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THE CENTRE - PERIPHERY MYTH OF THE WORLD: ORIGIN OF UNIVERSALISM
IN EURASIA

by

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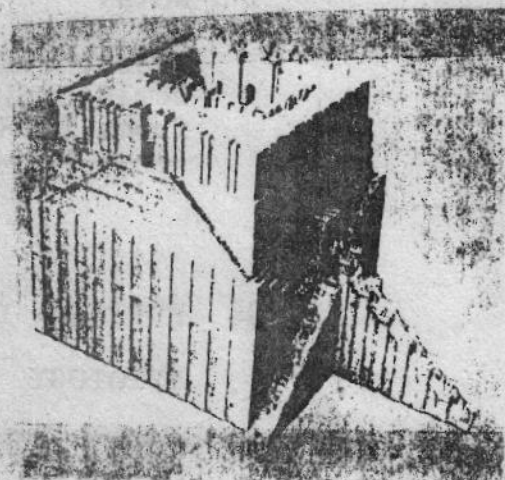
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جبل قاف - قال المفسرون
انه جبل محيط بالدينا وسور من
زبرجدة خضراء وخضرة السماء
منه وان وراءه عوالم وخلق
لا يعلمهم الا الله وقال بعضهم
ما من جبل من جبال الدنيا
الا وعرق من عروقه متصل
بقاف فاذا اراد الله هلاك قوم
امر الملك الموكل به فيحرك عرقا
من عروقه ينحسر بهم

"...pēs Xansāng jelping uj nē'inténé tǎrēm-pasāng kēr-
āngkwél... sāt nākpā sāli āln jelping āngkwél"2)

"By the measure of history, our nation's 200 years are brief and our rise to world eminence is briefer still. It dates from 1945, when Europe and the old international order both lay in ruins. Before then, America was largely on the periphery of world affairs. Since then, we have inescapably been at the center."3)



Note:

The sages following the movement of the sun,
over the two-headed world serpent, within the
world-encircling mountain. Siberian bronze,
from: BA Rjabinin, in: Finno-Ugry i Slavjane, p 17

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

To me has been given all the power
in heaven and on earth; hence go forth
and make all peoples into my disciples,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
Son and Holy Ghost, and teaching them to
keep all that I have commanded you.
And lo, I am with you all days
unto the end of the world!

- Matthew 28, 18-20

"World history has many examples of centre-periphery formations of one kind or the other, but not with that universality and that claim on other people's souls," macrohistorians may assert, "what is Western is universal"¹⁾. This holds good if 'Western' be taken to mean 'Christian' and 'secularized (Christian-based) European'. If it be taken to comprise not merely the Christian but the monotheistic tradition, then the faith of the Muslims lays far less claim on the souls of non-Muslims, while Judaism lays no claim on the souls of non-Jews.

On the other hand, the Buddha in his famed Vinaya speech ordered his adherents to "go forth and preach the good teaching to all" ca 470 BC.²⁾ Buddhism has been spread abroad by as hard, uncompromising methods as Christianity at times³⁾ - though this should not simply be taken as some sort of proof or result of the inherent aggressiveness of either faith. It is rather that a centrist, universalist message, aggressive in the sense of being missionary,⁴⁾ came in handy and was functional to expansionist secular powers on the rise. Centralized kingdoms and empires could be and were built without either Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, both before and after their rise, yet these faiths have further inspired, strengthened and underpinned such strivings.

The main purpose of this study is to track how, why, where and from what anterior conceptual basis "universalist" teachings, of varying types, arose, and in what order. The area of enquiry is Eurasia; the time of enquiry, the millennia and centuries up to the consolidation of Christianity following the death of Christ. The reductionist conclusions came as a surprise: Not only can all later universalist notions be shown to derive from these earlier ones, I believe - though the present study does not concern itself with this - but the early ones too, as it dawned on me while researching them, appear to go back upon a common origin. A fabulous one, to be sure.

Having written the study, I discover that what really prompted it was the joy of - discovery, or discoveries galore! In a world so chaotic as ours it will always be gratifying to find, or to believe that one finds, some unifying master key to widely diverse phenomena. The second, subsidiary "purpose" then, defined as an afterthought, will be to provide grounds, materials, for discovery of, and reflection on, how seeds can range far and wide, entering into new relationships of symbiosis, or being more or less masked, or engendering new species or subspecies, in the local landscapes where they strike root - yet retaining their generic, genetic "key" for us to find.⁵⁾ Is there such a common, far-back, deep-down denominator for the Irmensul pillar cult of the heathen Saxons⁴⁾ and the baptismal water of life of Christ, for the Miagardsorm world serpent of the Norsemen and the name of Pnom Penh in Kampuchea, for the alleged Peak of Adam in Sri Lanka and the concept of a Polar Star?⁷⁾ We shall see. We begin on the note of a Mongolian 20th century fairy tale.

..He came to the horses grazing by the pillar of the sun..came to the horses grazing by the pillar of the moon.. The god Khormusta said to him: "...Fetch an apple that grows upon the middle one of the three willows which grow by the seam of the heaven and the earth.." ..When he then reached the green grass and the cold spring of water his horse was already completely exhausted. By the green grass and the cold spring of water he let his horse graze for seven days and seven nights..⁷⁾

1. TYPOLOGY AND ORIGINS OF UNIVERSALISM

Macro-history attempts to deal in universal categories. In Occidental culture, at least, these are generally dichotomies - where both constituent, complementary elements are positive realities and not merely negations¹⁾ of each other: In the dichotomy of centre-periphery, or that of nomads and sedentary people, the one is not simply the absence of the other. What universal categories could appeal more to the macro-historian than precisely universalist versus particularist ideology? Yet here too, particularism is not merely the opposite or negation of universalism, nor vice versa. They can combine, in a symbiotic relationship, and what is more, generally do so.

Thus for instance, centre and periphery do not merely compete, they are not simply antagonistic; they also constitute each other, define each other's wishes and ambitions and interests, every (societal, organizational, economic, geographic etc) "centre" having its internal as well as external periphery, and every periphery having its internal as well as external centre²⁾. Likewise, nomads and sedentary populations interact, through trading and raiding³⁾. (Nomad empires arise and may endure along major routes of transit trade, i.e. to or between sedentary cultures⁴⁾. On the other hand the unification of China, as well as of the opposing nomad tribes to the north and west, has been explained as a result of nomad-versus-sedentary mobilization.⁵⁾)

Thus too, whereas many tribes on earth refer to themselves simply as "the men, the people, humans"⁶⁾ to the exclusion of all others, in a particularist spirit, they may hold ideas regarding the world as a whole.⁷⁾ And univer-

salist ideologies may be fiercely particularistic. This is the case with military-chauvinist as well as with missionary-religious ideologies with world-wide aspirations.

Three types of universalist ideology can be discerned: 1) The actionist, extrovert, conquest-minded type. 2) The contemplative, introvert, harmony-minded type. 3) Macro-historic ideology. Some definitions: The word conquest-minded should be understood literally, as referring to a state of mind. The three monotheistic religions belong to this category - Judaism being born of, or in connection with, the conquest of Palestine and the subsequently fluctuating fortunes of war over Palestine, Christianity ordering its adherents to march out and convert (by means unspecified) all humans into adherents; Islam enjoining, or at least enforcing in practice, conversion of the pagans. Of these three, Judaism after the Maccabees has been the most pacific⁸⁾, and the least active in missionary activities and missionary success. Islam is, also in the minds of its adepts, most strongly associated with political, military conquest⁹⁾ - yet more tolerant than Christianity with regard to deviators and non-believers¹⁰⁾. As for the second, inherently pacific type of "philosophical" universalism, in contrast to e.g. the Occidental warrior-religions of monotheism, this is exemplified by Buddhism and Hinduism. As to the third type, of course macro-historic ideology is found in e.g. the monotheistic faiths, we might even say that they are macrohistoric ideologies, as are Marxism and (in much cruder wise) Fascism¹¹⁾; yet what is meant here is none of these, which all squarely belong to the first type, it is rather all attempts departing¹²⁾ from this first type, at re-constructing¹³⁾ a unitary (universal) understanding of historical phenomena or, more modestly put, all attempts at finding universal regularities in human history.

