjoy. Do not covet someone's wealth at all.” (R.E. Hume)

“This whole world, and that which is the least of all in this world, which sustains and supports it, that is, the Atman; they are Brahman in association with their Shakti (manifested) or Brahma Shakti itself. Ignoring this truth, do not engage in actions for worldly pleasures; sincerely seek the brahmic beatitudes, reject the wealth obtained by sweat”. (Sri Janardana)

“All this is pervaded by the Lord, everything that is mobile and immobile in this world. With such renunciation enjoy (or protect). Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Swami Krishnananda)

“The Lord is situated in the hearts of all. The Lord is the ultimate reality. Feel joy in it through renunciation. Don't covet. Everything belongs to the Lord.” (Eknath Easwaran)

“All this is inhabited by God, everything that moves here in this moving universe. Therefore, only through renunciation enjoy all things. Do not covet what belongs to others.” (V. Jayaram)

“Involved by the Lord must be all this, every moving thing on earth. With this renunciation, enjoy yourself. Don't covet someone's wealth.” (Ralph T.H. Griffith).<sup>19</sup>

The reason for these differences in the translations lies in the attribution of different meanings by the translators, since the original

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<sup>19</sup> For a comprehensive comparative study of contemporary translations of the full text of the Īshāvāsyā Upanishad, see: Botelho, 2022: 51-67.

meaning at the time of the composition of the work is no longer possible to be identified, or pointed out in the midst of so many different translations. Every translator or every confessional interpreter claims that his or her translation or interpretation is the original. Guénon himself chose their meanings and then interpreted the sacred texts according to the interpretation that fitted his metaphysical ideas or his comparative theories. This interpretative dispersion is yet another example of how tradition is not able to faithfully preserve originality.

The few examples above were limited to showing traditional infidelity in textual, redactional, exegetical transmissions and in translations, there are hundreds of other cases. There was a lack of treatment on the evolutions in religious concepts between the different currents of Hinduism, which occurred over the centuries. These are so many that Jan Gonda needed a 480-page book, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, to cover just a few in brief. Therefore, I recommend reading this book above as a start to your research.

When we delve deeper and, therefore, find the huge amount of examples of corruption in traditional transmission, which occurred in the Hindu religion, which may have happened with many other traditions, it becomes difficult to believe in the theory, without documentary support and without confirmable evidence, of the immutable transmission of a Primordial Tradition, for so many centuries until today, preached by

René Guénon. That's why he disliked the historical method. What happened after Guénon's death was that, increasingly in the following years, studies of history, linguistics, iconographic evolution, as well as textual criticism, archaeology, philology and other historical disciplines, were able to demonstrate, regardless of the preaching of the adepts, the infidelity of traditional transmission, through well-documented research, while Guénon's documentation on this subject is very poor and, in many cases, does not even exist (for further details, see Witzel, 2014: 56-69).

### **The Development of a Myth from a Seminal Narrative**

Myths are like creatures: they are generated, are born, grow, reach adulthood and some die, that is, they transform during their lifetime. Even more, when they develop in different environments, they assume different characteristics, so the creatures are not exactly alike. Likewise, the same myth preserved in one tradition is not strictly the same myth, when preserved in another tradition, changes and omissions occur. As a general rule, myths and legends develop as they are transmitted orally and, even after being recorded in manuscripts, continue to undergo slight alterations. And Hindu myths are no exception. The main evidence of changes in the transmission of ancient myths is the difference in

the accounts, when these were passed into written form. When compared, the myths recorded in writing show significant divergences when comparing different manuscripts or printed texts. It is not possible to deal with all these cases here, we will deal with just one example, the myth of the Flood in Hinduism.

