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Andrew Louth, “Mysticism: Name and Thing”

This paper was given at New Europe College (Bucharest) in October 1997. Something like what is called comparative mysticism may well have a role in comparative religion, but that both of these need to see themselves as part of a much wider attempt to compare different historical cultures: religions cannot be abstracted from the cultures in which they answer people’s social and spiritual needs (that does not mean that religions cannot pass from one culture to another: they evidently can, but we must not suppose that there is some ‘essence’ of religion that can be isolated, which is that which has passed from one culture to another—the situation is much more complex than that, and the question of religious identity not so easily solved), nor can ‘mysticism’ be abstracted from the religions that foster deep, prayerful commitment. ‘Comparative mysticism’ is too easy, and unhistorical: it simply lulls us into thinking that we can regard as fundamentally significant (‘mystical’ has never lost the connotation of what really matters, what is ultimately powerful) what appeals to the individualized consciousness of the West—religious literature that aspires to the form of poetry, devoid of dogmatic content or ritual expression.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; Hindu and Muslim Mysticism; ‘mystical theology’; ‘ascetical theology’; Mysticism: the word; mystery religions; comparative mysticism;

Nuccio d’Anna, “Pastori, Veggente e muse sicule nella IV Egloga di Virgilio”

La complessa struttura della IV egloga suppone un’era di pace cosmica la cui prodigiosa perfezione dovrà essere cantata con *carmina* che si elevano al di sopra degli stessi canti tradizionali di Orfeo e Lino e dovranno toccare le vette della perfezione divina. Quello che può risultare fondamentale per capire le connessioni che esistono fra questa moltitudine di simboli e di dati, è il fatto che il “mito di fondazione” di questo straordinario santuario apollineo (il bosco di Gryniun), secondo quanto riferisce Servio nel suo commento, era stato cantato in un poema perduto (ma allora molto conosciuto nella traduzione che ne aveva fatto uno degli amici più stretti di Virgilio, Cornelio Gallo), da Euforione di Calcide, il cantore di una serie di mitologhemi di tipo arcadico-pastorale seguiti dai poeti del periodo augusteo ed imperiale. Virgilio lo ricorda in *Egl.*, X, 50-51, là dove appare in tutta la sua chiarezza il rapporto che lega Euforione alla tradizione dei *bukoloi* Siculi.

Keywords: Virgil, IV Eclogue; shepherd; Roman religion; sacred places; prophetism.

Milan Vukomanović, “*Ascesis, Symbol and Baptismal Rite in the Gospel of Thomas*”.

If we consider some forms of ascetic practices in the cross-cultural perspective, it seems, at first sight, that we are dealing with a relatively limited number of common acts directed toward a variety of goals which are more or less specifically defined within different religious traditions. Among that common fund of practices one may, for example, include fasting, prayer, almsgiving, meditation, vigils, different kinds of manual work, sexual continence, physical separation or withdrawal, certain forms of self-inflicted pain, etc. At second glance, however, one realizes that it would be too simplistic if one would aim at explaining varieties of ascetic expressions in terms of “similar means which lead to different goals” (established within the particular religious contexts). Very soon it comes to be realized that in the case of religious asceticism one is dealing with a far more complex phenomenon. One may argue that the Naassene Christians, who actually composed the *Gospel of Thomas* as their scripture, were already *acting out* an archetype of singleness or androgyny that had been presupposed by an underlying myth of their pre-Christian ancestors. In our view, the *Gospel of Thomas* itself would correspond to the final stage of Christianization of Hippolytus’ and Epiphanius’ “snake-worshippers”, that is, to the time when they already proclaimed themselves “Gnostics” or “pneumatics.” In this paper an attempt is made to determine the character of the ascetic ideas and practices of the community which composed the *Gospel of Thomas* (GTh). In GTh one may recognize several emblems of ascetic religiosity: renunciation of the world; itinerantism; encratism; the ritual ascesis; the ascesis of self-examination. All these recognizable patterns of asceticism are expressed in GTh by some very distinctive symbols and metaphors, such as the “single one,” “little child,” “world,” “corpse,” “kingdom,” “garment of shame,” etc. Some of these symbols clearly reflect the “proto-monastic” ideology of GTh, i.e., an ascetic system in which the notions of solitude, androgyny and celibacy play an unusually important role. Others refer to the need for self-transformation and thus relate GTh with a concrete form of ritual praxis – the baptismal rite. It is also argued that this initiation symbolism betrays the more general typology of the Adam-Androgyne figure encountered in the conceptions of some heterodox Christian communities from Asia Minor, such as the Phrygian Naassenes.

Keywords: Naassene Christians; *Gospel of Thomas*; Gnosticism; early Christian apologetics; history of religions in Late Antiquity; asceticism, baptism.