These three types are attested in history in the above order. It is instructive that in the womb of activist Christendom Occidental humanism arose - witness

Voltaire's dictum of defending, with his life if needs be, the right of others to disagree with him, and the development from "all men are (can be, should be) brothers in Christ" to "all men are brothers". This latter position should not simply be credited Christianity; it is a fruit and a mark of secularization (meaning the translation of Christian mental structures into secular terms), yet this secularization was nourished also by the ancient Greek heritage (with the discovery of Pompei boosting interest in all things ancient), so that "universal brotherhood" appears as the grafting of democracy ideals from particularistic Greece onto secularized Christian universalism. (The actionist imperative is very much still there in the Jacobite saying: "Sois mon frère, ou je te tue!") And though wishes for universal brotherhood should ostensibly belong to the second, pacific type of universalism, they time and again carry overtones, or show up undercurrents, of thinking as to just how this brotherhood should be achieved, and just how it should look when achieved - the missionary urge is not yet quelled, the actionist Occidental origins are still to be sensed.)

Quite as instructive is the universalism of the harmony-minded, pacific, live-and-let-live religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. For while Buddhism at least is implicitly universal in being open to all comers and addressing all men alike, it is the explicitly universalist ideal to which we should address ourselves. This is a point common to Buddhism and Hinduism. It is evidently very ancient. And not at all pacific.

With such subjects on our agenda, let us note at the very outset, as our point of departure - meaning departure from our habitual European conceptions - that the European tongues know of no universalist concepts originally, or far back in time. "The earth" originally is the soil and mud between our fingers: Latin mundus was a popular assembly; Greek cosmos, a military phalanx, and a dignitary; Russian mir, a village collective; Latin universum, anything whole; and "the world" of the Germanic peoples, from wor, war "a man", plus "old" - the age, or life-span, of a man.

2. EARLY CHINESE UNIVERSALISM

Heaven ordered the black bird to descend and bear Zhang; he dwelt in the land of Yin that was very vast; of old God (Di) gave the appointment to the martial Tang; he regulated and set boundaries for those (states of the) four quarters.. The (states between the) four seas came (in homage), they came in crowds; the great circle-boundary was the river..)

On the basis of this ode it has been held that a universalist note was sounded in China already by the eldest firmly known dynasty in the northern part of the land, the Zhang (or Yin), founded by "the martial Tang". This dynasty ca 1751-1111 BC²⁾ heralded the Bronze Age, using bronze weapons to subdue the otherwise Stone Age tribes. The above ode has been construed thus: Like the living Zhang king ruled his subjects, so too one of the Zhang ancestors ostensibly ruled the entire world - the "limitless" power domain of the Zhang family members who had already become (or were on their way to becoming) beings of a higher order.³⁾ This modern interpretation is unfounded. Another ode may also be adduced:

Deep and wise was Zhang; for long there had appeared its good omens; the waters of the Deluge were vast; Yü laid out the lands of the earth below; he delimited the great outer states, the wide circle-boundary was long; the house of Zung began to become great; God (Di) appointed their child to bear Zhang.. Beyond the seas there was order. God's commands were never disobeyed; all down to Tang they were alike (in this).. The Martial King then set out, killingly he grasped the axe; he was like fire so blazing; and so there was none who could dare check us..

On such evidence it has been suggested that a West Asian (Babylonian) conception of a supreme deity had percolated to China and struck root even before the

Zhang, under the nebulous Hsia rule.⁴⁾ Yü is the reputed Hsia founding figure, said to have stemmed the great Deluge (of nine years' duration).⁵⁾ Lastly, in a third ode we are informed that "the city of Zhang was orderly laid out, it is the centre of the four quarters; majestic is its fame, bright is its divine power; in longevity and peace it protects us".⁶⁾

All this certainly adds up to a centre-periphery theory - but not under the Zhang, let alone Hsia. These odes, it has been established, were first created under the (eastern) Zhou dynasty 770-241 BC, in the petty state of Zung (cf the text of the ode above), more precisely it seems in the years 637-630 BC.⁷⁾

In the first ode there is no word of a Zhang ancestor with "limitless" rule. The expression Zhang-di, meaning literally "Zhang deity", i.e. "deified Zhang" (and referring of course to a deceased ancestor), is of comparatively late occurrence. As to monotheism, it is not even clear whether the Di of the texts refers to one or several (as Chinese does not differentiate). The Yin state was in fact not "very vast", except in comparison to something very small (e.g. the Zung state). The great encircling boundary (of Yin) was the Huang-ho river.

There is nothing improbable in Babylonian concepts having reached the Chinese by the 7th century BC, via intermediaries. On the contrary, "the four regions" is an ancient Mesopotamian conception,⁸⁾ as is the insistence that they are bounded by the sea. While a Mesopotamian of the 28th century BC⁹⁾ would know of four seas (the Indian Ocean or Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Caspian, failing one of the latter two the Red Sea might be added), a Chinese of the 7th would surely be at a loss. Whereas a Mesopotamian had concrete reason to speak of "four regions" surrounding his land (viz. Elam to the east-northeast, Phoenicia/Lebanon to the northwest, Egypt including parts of Palestine to the west, and Arabia to the south),¹⁰⁾ a Chinese did not.

Other indications also obtain. There is the common Chinese and Mesopotamian view that things on earth have their counterpart in heaven;¹¹⁾ characterization of the ruler as "flaming" (cf. above); and the expression that "kingship descended from heaven" - via a mountain.¹²⁾ The ten antediluvian kings of Sumeria supposedly reigned for 432,000 years - while the Chinese thirteen kings of heaven plus eleven kings of earth likewise reigned for 432,000 years.¹³⁾ There is the same conspicuous trusting to astrology (from at least the mid-6th century BC in China),¹⁴⁾ and the same quaint appellation of the constellations as "mansions".¹⁵⁾ Not merely mountain-worship, but the belief that all beings hailed from one mountain, is common to both.¹⁶⁾

In Zhang-related sources the wind is represented by the Feng bird, which is the emissary of Zhang-di.¹⁷⁾ Farther west this bird is known as the Garuda, Simurg or Phoenix, likewise a godly emissary, and equally capable of carrying bulls and other big animals in its talons. Such a bird is first described in Sumerian mythology, from the 26th c. BC.¹⁸⁾

Furthermore, a most prominent Chinese deity was the earth god Zheh, conceived of as a tree: "One chose the polished marrow of a tree and set it up as stem-Zheh." A modern commentary asserts that "this trunk or stem probably formed the part of the earth god which soared forth from the interior of the earth; it was also the god of the dead which, insofar as they did not become beings of a higher order (Di), returned to it"¹⁹⁾. Now the Zhang cosmos comprised a heavenly overworld, the middle world of the living, and an underworld. The same three-tiered view is characteristic of Central Asia and Mesopotamia - where the Tree (or pillar) of life, or the World Tree, is the element connecting the three - and (re)presenting immortality too, as the "navel-cord" between mortals and gods above. The Chinese pictograph Zheh is composed of "veneration", "tree" and "earth", strongly indicating a Tree of the Earth, a World Tree.²⁰⁾ It is supposed to give rain and plenty, as is the World Tree with its nectar. And whereas the "vault"²¹⁾ of heaven was revered at a round hillock, the earth was revered at a square one,²²⁾ and thought to be square²³⁾ ideas ancient in Mesopotamia, as we shall see.