Like other ancient peoples, Hindus also have a Flood myth (जलप्लावन – jalaplāvana).<sup>20</sup> This grew out of a short seminal narrative, then was augmented and embellished by other narratives recorded in the Mahābhārata and the Purānas. Of all the narratives, none is more significant than the one in which the god Vishnu incarnates himself in the form of a fish Matsyāvatāra (मत्स्यावतार) to save King Manu (मनु), the Vedas<sup>21</sup> and the Seven Sages (सप्तर्षिः) from flood. The texts that narrate this myth are: the Shatapatha Brāhmana I.08, the Mahābhārata III.185 (Critical Edition), Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24, Agni Purāna cap. 02, Matsya Purāna chap. 01 and the late and suspect Bhavisya Purāna III.01.04.47-57. Chronologically, the oldest and most seminal narrative is that recorded in Shatapatha Brāhmana I.08.01, whose

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<sup>20</sup> Compound word that combines the terms जल (jala - water) and प्लावन - (plāvana - flood), therefore literally: flood of water.

<sup>21</sup> Stolen by the demon Hayagrīva, from the mouth of the god Brahmā, while the latter slept (Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24.08).

core myth existed before its development and embellishment by other traditions. The core seed of the myth is as follows:

“In the morning, they brought water for Manu to wash, just like they are used to bringing water to wash their hands. When he was washing himself, a fish appeared in his hands” (verse 01).

“He (the fish) spoke to him these words: ‘Take care of me, I will save you. ‘What will you save me from?’ (asked Manu).<sup>22</sup> ‘A flood will destroy all these creatures, from which I will save you’ (said the fish). ‘How should I take care of you?’ (asked Manu)” (verse 02).

“The fish said, ‘while we are small, there is great destruction for us (small fish): fish devours fish. You will first keep me in a jar. When I grow up, you'll dig a well and keep me in it. When I grow bigger, you will take me to the sea, for then I will be beyond destruction' (of being devoured)” (verse 03).

“He (the fish) soon became a great fish, the biggest of all fishes. Then he said: 'In such and such a year, that flood will come. You must listen to me (to my advice) preparing a ship; and when the Flood comes, you must enter the ship and I will save you from it” (verse 04).

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<sup>22</sup> The parentheses are not in Julius Eggeling's English translation, they were introduced here to facilitate the reader's understanding.

“After he (Manu) had taken care of him (the fish) in that way, he (Manu) took him to the sea. And in the same year that the fish had indicated to him, he listened to the advice of the fish preparing a ship, and when the flood came, he entered the ship. The fish then swam to him and on his horn<sup>23</sup> he tied the rope of the ship, and in this way he quickly reached the wonderful mountain of the north” (verse 05).

“He (the fish) then said: ‘I saved you. Tie the ship to the tree, but don't let the water release it, while you are on the mountain. When the water goes down, you must gradually go down. Consequently, he gradually descended, and hence that northern mountain slope is called 'Manu's descent'. The flood then swept away all these creatures, and only Manu remained there” (verse 06 – Eggeling, 1993: part I, 216-7 and Dikshitar, 1935: 01-3).

The sequel deals with the descendants of Manu. If Manu had resided in caves in the bowels of the Earth, such as Manu's identification with the King of the Underworld suggested by Guénon, he would not have survived the flood, as the caves would have been flooded.

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<sup>23</sup> In this case, the fish had a horn. The Agni Purana II.15 reports that the fish's horn was one million yojanas in length, that is, the equivalent of 12 million km. This horn size corresponds to 31 times the distance from Earth to the Moon (384,000 km), or approximately 1/5 of the distance to the planet Mars, depending on its closest orbits (approximately 63 million km).

In chronological order, the first text to elaborate an extended narrative from the seminal account of the Shatapatha Brāhmana tradition is chapter 185 of Vana Parva of the Mahābhārata (Critical Edition). In this text, Manu is praised as a king, the tiger among men, great seer of great strength (III.185.01-5). Note what he practiced to reach this stage: “This lord of men (Manu) practiced severe and great self-mortification in the Vishālā forest, while he stood erect, on one foot, with his arms raised. With his head bowed and his eyes unblinking, he practiced impressive austerities for ten thousand years”<sup>24</sup> (Mahābhārata, III.185.01-5 – van Buitenen, 1975: 583). So, these were the preparation practices of the lawgiver of Hinduism, so revered by Hindus and praised by Guénon as the Primordial and Universal Lawgiver, the Principle, the Cosmic Intelligence and the Spiritual Light. If it were fact and not myth, such an irrational preparation, such as these physical austerities, could only result in that very discriminatory, xenophobic and prejudiced legislation of the Manusmṛti (Code of Manu).