Ezio Albrile, “La Signora dei sogni origini e visioni dell’alchimia ellenistica”.

Tre sono gli elementi fondamentali intorno ai quali si svolge la gnosi ermetica: Dio, il cosmo, l'uomo. Due i movimenti dell'anima, *ascensus* e *descensus*. L'ascensione verso Dio reca la salvezza in quanto contemplazione del cosmo, una meditazione astrale che si concretizza in un'esperienza estatica; e ciò in virtù della capacità visionaria dell'uomo che si trova nello stato di grazia a cui può elevarlo l'ermetismo inteso non come sistema di pensiero, bensì come moto di ricerca interiore. Nell'ermetismo alchemico pratica iatromantica e "teologia" visionaria convivono nel quadro di una cosmologia in cui elementi di ascendenza iranica ed egiziana sono reinterpretati in chiave ellenistica. In tale prospettiva l'alchimia non è più un prodotto del sincretismo, bensì il superamento dello iato fra la natura e l'uomo, cioè la liberazione dai vincoli che l'ordine demiurgico aveva stabilito alle origini.

Keywords: Greek / Hellenistic alchemy; *ascensus* / *descensus*; Hermetism; Gnosticism; Egyptian religion; Iranian religions.

Radu Drăgan, "L'Esprit-Lien de l'univers".

Les alchimistes ont complètement renversé le vieux problème gnostique. Au lieu de chercher le salut de la matière par sa dissolution dans le spirituel, ils ont imaginé qu'il est possible de retenir celui-ci dans le monde et dans cette vie. C'était une gnose, pour ainsi dire, positive : la souillure, le mal, la mort, peuvent être vaincus, si l'on dispose des moyens adéquats, de la doctrine et de la pratique qui s'ensuit. On a rapporté que, avant de mourir, le Cosmopolite s'est excusé de la manière suivante : il était trop affaibli par la longue détention, sinon sa médecine l'aurait sans doute sauvé. Ainsi, il tentait de préserver son prestige et celui de la Pierre. Mais l'on voit bien que, pour l'alchimiste, la mort est un accident non pas parce que, suivant une longue tradition, l'âme aspirerait à s'intégrer à sa céleste demeure ; non, la félicité est à chercher dans ce monde, car pour lui, à travers la Pierre, ce n'est pas seulement l'âme qui monte, mais c'est aussi l'incorruptible qui descend.

Keywords: The problem of the void; alchemists; Rosicrucians; philosopher's stone; theosophy; esotericism.

Pierre Lory, "Note Sur L'ouvrage "Religion After Religion" — Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin At Eranos, Par Steven M. Wasserstrom".

Review articles, emphasizing the interpretation of Islamic doctrines by Henry Corbin, the Eranos circle and their more recent interpretation as close to traditionalist vistas, as well as the significance and failures of a recent Princeton monograph on the topic.

Keywords: *Eranos*; Gershom Scholem; Mircea Eliade; Henry Corbin; 20th academic and traditionalist study of religions.

Ioana Feodorov, “La «Question de l’image» chez les Musulmans : un bilan du sujet dans le livre récent de Silvia Naef”.

Le sujet des recherches dont Silvia Naef publie les résultats dans ce livre se situe au premier plan des thèmes contemporains qui préoccupent les spécialistes de l’islam et des autres religions du monde, comme témoignent nombre de contributions de la dernière décennie. Le livre de Silvia Naef répond d’une manière remarquable à la curiosité croissante pour l’Islam, au désir de mieux comprendre la pensée et la sensibilité des croyants d’une religion qui s’impose avec une telle insistance à l’attention du monde contemporain. Le rôle de l’interprétation des formes de l’art dans ce dialogue des civilisations est souligné par l’intérêt de plus en plus grand que suscite l’organisation d’expositions d’art musulman. L’attention particulière pour les arts figuratifs de Turquie, d’Anatolie et de l’Empire Ottoman recommande ce livre aux Roumains, ainsi que l’intérêt particulier pour l’art populaire musulman, dont certaines manifestations pourraient être rapportées aux phénomènes artistiques des Pays Roumains au temps de la domination ottomane. Une possible direction de recherche serait l’analyse des croyances anciennes des pays islamisés pour essayer de retrouver les racines du culte des dieux de la nature, bannis par toutes les religions monothéistes, mais dont les croyances persistent en milieu rural, notamment dans l’art populaire figuratif (voir l’exemple des masques et costumes zoomorphes utilisés toujours aux grandes fêtes saisonnières).

Keywords: Islam; Islamic arts; Near Eastern religious history; imagology; hermeneutics; status of the images in Islam cultures.

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