Lastly, Di suggests Iranian and Indian div, deva.²⁴⁾

The Chinese in all probability were in rather constant contact with both Iranian and proto-Turkic peoples. In a Book of Songs from 1000-700 BC with songs "from diverse lands" we oftentimes hear of "blue heaven"²⁵⁾ which ca 700 AD and later surfaces as the supreme deity of the Turks. Interestingly too, "heaven created the lofty mountain, the great king cultivated it"²⁶⁾ the (singular) lofty mountain and the relationship of the king to it recalling Iranian, Indian and Mesopotamian religion once again. A later, Zung dynasty (high middle ages) commentary reads: "If one thinks of the appearance, one speaks of Tien (heaven). If one thinks of the domination, one speaks of Di (god)."²⁷⁾ There is even a Chinese version of the sin-flood story: After the rainflood, which is stopped by a heavenly maid, two humanlike beings survive to regenerate the world - one being named Nu-wa!²⁸⁾ This legend was recorded in the second or third century BC.

Westerly influences in part accompanied the Wu, or loosely, shamans. One group of Wu had as its specialty offerings to "the nine heavens" - cf the nine heavens and nine underworlds of Siberian shamans and the mediæval Turks. That the nine heavens were introduced by the Huns is indicated by an ancient Han dynasty source: "The Wu of the Huns serve the nine heavens upon the terrace for the reception of the gods."²⁹⁾ (The number nine²⁹⁾ in Central Asia, and partly in China, corresponds in mythology to the seven of Mesopotamia.)

From the fourth century BC another occidental notion flourishes in Chinese sources: that of the Kun-lun, the central World Mountain, "having all the attributes of the Indian Meru"³⁰⁾. (One Chinese scholar sees in the name Kun-lun a transcription of the last two syllables of Babylonian zig-gurat.³¹⁾ According to ancient Chinese cosmology the north-western cosmic pillar (upholding heaven) has been broken,³²⁾ so that the earth inclines from northwest towards the south-east, the Kun-lun "hence logically was located in the west". (As will be seen, there is another, fuller explanation.) With increasing Chinese knowledge of the west, however, it was relegated ever farther west, until it disappeared³³⁾ more and

more from serious literature towards the end of the Han dynasty (220 AD). Forth from this mountain flow four great world rivers, one in each cardinal direction. China is but the easternmost part of the world thus defined, traversed by the Huang-ho, which hence must originate in this mountain. The Kun-lun is "the earthly residence of the heavenly god", and directly to the east of it six Wu clans were supposed to combat the maneating dragon Ya-yü with the plant of immortality in their hands. Upon the Kun-lun lay also the Garden of Paradise, where the "King mother of the West" let the peaches of immortality grow and mellow. In a 200-130 BC source the Kun-lun has got a counterpart in the East, the Peng-lai on an isle in the Ocean where Daoist spirits were supposed to dwell - showing how this notion, of occidental origin, had been worked into Daoist thought.³⁷⁾

The Wu ideas were one of the constituent elements of ancient (pre-Han) Daoism. A chief goal of this Daoism was to prolong life. This could be achieved either through total acceptance of and non-resistance to the cosmic forces, or through becoming a Hsien: "Hsien means to become old yet not die", and is roughly translated as a saint; the pictograph consists of "human" and "mountain", and might of course indicate simply a mountain-dwelling recluse yet another way of writing intimates "a human who ascends the mountain(range)"³⁷⁾, i.e. to associate with the gods; cf. longevity/immortality as associated with the Kun-lun. These holy people are thought to rise and descend with the wind, rain and clouds, "their wings stretch across all times and expanses and are, it may easily be recognized, the travels of the Wu and shamans extended into the limitless"³⁷⁾. In a Wu poem from South China a deity says: "Far wide I crossed this land and more, Far wide across the four seas to the limits of this world."³⁸⁾ Who are originally the Wu then?

The Wu who spread out across both north and south China were for the major part descendants of one single Wu clan named Fan - which means "barbarian" in Chinese - from the land of the Huns, we are told.³⁷⁾ This is a precious pointer, to my mind, to the Wu-zun people of Chinese

sources: they were a small people in the south part of the Ili valley, with the Huns as their immediate neighbours to the north of the Ili, southwest of the Tien-zhan mountain range. The Tien-zhan means "Mountain of Heaven" - and its mediæval Turkic name is Ak-tag (as is expressly said in other Chinese sources), "the white mountain"³⁸⁾. This is the holy mountain of Central Asia par excellence: Upon it Buku Qān, ancestor-king of the Uigur Turks, is initiated with regard to both wisdom (religion) and world rule.³⁹⁾ In all probability this was the mountain to which Wu "shamans" in China would refer. I may add that one word of the Wu vocabulary is preserved, namely kun, meaning "king"⁴⁰⁾; cf. the Kun-lun (inexplicable in Chinese itself) as designating the "King mother" mountain of the West.⁴¹⁾ Finally, with whom are the Wu-zun associated, who were their immediate western neighbours? Right west of the Issikūl sea, it appears, ran the border of the Wu-zun with Kāng-gū - Iranian Samargand.⁴²⁾ (Kāng means "great", as does Kun - and Qān, Khān.⁴³⁾)

A universalist philosophy is also found in Daoism. What is Dao? "It is without form, yet the origin of all forms. It is without sound, yet the origin of all sounds. Its son is the light, its nephew the water. All thus arises out of the formless!" As an ancient philosopher has it: "Dao is the beginning of heaven and earth. It comprises all the threads into one unity. It created all beings and let heaven arise. It encompasses all, without itself having shape."⁴⁴⁾ It is only after coalescing with Wuism and Hsien doctrine that Daoism comes forth as a proper religion, some centuries before our era. Here we find the duality of Yang (light) and Yin (darkness), also seen as male and female, and a veneration of water: "The highest good is like the water. The water with its good works benefits all beings, but eschews conflict. It lives where no man would dwell. Therefore it comes close to Dao." Whereas all strives upwards towards the light, the water recedes into the dark, which is the origin and spring of all life and to which all shall return. "The preeminence of this motherly, dark and moist Yin region harks back, one may gather, to primordial conditions - matriarchy. Only towards the end of the Zhou period does the light Yang region gain preeminence, possibly under the influence of Central Asian light religions."

These religions are the Iranian ones (Zoroastrism/Parsism and Manichæism). Yet the similarity is there in other ways as well. For one thing, water is defined in the same way in Zoroastrism, as the life-giving blessing of the material world, seeping down into and through the earth, as through a sponge. Moreover, the very cardinal point of the Iranian faiths is the duality of light and darkness: These are originally separate, but have been mixed together, so that at present light contains elements of darkness and darkness of light, quite as do Yin and Yang. "One holds this contrasting of light and darkness, which in the Iranian religion plays such a prominent role, in general up to now to be indubitably Indogermanic," and in the Indian Vedas darkness is not (cf ancient Daoism) considered as evil. Yet the Babylonians too derive the world from the same duality, "the light" is called father and "the darkness is called mother."⁴⁶⁾ Daoism hitherto has simply been considered a Chinese, autochthonous faith, full stop. There is something to be said for its reflecting a transmission of themes from (or through) Central Asia, as replanted in China. Other such themes are the registry of the damned and the eternally redeemed in the heavenly Hall of Light, the "great man-and-god, Lord of Longevity", the world catastrophes through which few are saved,⁴⁸⁾ and the three stages of society.⁴⁹⁾



When "the heavenly lord" in eastern China is venerated at "the heavenly navel",⁵⁰⁾ this latter expression too most probably hails from, or via, Central Asia. A Chinese emperor orders "that the nexus between heaven and earth be broken off, in order that no more spirits descend"⁵¹⁾ as a measure against the Wu - strongly indicating that the belief in such a nexus, navel, World Pillar etc was characteristic of the Wu.