This makes it impossible for many to believe in the existence of a “Cosmic Intelligence”, and if it exists, how could it be so small as to produce such an ethnic and provincial legislation?

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<sup>24</sup> And to add to the severity, the Bhāgavata Purāna VIII.24.10 informs that during the austerities he survived only on the consumption of water.



Unlike the account in the Shatapatha, in this version of the myth the fish (matsya) appeared swimming to the bank of the river Vṛini in order to meet King Manu, who at the time was practicing austerities. This Flood narrative in the epic slightly expands on the Shatapatha narrative. Common snippets vary in some small details. For example, in Shatapatha, the ship is tied to a tree in the northern mountain, while in Mahābhārata, the ship is tied to the peak of the Himalayas. Therefore, the slope on the northern mountain, where the ship anchored, came to be called the Descent of Manu (Shatapatha Brāhmana, I.08.01.06 – Eggeling, 1993, part I, 218); whereas, in the account of the Mahābhārata, the highest peak in the Himalayas is termed “the Mooring” (Mahābhārata, III.185.45-50 – Van Buitenen, 1975: 585). Also very significant for religious traditions is the fact that in the Shatapatha it is not mentioned which god the fish was the incarnation of, whereas in the Mahābhārata (III.185.45-50) the fish states that he is the god Brahmā (Lord of Creatures), while in the Purānas the fish (Matsya) is pointed out as the incarnation of god Vishnu (Matsyāvatāra).

There are the following geographical divergences in the accounts. In the above narratives of the Shatapatha and the Mahābhārata, King Manu and the events of the flood take place in the Himalayan region of northern India; in the Bhāgavata Purāna (VIII.24.13) and in the Agni Purāna (II.4-5), the events take place on the banks

of the river Krtamālā<sup>25</sup> in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India; whereas in Matsya Purana (I.10) the events take place around Malaya Mountain in the state of Kerala, southern India.

The flood account in the fraudulent Bhavishya Purana<sup>26</sup> is a Hindu adaptation of the Biblical Flood. The adaptation begins even in the period of the creation of humanity with the couple Adam and Eve. The first is called Adama and the second Havyavati. The couple is tricked by the demonic serpent Kalipurusha and eats the fruit of the sinful tree. Adama (Adam) lived 930 years, his son was named Shwetamana. Instead of Elohim and Jehovah in the first and second creation narratives in Genesis respectively, the god of creation is Vishnu. Noah is known as Nyūha (न्यूह) in the Bhavishya Purāna and ruled for 500 years, he had three sons: Sima, Sama and Bhava. The god Vishnu appeared to him in a dream and informed him of an imminent deluge, asking him to build a large boat. The flood rain was sent by Indra (Vedic god) through his devastating cloud

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<sup>25</sup> G. V. Tagare reported, in a note, that the Krtamālā River currently corresponds to the Vaigai River, in the state of Tamil Nadu, southern India (Tagare, 1987: part III, 1118n), is 258 km long, rises in Malaya Mountain and crosses the holy city of Madurai.

<sup>26</sup> भविष्य - Bhavishya means future, therefore: Purāna of the Future, although the Purānas are narratives of myths and events of the past. Some authors paradoxically translated it as "History of the Future".