Now all the above sources concern China before its unification under the Chin, 221-207 BC. "When Chin had united the entire land under the heaven" an imperial decree begins⁵²⁾ - demonstrating that "the entire land" here does not imply the world as a whole, but merely China. Yet the Central Asian (i.e. non-Chinese) origin of Chin ideology is patent in the

erection in 220 BC of a palace symbolizing the constellation "heavenly peak", our Polar Star, i.e. the Pillar of Heaven, the World Pillar.⁵⁷⁾ This was the abode of "the Single One", the supreme heavenly deity - and the nearby river was seen as the earthly manifestation of the Milky Way. The latter point is telling indeed: the Milky Way is of paramount importance in Iranian religion, as the Bridge of Cinvant or pillar of light up to the Polar Star, where the dead ascend. The deity of the "Middle Palace" (i.e. world centre) in the "peak of heaven", the Single One, became the object of a Daoist cult.⁵⁸⁾

The Paradise mountain in the west was a popular concept - thus it was the rallying cry of a widespread insurrection in 3 BC.⁵⁹⁾ The coexistence of disparate elements in Daoism is exemplified by the belief that an adept could aspire to become, in the best cases, a high official in heaven, in the less successful cases, an inhabitant of the Kun-lun paradise, or simply one enjoying the full of life on earth.⁶⁰⁾ From this it is evident that the Kun-lun was not so top-notch after all, testifying one would think to its foreign origin.

This origin must explain the otherwise (to the Chinese) inexplicable name of the mountain. One cannot but be reminded of that Sanskrit name of the far-northern Land of the Blest - Uttaru (= Utter, Outer) Kuru, or simply Kuru. Nor can one forgo mentioning that, though the mountain "disappeared more and more from serious literature", it did not disappear from geography: it is still there, as any map of the People's Republic will show, in the shape of the Eastern and Western Kun-lun ranges of Xinjiang.

There were also other centre-of-the-earth and central-mountain concepts. Thus the centre of the world happened to be China, and the centre of both China and the world was a spot somewhere south of the state of Yen (with present-day Beijing) and north of the state of Yueh (by the easternmost bulge of the Chinese coast).⁶¹⁾ This point of view was ridiculed by the so-called Dialecticians of the 3rd century BC as being "the viewpoint of a well-frog".⁶²⁾

Between Yen and Yueh on the Zhandung peninsula the Taizhan ("Supreme Mountain") is situated. All beings are said to have descended from this Supreme Mountain, one of the main tasks of which was to direct and distribute the life-giving waters of heaven. This was the mountain of both life and light (viz. the rising sun in the east), and by a hillock at its foot the dead were thought to assemble. Possibly we here have a very ancient, and indigenous Chinese, mountain cult - which in the course of time came to act as a pole of attraction for other mountain-related concepts of Central Asiatic transmission. The deity called the Princess of the Many-Coloured Clouds might be one such. By the beginning of the Han dynasty ca 200 BC the Taizhan had already become a veritable Daoist mountain of the gods, in the way of Central and Western Asia.⁵⁹⁾

Zhandung was the centre of the Yin-Yang and Five Elements school, and noted for the fanciful stories heard (from abroad) and told by its inhabitants. Which the foreign impulses were that contributed to the growth of the Yin-Yang and Taizhan theories, we may infer from passages by the Zhandung philosophers. Thus one work informs us that -

Heaven has nine fields; Earth has nine continents; the land has nine mountains; the mountains have nine passes; there are nine lakes.. The total territory contained within the four seas is 28000 li from east to west, and 26000 li from south to north.. There are more than ten thousand lesser waterways. Between the four extreme limits (of the world) there are from east to west 597,000 li, and from south to north also 597,000 li. The stars of the zodiac move with the heavens, but the axis of Heaven does not itself move. At the winter solstice the sun travels in a distant path, and moves around in a circle through all four quarters (in the sky). This is called 'mysterious light'. At the summer solstice the sun travels in a near path and is right above. Beneath the axis of Heaven there is no day or night. To the south of the (country of the) white people, beneath the hardwood trees, there are no shadows in the middle of the day, and when one calls there is no echo. For this is the centre of Heaven and Earth.⁶⁰⁾

These theories may be "derived from the Yin-Yang school", meaning via this school. For the ultimate derivation is, clearly and unmistakably, Babylonia.

The magically recurrent number nine corresponds to the role of the equally potent number seven in Babylonian-Sumerian and, hence, Iranian, cosmology. The (ten) thousand lesser waterways are refound in the Iranian sources⁶². The seven (or here, nine) continents we shall have occasion to revert to (p 45 below). What we shall enquire into here and now is that weird supposition that in the centre of Heaven and Earth there is neither day nor night, neither shadows nor echoes.

These characteristics come natural to any poetical mind wishing to stress the immobile, unchangeable nature of the World Centre - as well as its being possessed of unending, total light (hence no day-night alternation, and no shades). Such are the ancient Babylonian and the subsequent Iranian tenets of faith. And the gist of the description in the Chinese source above, from ca 200 BC, is refound in even more ancient Greek sources as well as in Siberian lore of the 20th century AD. In both cases the ultimate Babylonian origin is patent, from the attendant details. In the Odyssey, Circe sits weaving at a loom - which may symbolize "the rolling course of time and the axle of the world" - upon an island where one cannot tell where the sun rises or where it sets. Anyone who trod on the highest mountain of the Peloponnese, or of Crete, according to tradition lost his shadow. In the Middle Ages Gervasius of Tilbury gives the conviction of some traditionalists that the well where Jesus conversed with the woman of Samaria was the centre of the earth, as here the sun at noon descended vertically into the water of the well and there was no shadow to be seen, allegedly. And in a Yakut tale from Siberia the centre of the earth is also the "earth's stillest place, where the moon does not wane and the sun does not set, where eternal summer reigns" etc.⁶³ In that universalist Eurasian legend of legends, that of Alexander the Great, the world-conqueror comes to the terrestrial paradise - where there is a luminosity which is neither day nor night, neither of sun nor moon or stars. Here is a mountain, and an abundance of costly gems - some of which may be meant to be eaten, or at least bodily enjoyed - and a limpid stream, the water of immortality.⁶⁴ We understand, then, the ca 200 BC Chinese inscription:

If you ascend the Taizhan you will see the divine men; they eat the essence of jade and drink the limpid spring; they have attained to the Way (Dao) of Heaven; all things are in their natural state; they yoke the Hornless Dragon to their chariot; they mount the floating clouds..⁶⁴

As will be seen in the following chapter, the "earth's stillest place" is to be found in Indian cosmology too. It is fundamentally the same idea as is expressed, like the Taizhan theme above, in a so-called Chinese-mirror inscription: "May your eight sons and nine grandsons govern the centre". "That is, may they unite themselves with the Supreme Mover, source of immortality and of thaumaturgical power", a perceptive commentator says. For these "mirrors" are mirrors of the cosmos, what the Hindus and Buddhists know as mandalas, serving a magical end, that of "Unification with the central point from which, as soon as it has been attained, is derived the omnipotence of him who has achieved this. The Dao - first principle and Prime Mover of all things... is identified with the centre and unity"⁶⁵. An illustration is given at the end of this chapter.

The centre of such a cosmograph or world-view is generally, and not surprisingly, identified with China, the Middle Kingdom, and more specifically with a centre ideally located in China, in the form of a mountain or a palace ("heavenly peak") conceptualized as a mountain connected with the axis of heaven. Now Zhungguo, or "the Middle Kingdom", may simply have arisen to designate what was originally one small state in the middle of other petty Chinese states, only later acquiring a cosmological significance. The Chinese empire, united in 221 BC, was termed in Chinese Tien hzia, "all under Heaven", we are told, "however, the belief was already prevalent before this time that the Chinese sovereign, in theory at least, was ruler of the entire civilized world."⁶⁶ In early Daoism Huangdi ("Yellow-Emperor") was venerated as the first world-dominating ideal sovereign, tellingly he is taken for the forefather of the rulers of the 7handung state⁶⁷ (with the Taizhan mountain and other themes above),

"he may probably be connected with the Tai-di ("supreme god") dwelling upon the very uppermost peak of the Kun-lun which soars into the highest heaven"⁶⁷⁾. He is surrounded by four other (lesser) emperors, one in each cardinal direction. Thus, in the Centre there is the "yellow creative power of the central god-emperor", in the east the "green creative power of the godly clear-heaven of the east", in the south "the red creative power of the south-god-emperor", in the west "the white creative power of the west-god-emperor" and in the north "the dark creative power of the north-god-emperor"⁶⁸⁾. Whence these notions?

They are first attested under a Han ruler in the second century BC: The great earth god hillock of the son of heaven is green in the east, red in the south, white in the west, black in the north and yellow in the middle.⁶⁹⁾ It is easy enough to suggest its origin: These are the colours, roughly, of Mount Meru of the Hindus (and, later, Buddhists)⁷⁰⁾ - i.e. another version of the Kun-lun mountain paradise. And in connection with the Meru the Hindus speak of the world-ruler, the cakravartin, who is surrounded by four lesser emperors, one in each cardinal direction. That the first Han rulers claim that the last non-Han emperor was afraid of the "world-ruler atmosphere" of southeastern China, fearing that his dynasty would be overthrown from there, merely goes to show that the world rule concept was by this time well established - and of course that the Han came from southeast China.

In early Han times the swastika appears - in the same form as was developed in Mesopotamia some three thousand years before. It is originally a cosmological symbol, probably of the moving sun (plus the four directions?), but already in Mesopotamia (on pottery etc) came to be what the Sanskrit name svastika says, "fortune-bringer", in Chinese wan, in turn giving the Japanese ban (in e.g. "banzai!")⁷¹⁾; testimony to the acceptance both in China and farther east of ideas imported along the routes of trade and travel right across the Asian continent.

It is a commonplace view that the Chinese traditionally show and have shown but the slightest interest in the world at large: all that matters to the Chinese, it is held, is China, the Middle Realm, while all others are dismissed as the North barbarians, the East barbarians, the South barbarians and the West barbarians. Such an impression entails an undue simplification. In 245-250 AD we have the first recorded use of the expression Da-tsin among the Chinese, meaning "Greater China" and referring to the (East) Roman Empire.⁷²⁾ Da-tsin here represents the West in an exposition of the four Orientals, the four cardinal directions of the world - with China representing the East, India the South and the Yüche (Indoscythian) tribes the North. A Japanese scholar "has demonstrated that the Chinese attributed to Da-tsin all the qualities of their own state ideal"⁷³⁾ it was also in China and Greater China that people were physically ideal.⁷⁴⁾

What can be said, however, is that active and aggressive interest in the non-Chinese world was never displayed by the Chinese: Their interest was passive, it consisted in simply recording some of the information that came to them by mouth of foreign visitors. Their interest was non-aggressive, they occupied and pacified regions in the north and west (along the Silk Route) in response to attack. It was such circumstances that fostered the exclamation of the Tang emperor Taidzong in the 630's AD that "I have subjugated the 200 kingdoms, imposed silence upon the Four Seas, and the far-off barbarians are come in order to submit one after the other".⁷⁵⁾ Characteristically, it is the barbarians - far-off - who come to the Chinese.

The Tang emperors trace their extensive powers back to the legendary sovereign Yu the Great, who according to myth descended from heaven "in order to put in order the four regions of this base earth". A letter of congratulation to the Tang emperor on his victories in Corea from the king of Tibet in 646 shows how early this idea percolated

to the Tibetans: "The holy Son of Heaven has subjugated the four cardinal points. The kingdoms which the sun and the moon light up are for him so many servants and maids."⁷⁶⁾ This, as stated above, is a reflex of non-Chinese ideas⁷⁷⁾ rife in Central Asia, with which these emperors were occupied. As will be seen, the idea of subjecting the four orients (cardinal points of orientation) is a Buddhist and ultimately Hindu one; thus the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim to Central Asia and northern India Hiuan-dzang declares (525 AD): "As the present age has no "king of the wheel" (cakravartin) who answers to the cosmic order, there are four sovereigns on the territory of the continent Dzhanbu"⁷⁸⁾ (i.e. the Jambudvīpa, or central continent of the world, of Hinduism and Buddhism).

Before repairing to India, we must acquaint ourselves with universal love, a concept seemingly coined by the Chinese. It is the bidding of the so-called Mohists, whose grand old man Mo Dzu (around 400 BC) stressed its utility thus: "When everyone regards the capitals of others as he regards his own, who would attack the others' capitals? Others would be regarded like self. When everyone regards the houses of others as he regards his own, who would disturb the others' houses?"⁷⁹⁾ Mo Dzu's reasoning is pure utilitarianism: The practice of universal love (zhien ai) benefits not only the one who is loved, but the one who loves, on the principle of reciprocity.⁸⁰⁾

Here a cautionary note is not amiss: Zhien does not denote "universe", or world, or cosmos or the likes, but "all objects", of English "every-thing". The emphasis is on all particulars that come into contact with one, and not on an expansionist zest for transcending the geographic borders of the world. It is a local and individual "universality".

The Chinese philosophical debate on this "universality" is instructive. A basic objection to the Mohist view was that "infinity is injurious to universality", meaning that if the number of people is incalculable, how can one love them all? "If the South (i.e. of China) has no limit, it cannot be included in toto" in universal love, on the grounds that only that which is limited can be included within something that is illimited, general. The Mohist answer ran: "If the South is illimitable, it cannot be entirely filled with people, and hence the number of people must be limited. If it is limited, however, what difficulty is there in loving all men? Yet if people do in fact fully occupy this supposedly illimitable South, then what appears infinite is actually limited. And once the territory is limited, what difficulty is there in loving all people in it?"⁸¹ Even in such hairsplitting we notice the overriding unity of both Mohists and anti-Mohists in stressing that "all objects" are limited, circumscribed, local - and Chinese (cf. "the South", where boundaries and numbers were hazier than in the Northwest with its Great Wall and deserts).

In the Mohist-anti-Mohist debate on "universals" too the same points are there. First, the word "universal" used to designate any general concept (e.g. "chair" as the general designation of all chairs, as opposed to the particular, concrete chair), is a European translation - and a very rough approximation indeed. The Chinese is zhih, which means simply "designated". As only particulars really exist, "there are no zhih existing in the world, but things cannot be said to be without zhih", i.e. without names.⁸²

On the strength of the above indications the contention is that universalist and centre-periphery concepts in China derive, generally, from Central and ultimately Western Asia. Their earliest recorded appearance is in the 7th century BC; they are rife from the fourth century BC. They are found in particular in association with the Wu and the Daoists.