Sambartaka. Only the regions of Vishālā (mythical Jambūdwīpa region) and Badarikashrama (in the Himalayas) were not flooded. King Nyūha (Noah) and his family were saved and everything else destroyed. Finally, instead of developing the already existing seminal Hindu flood narrative, as the other Purānas did, the Bhavishya Purana preferred to adapt the Biblical Flood narrative to a Hindu context, which turned it into a narrative even further away from the seminal narrative of the Shatapatha Brāhmana.

Of all the flood narratives, the most extensive is that of the Bhāgavata Purāna. It adds some details regarding the previous narratives. For example, he adds the episode of the demon Hayagrīva, who stole the Vedas, which had unconsciously escaped from the mouth of the god Brahmā, while he was sleeping under the influence of Time and wished to go to bed (VIII.24.08 – Tagare, 1987: part III, 1117). In Shatapatha Brāhmana I.08.01.05 and Mahābhārata III.185.30-35, it is Manu who builds the great boat to survive the flood, while in Bhāgavata VIII.24.33 the great boat is provided by the Fish (Matsyāvatāra) already built. Also, in the first two texts, the boat is tied with a rope to the Himalayan Mountain, whereas in the Bhāgavata VIII.24.36 and in the Agni Purāna II.13, the boat is tied with the great serpent Vāsuki, like a rope. Anyway, it would be too extensive to mention here all the details that differentiate the narratives.

## The Greatest of Delusions

Of all René Guénon's delusional ideas, none was more fanciful, to some even comical, than his belief in an underground region, known as Agartha, inhabited by highly spiritual creatures, led by an underground world ruler known as the King of World (Guénon, 1958).

It seems that the first work dealing with spiritual creatures residing in underground regions was the science fiction novel *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), a former Secretary of State for the British Colonies (1858-1859), initially published anonymously in May 1871 under the title *The Coming Race*. However, in late 1871 Bulwer-Lytton came to be discovered as the author and so subsequent publications included his name. In this fiction, Vril is the name of an energy that endowed the creatures that awakened it with exceptional powers, so they managed to survive underground. It is about the adventure of a young man who, during an exploration, in the company of a friend who was a mining engineer, fell into an abyss, due to an accident with the rope that supported him. Abyss that ended in an underground world inhabited by angel-like creatures, that is, an advanced underground civilization. So, the young man made friends and lived with these exceptional

creatures, and even fell in love with his host's daughter.

Despite being a science fiction novel, many esoterists believed in the existence of an underground region inhabited by highly spiritual creatures, claiming that Bulwer-Lytton drew his inspiration from reality to create a fiction. René Guénon was one of them, but he was not the first to write about this subterranean region, believing in its existence. Before him, the French esoterist, Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842-1909), wrote a book in 1886, based on his experiences in contact with oriental adepts, called *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in Europe), whose publication only took place in 1910, by another French esoterist, Gérard Encausse, better known by the pseudonym Papus. In this book, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre revealed the existence of a mysterious initiatic centre called Agarttha, located in the subterranean regions of the Earth. The book is full of orthographically incorrect Sanskrit transliterations. A few decades later, the Russian explorer and writer Ferdinand Ossendowsky (1876-1945), an author who has written extensively about his many travels, published in 1922, in his book *Beasts, Men and Gods*, also full of incorrect Sanskrit transliterations, the accounts of the King of the World and the Underground Kingdom (part V, p. 299s), which he heard from Buddhist monks during his visit to Mongolia. Ossendowsky's accounts either agree or diverge

from those of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, as they are derived from different sources. Soon afterward, René Guénon took these two works and commented on them in his delirious book *Le Roi du Monde* (the King of the World), and through a fanciful comparison with countless traditions, sought to justify the existence of the King of the World who resides in Agarttha, that is, “the subterranean world that spreads its ramifications everywhere, under the continents and even under the oceans, through which invisible communications are established among all regions of the Earth” (Guénon, 1958: 08). But this was not always so and it will not be forever, for, according to Guénon, “Agarttha has not always been underground and will not remain forever, a time will come when, according to the words reported by Ossendowsky, ‘the peoples of Agarttha will leap from their caves and will appear on the surface of the Earth’” (Guénon, 1958: 67). I confess that when I read this book for the first time in the 1980s, I had a hard time holding back laughter in some parts, now imagine how much more comic a speleologist<sup>27</sup> or a geologist will find while reading.