A Chinese mirror

Chinese "mirrors" such as the above have been described as "mandala schemes of the universe - round heaven, the pole star or axis mundi in the middle; square earth; the four gates of the Zhungguo of China or of the royal palace correlated with the axis mundi"⁴³. In 106 BC a Han dynasty emperor erected a terrestrial Ming-tang ("Hall of Light") corresponding to the heavenly Daoist one, described (in 79 AD) as round above, square beneath with eight windows for the eight winds and four doors for the four seasons, all enclosed within a wall and a water-ditch.⁴⁴ The Ming-tang evidently is but another reflection of the cosmology "mirrored" above. In the mirror too we find the central mountain, twelve knobs (in the Ming-tang representing the twelve months), the square earth-rim, ~~four~~ gateways, eight lesser continents beyond ours, the round basis of the heavenly vault, a rim of jagged outer mountains, and finally the serpentine sea.⁴⁵

3. EARLY INDIAN UNIVERSALISM

"Turning the wheel of teaching"¹⁾ westward we shall refind most of the basic constituents of Chinese cosmology already reviewed, but in somewhat different forms or with different accentuations. The centrality of empire and emperor are stressed here as well. Both Hinduism and Buddhism acclaim the cakravartin, or world ruler. Cakravartins are sovereigns who conquer surrounding kingdoms or bring them under their authority, they are born on earth as partial incarnations of the chief Hindu deity Viṣṇu, they wear on their feet the marks of a wheel (cakra). Like the great Hindu gods Indra, Agni, Soma and Rudra, and in Buddhism the Bodhisattva (Buddha), a cakravartin is considered to be in possession of seven treasures - the wheel, the elephant, the horse, the gem, the best woman, the best treasurer, the best adviser-general.²⁾ Thus the term cakravartin, the title of the emperor who according to later belief consisted of a part of the Supreme Deity, has something to do with a wheel, or we may say the wheel - of space, power, time:

Here is the first known Indo-European centre-periphery theory, or the rudiments of one. The chariot of the sun has but a single wheel, and this chariot is the visible representation of the year and of time in general, hence the wheel of the year in the R̥g-Veda. The two worlds (the visible and the invisible) are as two wheels, with Indra the axle through and beyond them. All worlds, abodes or beings are called wheels, or all beings are placed on a revolving wheel, the wheel of dominion controlled by Indra, say the ancient Vedic texts. The sovereign who could achieve the ideal of ruling the entire world under one umbrella, drove a chariot of unchecked course up to the end of directions, a classic statement runs³⁾.

(We are reminded of the Chinese maxim of "charioting upon the normality of the universe"⁴.) Chariot races were, in the view of one scholar, "a very important means of generating vaja- (irresistible authority - HS) and obtaining or establishing dominion", while the sun likewise "is itself a wheel, ever invincible and ever indefatigable, turning its circle in the sky and the universe" .

May we..infer from the above data that a cakravartin- originally was a king who participated in the conquering efficacy of the "wheel", i.e. of the sun, of the vaja-winning and "imperialistic" chariot, of a power centre of universality, of universal dominion? Some importance may perhaps be attached to the epithets added to the cakravartin's cakra-: it spreads abroad, is brilliant, heavenly, invincible. The central and dominant position of the person who occupies a place in a "wheel" may also be illustrated by a passage in an upanisad: like the spokes on the hub of a wheel, everything is established on (in) life.. So the term cakravartin- might have come to denote a universal king...: "he who is placed in the cakra-" is he who like the sun is the centre, lord and sustainer of the world, its eye and life-giver; coinciding with the axis mundi the sovereign could reside only in the middle.)

The hub, spokes and periphery of the wheel illustrate quite vividly not merely the general concepts of centre and periphery, but also of one centre controlling and uniting many parts, through reaching out by as many long-arm, strong-arm methods, into one periphery - where, just as with trade and information relations in the world today, in the Galtung structural theory of imperialism,⁶ the relations or connecting lines between the periphery parts (third world countries) are weak or practically non-existent, while those between each periphery part and the centre (industrialized, "imperialist" countries) are strong and visibly dominant, as are the spokes of the wheel. (Interestingly, we sometimes refer to the industrialized "hub" of the world system⁷.)

The same expansionist ideal is there in the word raj- "king", which etymologically denotes space, expanse, extent, the king being the one who "stretched himself out"; and while the idea of the cakravartin was, it is opined, largely theoretical and perhaps even utopian, a fond subject

for philosophizing authors, the practising politicians evolved the theory of the vijigīṣu- or conqueror pure and simple, who is the centre dominating a circle (periphery) of other states.

The above are Hindu ideas. Buddhism reproduces them in rough outline. There is the famous Buddhist concept of dhammacakka, or Wheel of Law, designating the conquering efficacy and supremacy implied in the Dhamma (Law), which like the sun illumines and rules the earth, and the concept of brahmacakka, "the excellent wheel" meaning Buddhism. The wheel represents the universality of the spiritual dominion of the Enlightened One, whose secular counterpart is the universal earthly monarch, both of them manifesting the same universal principle. The Buddha, needless to say, is this cakravartin monarch par excellence; and the cakravartin is, according to Buddhist sources, a king who rules the earth surrounded by the ocean, "the circle of the earth". The Buddhists maintain that the emperor's main treasure, the cakkaratana, a sort of palladium of dominion, wins the various quarters of the world for him; wherever it halts, all the chiefs of that quarter acclaim him their sovereign.⁹⁾

In sum: Although Hinduism and in particular Buddhism are contemplative-pacific, their explicit universalist political (and for that matter, by analogy, spiritual) ideal is definitely actionist, expansionist, imperialist - indicating that this is the primordial type of universalism, of which a pacific all-men/beings-are-brothers type is a secondary development (i.e. not necessarily with regard to the pacifism, but with regard to its universalism).

This expansionism of course might hark all the way back to the Aryan invasion of India, when the Indo-European Hindus established themselves at the expense of the Dravidic and other aborigines, some 3500-1500 years BC. Yet there is another explanation, to be culled from the cakravartin's "wheel" itself.

It goes back to Mesopotamia - the culture of which

the Indo-European invaders must have encountered and borrowed from at an early age, indeed perhaps that of the invasion. In the 4th millennium BC diverse forms of the cross, including the swastika, exist as symbols and ornaments in the Land between the Rivers. In the latter part of the 3rd millennium the cross develops into a fourfooted star or sun, under the influence of an increasing astral cult. The sun is also depicted as a round disc. And the two coalesce into a third, soon the dominant symbol - the sun-wheel, from the 3rd millennium BC, generally resting in a crescent moon - the symbol later adopted by Islam.¹⁰⁾ The conception of the sun as the wheel of the sun-god's chariot, which underlies the cakravartin ideology of India, has its origins quite clearly in Mesopotamia. Here the ruler officially calls himself "my sun"¹¹⁾, certainly implying the wheel of light and domination, rolling up to the end of directions. On the other hand, "in the way of pain, on the road of the chariot"¹²⁾ is an aphorism for the land of the dead, with the "chariot" probably referring to the chariots found in the tombs of the early Sumerian kings at Kish and Ur,¹³⁾ placed there in the belief that the kings would be able to use them for domination in the land of the dead as in that of the living.

Having treated now of the human centre of the universe, the universal ruler, we proceed with the other notions of centrism in Indian thought. The geographical centre of the world is - cf the Chinese materials above - the world mountain, the heavenly peak, Meru to the Indians. In the maṇḍala representations of the universe this central point is also, tellingly, called the "palace".¹⁴⁾ we consult "the plan of royal palaces in the East. For these, according to the Mesopotamian scheme, represent the world rotating round an axis which is the throne of the king and is identified, ideally, with the central mountain of the universe or with the Pole Star, the immobile pivot on which all turns." Moreover, "not only royal palaces but ordinary dwellings were, originally, a superficies transformed into a centre through which the

axis mundi ran and so put the inhabitants into contact with the three spheres of existence, the subterranean, the median and the superior.. This took place when the planes were ruptured by the axis of the world being magically transported into the dwelling. Thus in the tent of the shepherds of Central Asia, and certainly of the earliest Tibetans, the hole at the top through which the smoke passes corresponds with the 'orifice' of the sky, the Pole Star, in a cosmic system thought of as a gigantic tent.¹⁴⁾ We may add that here is the background to a contemporary Indian tradition on house building. Before commencing, the astrologers are consulted; thereupon the mason sharpens a pole and thrusts it into the ground at precisely that spot which has been ascertained by the astrologers so that the head of the subterranean serpent be firmly held in place.¹⁵⁾ (This serpent we shall presently acquaint ourselves with, along with the pole. Even the gigantic tent is of ancient 'Irāqī origin'.¹⁶⁾

The centre of the mandala is described as follows in a text of the Jain religion, a very ancient faith still flourishing in India: The meditator is to imagine a great motionless ocean of milk, in the middle of which is visualized a lotus-flower as large as the Jambudvīpa (i.e. our, the central, continent on earth). This lotus has a thousand golden petals and its pericarp rises up like a mountain of gold. The meditator should think of himself as seated on a throne on the peak of this mountain and as complete master of his passions. Thus he is, ideally, transported up upon the peak of existence, where he must work to free himself from karma (the spell of this mundane life) so that he can 'leap' on to the plane of nirvāṇa.¹⁷⁾

The sea of milk (meaning the "water", or milk, of life), the throne, the "golden" or luminous mountain-of-the-world (the "heavenly peak" of the Chinese), the lotus, even the mystical plane of nirvāṇa "above" human karmic existence, all are sprung from a foreign seed - though in the Indian womb, producing offspring with the definite imprint of Indian thought and ways.

"In India, the lotus has been regarded as expressing a twofold symbolism," a modern scholar notes. "The first denotes creation in its widest sense, generated from the primordial seed of the cosmic waters, as in the myth of Brahma rising from the navel of Narayana lying upon those waters. The lotus is the earth itself on those same waters.. and the prop of the universe" . The second meaning of the lotus is the other plane of existence" which reveals itself in the centre of the mysterious space in the depths of the heart" through a 'leap' of consciousness. The attainment of this mysterious centre is nirvana; and the centre is "the stillest place on earth".¹⁹⁾

"In the space that is within the heart lies the Lord of All, the Ruler of the Universe, the King of the Universe," says one upaniṣad, while another insists: "Like unto the extent of space is the void within the heart. Heaven and earth are in it. Agni and Vāyu, sun and moon, likewise the stars and lightning and all other things which exist in the universe and all that which does not exist, all exists in that void."¹⁹⁾ (A very full void; yet we are reminded of the centre of the earth as being without echoes and shadows - indicating: without distances.) This centre, then, is not envisaged as an extended two- or three-dimensional part of space but as a point. And this luminous point of consciousness may be likened to, again, the hub of a wheel, from which stream forth the psychic powers: "As all spokes are connected with both the hub and the rim, so all creatures, all gods, all worlds, all organs are bound together in that soul." The spokes in turn may be identified with the rays of the sun.²⁰⁾

In the maṇḍala "psychocosmogram"²¹⁾ the original Mesopotamian components are redefined according to the needs of the Indian mystic, yet still identifiable. The major, middle part of the maṇḍala is occupied by a square. Outside it are eight "graveyards" (interpreted as awe-inspiring places in India for meditation), or eight "paradises" - each equipped with its own mountain in the middle, its own tree and cool, perfumed river or lake; the

tree of such a paradise characteristically glitters with gems and precious stones.²²⁾ These paradises (or alternatively graveyards) recall the peripheral continent surrounding the great central continent according to the Indian and, ultimately, the Babylonian world view. The square represents, and is called, as we have said, a palace. In the middle of each of the four sides a gate opens in the form of a T (cf our Chinese mirror above!). The sides (walls) are surmounted by a balcony decorated with lotus flowers; here Trees of Paradise rise up from vases containing the Water of Life. A line bisecting the "palace" and mandala symbolizes mount Meru - and the spinal column of man²³⁾ (a theme we shall enter upon below). Finally, the ceremony performed in a mandala is a "coronation", a royal baptism.

"The symbolism is clear", as others have noted already. "It is derived.. from the Mesopotamian zikkurat, which was also a cosmogram of the universe.." ²⁴⁾ Or we may simply say: Basics of Indian culture, including the mandala, go back upon Mesopotamian ideas. Another instance is the stupa (and the related topa and dagoba), that characteristic reliquary or grave monument. This is a tall, round mound - depicting in reality a navel of the earth²⁵⁾ - surmounted by a short pillar and capital. The base of the stupa may often be square. The temples at Sanchi and Amarāvati in India, from the 1st and early 3rd century AD, have reliefs showing stupas/topes/dagobas - in association with a serpent, represented as being inside or, in one case, slung around on the outside of, the stupa. In another case the serpent is guardian of, and beneath, a Tree of Life rising up within the stupa.²⁶⁾

The liquid of the Tree of Life is described as a white and cool ambrosia. Now the Sanskrit word nirvāṇa in fact means, approximately, "cool"²⁷⁾ The way up to this well-nigh inattainable stage of meditation is termed the 'ladder' or 'stairs' of the secret of the serpent Kundalini,²⁸⁾ whom we shall meet soon. The serpent is "secret", i.e. below-surface, subterranean, subliminal. And the "stairs" or "ladder"²⁹⁾ - of the heavenly ladder of Jacob's dream in our Bible - are taken from the ziggurat.

These gigantic edifices of Babylonia originally had five but later on seven often spiralling storeys up to the top. This evidently symbolizes the seven planetary deities of the Babylonians, bequeathing to posterity the conception of the seven heavens.³⁰⁾ Where do we refind this Babylonian theme? In a tradition on Mount Meru - clinching the argument for its derivation from the Babylonian cosmology. In the same wise that micro- and macrocosmos mirror each other in the navel-altar-world-mountain conception, we find the Meru performing a micro-macro function in Hindu tradition: For Mount Meru, to the contemplation-oriented Indians, is in fact an image of the spinal column, Merudanda. Through the body run a very great number of hollow passages, veins, capillaries (cf the Iranian view of the earth and water),³¹⁾ the main one however being the one that runs up the spinal column. The inside of the spinal column is described as hollow and doubly sheathed, like a plant (or the passageway for the sap within a tree). In the bottom pit of this hollow dwells the serpent power, Kuṇḍalinī:

Kuṇḍala means coiled. The power is the goddess (devī) Kuṇḍalinī, or that which is coiled; for Her form is that of a coiled and sleeping serpent in the lowest bodily centre, at the base of the spinal column, until... She is aroused in that Yoga which is named after Her.³²⁾