Guénon mentioned, in the first chapter of *Le Roi du Monde* (The King of the World), the book *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in

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<sup>27</sup> Specialist in the study of Speleology, the science that studies caves, from the Greek σπήλαιον - spelaion and from the Latin spēlaeum, cave (Sullivan, 1997 and Faulkner, 2008).

Europe), by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (Guénon, 1958: 08), later specified that Saint-Yves had obtained the information about Agartha “from a Hindu source” (idem: 10). Well, the population of India is 90% Hindu, Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion, but a hereditary religion. To be a Hindu, you have to be the son or daughter of a Hindu couple who belongs to one of the castes of Hinduism, therefore, Hinduism is not a missionary religion, it does not make converts, so it has no mission to fulfil in Europe. Therefore, a *Mission de L'Inde en Europe* (Mission of India in Europe) does not proceed, because orthodox Hindus are not missionaries. Now, the innovation is in the New Religious Movements inspired by Hinduism, they do accept converts: Hare Krishna Movement, Rāmākṛṣṇa Mission, Swami Shivānanda's Divine Life Society, Sadhguru's festive Isha Yoga Centre, as well as the groups of followers of Ramana Mahārshi, of Swami Yogananda, of Satya Sai Baba, of Sri Aurobindo, etc. These New Religions do not follow the caste system required in the strict Hindu Dharmashastras, so anyone is able to practice them.

As for the “underground world that spreads its ramifications everywhere, under the continents and even under the oceans, through which invisible communications are established between all regions of the Earth”, quoted by Guénon, we know today that, despite the advances in Speleology in recent decades, we are still far from

confirming this possibility, since the longest cave system in the world is the Mammoth Cave system, in the state of Kentucky, USA. The extent of the caves and passages mapped so far is approximately 500 km. There are over 200 caves in the cave system, with around 250 entrances to the caves. But this is not all, as exploration is still ongoing and speleologists claim that there are still many areas to be explored and mapped (Faulkner, 2008: 10). What is intriguing about an underground “King of the World” is the exceptionality in relation to other reports of paradisiacal regions in other myths around the world. While the gods' preference was always for the surface or for the heights (Himalayans, Shambala, Mount Olympus, Mount Kailasa and Mount Meru), the King of the World, quite the contrary, preferred to reside underground.

### **The King of the World**

In the very first paragraph of the second chapter, based on his hasty comparative theory and always inserting his own interpretation, Guénon emphatically identified the King of the World with the mythical progenitor and lawgiver Manu (मनु), that of the Hindu flood myth, as follows. In this way: “the title of 'King of the World' taken in the highest and most complete, and at the same time in the most rigorous sense, is properly applied to Manu, the primordial and universal



Lawgiver. (...) Manu never designates a historical or more or less legendary character, but rather a principle, the Cosmic Intelligence, which reflects the pure Spiritual Light and formulates the Law (Dharma) that regulates the conditions of our world and of our cycle of existence” (p. 13). Well, there is no mention in any of the Hindu texts that Manu Vaivaswata (मनु वैवस्वत)<sup>28</sup> (also known as Manu Satyavrata) resided in an underground kingdom, quite the contrary, by the Puranic accounts, he lived very content with his feet on the surface of the Earth, for he was a king. Guénon believed that Manu was the “Primordial and Universal Lawgiver”, he was, according to Hindu tradition, the revealer of Manusmṛti (Code of Manu). Unlike what Guénon thought, he was indeed a mythological character and his legislation is not universal, as only the Hindus followed the rules prescribed in this book which, for the sensate contemporary culture, is a monstrous monument of discrimination, prejudice, submission, of inequality, xenophobia, misogyny, servitude, protectionism, privileges for the upper castes, deprivation of liberties and endogamy. Almost everything in the Manusmṛti runs counter to the current and universally accepted *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 1979

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<sup>28</sup> Seven Manus (progenitors of the human race) have already arisen, one for each epoch (Kalpa). Manu Vaivaswata is the Manu of the present age, the seventh, seven more to come, according to Hindu mythology.

*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, signed by almost all UN member states. Guénon also defended the caste system (Guénon, 1945: 216-24 and 2002: 62-7). Furthermore, Guénon identified the King of the World and the Manu with a principle, the “Cosmic Intelligence” (p. 13). Therefore, the latter can only be something incorporeal, so what is the feasibility of a “Cosmic Intelligence” residing in a confined underground region of the Earth?

Also, taken by a comparatist compulsion, in addition to the comparison with Manu, in the first chapters of *The King of the World* (Le Roi du Monde), he compared the King of the World with other characters of religious myths, or with historical characters who had their lives and their mythologized sayings, however, about these many religious characters he compared, we do not find references, either in mythology or much less in history, that any of them resided in an underground region, such as the King of the World.

Then, through his compulsive practice of comparing through appearances between ideas and between symbols, because everything that appeared he associated, without in-depth and solid truly historical documentation to support, since his theories are almost always not documented through sources certainly historical, for he preferred mythological and religious sources, he unleashes a number of comparisons, in order to justify the association between king and priest,

peculiar to the King of the World. Among so many hasty comparisons, he mentioned the biblical Wise Men (Roi-Mages – p.17). However, strictly speaking, these characters are mentioned only in the Gospel of Matthew 2.01, through the Greek word μάγοι (magoi, plural of μάγος - magi; Latin: magi, plural of magus), and the word “King” is not included. Their number is not mentioned, nor their names, as tradition informs. Therefore, the attribute of “King” to the Magi of the East is a later addition by translators and by interpreters, so that there is no mention, in this single quotation in this gospel, that these Magi were kings.

According to a note from Guénon, the King of the World made an appearance at the monastery of Narabanchi,<sup>29</sup> in 1890 (Guénon, 1958: 67n), on which occasion he made the prophecy that “the peoples of Aggarti will come out of their caves to the face of the Earth” (Ibid: 67). And it continues: “before its concealment to the visible world, Agarttha had another name, since this name of Agarttha, which means “unattainable”, or “inaccessible” (and “inviolable”, because it is the abode of peace, Salem) was not then appropriate for him. Ossendowski explains that Agarttha descended underground more than six thousand years ago, which corresponds very roughly to the beginning of the Kali Yuga, or the “dark age”, the

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<sup>29</sup> A Buddhist monastery in Mongolia visited by Ferdinand Ossendowski.

“iron age” of the ancient Westerners...” (Idem: 67). Well, if these facts are true and this prophecy comes true, it will be interesting to watch these creatures, resident for millennia under the earth, adapt to life on the surface with the presence of sun, rain, light, lightning, wind, snow, vegetation, abundant oxygen, etc. If we believe in the myth of the ages (yugas) of the Hindus, the date for the submersion of Agarttha which coincides with the beginning of the Kali Yuga is unfounded, since the Hindu traditions, recorded in the Purānas, are not unanimous as to the date of the beginning of the Kali Yuga, as well as its duration.

On the other hand, if we understand this fanciful prediction from a scientific point of view, according to speleologists and biologists, creatures that are able to survive in dark caves (example: the bat, the white snake, the blind cave fish and other insects) do not develop eyesight, due to unnecessary, due to darkness (see: Sullivan, 1997: 79-132 and Faulkner, 2008: 30-3). So, if the emergence of the peoples of Agarttha happens, we will find that its inhabitants have no eyesight, so they will have to walk the surface of the Earth with a cane and a guide dog, as well as with a lot of protection from light and heat of the sun. Of course, they will have to use sunscreen, a hat, an umbrella and always look for the shade, probably even the King of the World, which could be a comic scene, rather than a glorious emergence.

Further on, he reported that the ancient name of Agarttha, before its occultation, was Paradesha, a Sanskrit term that he translated as “supreme country”, which applies to the spiritual centre par excellence. Invariably, through another bout of comparatist compulsion, for to him everything that only appeared could be compared, he compared the evolution of the word Paradesha, claiming that from this word came the word Pardes of the Chaldeans and the word Paradise of the Westerners (p. 72-3). However, it is necessary to clarify that the Sanskrit antipositive Para (पर) does not always mean “supreme”. The compound word Paradesha (परदेश) is formed from the words पर (para), which means “beyond”, “after”, “further”, “foreign”, “hostile” and “supreme”; and देश (desha) “region”, “country” and “land”, so the most common meaning of Paradesha is “foreign region”, “hostile country” and “foreign land”, hence not always the word “para” means “supreme”, so it is not used in Sanskrit literature in the sense of “supreme country”, only in Guénon's interpretation. Then the compound noun परदेशसेविन् (paradeshasevin) meaning “foreigner” or “traveller”. Therefore, the derivation of the word “Paradise” from the word “Paradesha” is questionable.

Through yet another bout of comparatist compulsion, this time through an even more improbable comparison, he came to compare the dormant energy of kundalinī, located in the lowest

part of the spine in the human body, according to yoga books, with the “supreme spiritual centre in the underworld” (Guénon, 1958: 66). Strictly speaking, his sources of comparisons are always mythological, legendary, symbolic or speculative, and never securely documented and proven historical sources, since he repudiated “historicism”. So, his historicity support for myths and speculations, which he believed to be real facts or characters, during his fantastic comparisons, is always another myth, another mythological character or another speculation. Something like a myth supporting the historicity of another myth, or a speculation being supported by another speculation. So to speak, in a way, it is possible to recognize that Guénon's erudition is diversified and, at times, even in-depth, however, his historicity is unfounded, as it is based on myths, symbols and religious beliefs, in a way that that his work in general is an immense attempt to transform myths into facts, mythological characters into real characters and religious beliefs into science, what he called “Sacred Science”, in short: from fantasy into reality.

Strictly speaking, there is no “Sacred Science”, according to the rigor of Contemporary Science, because all that Science tries is to move away from sacredness, the latter makes research emotive, and what Science needs is to be cold and impartial. Sacredness is the overvaluation of something or an idea, which represents an

interference and contamination during the coldness of the scientific method. Scientific methodology does not match emotion. Therefore, the most appropriate denomination for what Guénon tried to communicate is “Sacred Knowledge” or, to be even more precise with his idea: “Sacred Belief”, rather than “Sacred Science”.

In the same way that he admitted that Western science is an “ignorant knowledge”, a scientific reader, after reading Guénon’s books, will readily accept that the set of his comparative ideas is something like a “delusional knowledge”, whose imagination superimposes the sure. For, the suspicion never crossed his mind that metaphysical knowledge could be only speculative and hypothetical knowledge, conjectured in order to supply the lack of resources and the inexistence of investigative instruments of the old speculators. One of his claims for the superiority of metaphysical knowledge over scientific knowledge is that the former is grounded in “principles”, which are the causes of all things and all phenomena in the universe, while the latter is grounded in the concreteness of materiality, therefore, the effect of these “principles”; without taking into account that, with the advancement of scientific research, what in the past was considered a “principle”, with the subsequent discoveries and the development of knowledge, it was later confirmed that these

“principles” are, in fact, effects of causes deeper, which were not previously known.

Well, it is worth stopping here, since the remainder of the book *The King of the World* (Le Roi du Monde) is a continuation of the same ideas and the same delusional comparisons, such as those already mentioned and commented on, which does not change the degree of fictionality of the comparisons and arguments of René Guénon already mentioned, as there are so many delusions to be commented on, which would transform this study into an extensive text.

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