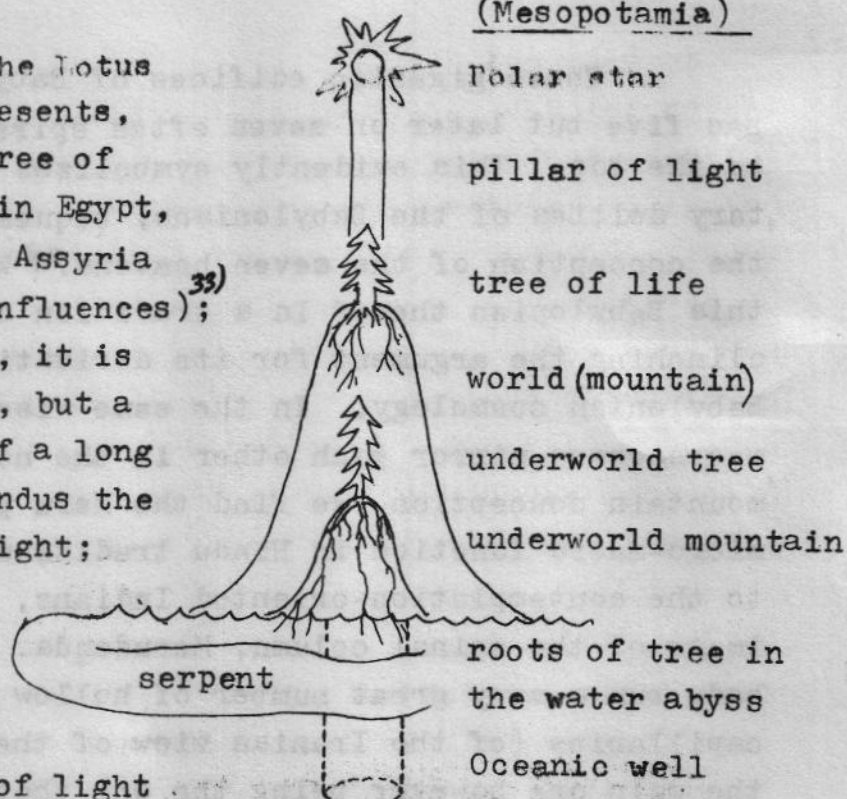
There are seven stages above one another, of the seven stages of the ziggurat: six centres, called lotuses or cakras, through which the serpent-power may rise (corresponding to the spinal base, the pubic region, the navel, the heart, the throat and a point between the eyebrows - popularly known as "the third eye"), and the well-nigh inattainable "Thousand-petalled Lotus" on the top of the head, the ultimate aim: liberation from the bonds of the natural world, a state beyond mind, which is a part of nature (sic).

In this final metamorphosis into the human body, that same old basic symbolism is nevertheless patently

The Cosmological Navel

(Mesopotamia)

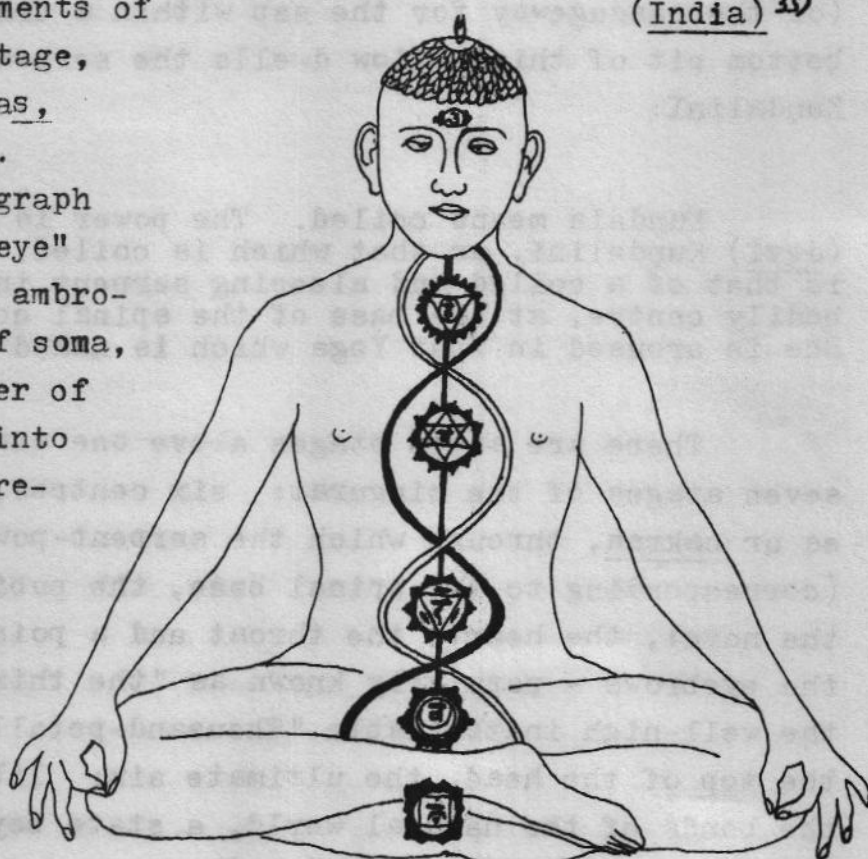
enough present. The Lotus supplants, or represents, the cosmological Tree of Life - as it does in Egypt, Phoenicia and even Assyria (due to Egyptian influences)³³⁾; in all these cases, it is not simply a lotus, but a lotus on the top of a long pillar.³⁴⁾ To the Hindus the lotus symbolizes light; thus the Thousand-petalled Lotus is seen as the experience of light and of an ambrosial stream of joy. Recent research



traces the elements of this seventh stage, above the cakras, to Mesopotamia. Thus the pictograph in the "third eye" represents the ambrosial stream (of soma, haoma, the water of life) pouring into a traditional receptacle: the crescent moon. On the top of the yogi's head is a "lotus with two petals" -

The Serpent-Power Yogi

(India)³⁵⁾



which is botanical nonsense, but is a fair representation of the two-winged solar disc of Assyria.³⁶⁾ We may add: the

"Thousand-petalled Lotus" (the symbolic foliage-like hair of the yogi) is the dense, rich foliage attributed to the Tree of Life by all sources. The spinal column is its trunk (cf the Tree of Life portrayed as a palm-tree in Assyria, which strikingly evokes the idea of a spine - and most probably did evoke this idea in the Hindus). Finally, of course, the serpent is the groundswell so to speak, of Mesopotamian cosmology - residing in the pit or spring at the base of the Tree of Life.

The appellation "the coiled one" is indicative enough. In the lowest cakra or lotus Kuṇḍalini is represented as coiled three and a half times round an erect phallus - in exactly the same way that the serpent is wound, also three and a half times, around the navel at Delphi as well as that of Petra.³⁷⁾ With the Hindu cult of the god Śiva's phallus, the substitution of a phallus for the navel-pillar of Mesopotamia is understandable; yet the original is also found: The god Viṣṇu may be portrayed as sitting within the serpent Kuṇḍalini's coils and contemplating the lotus on a long stalk issuing from Viṣṇu's navel.³⁸⁾ The Mesopotamian "world serpent" is always coiled;³⁹⁾ the Ocean is envisaged as this serpent; and the ziggurats are spiral-wound too - most clearly seen in that monumental round minaret of ca 850 AD still standing outside the ruins of the caliphal mosque and palace at Samarra, 'Irāq. The name, still today, is الملوّية "the place where something is coiled up" - and the serpent which is wound up under the Ka'ba, around the world, and around God's throne, is characterized by the same verb التَوَرَّج "to coil up".⁴⁰⁾ It is a foundation of the world, and ever glittering, brilliantly light (as the glittering sea). Cf now the Hindu description:

Like the spiral of the conch-shell, Her shining snake-like form goes three and a half times round Śiva, and Her lustre is as that of a strong flash of young strong lightning. Her sweet murmur is like the indistinct hum of swarms of love-mad bees. She produces melodious poetry.. and all other compositions in prose or verse.. It is She who maintains all beings of the world by means of inspiration and expiration, and shines in the cavity of the root Lotus like a chain of

brilliant lights. /She is the receptacle of that continuous stream of ambrosia which flows from the Eternal Bliss. By Her radiance it is that the whole of this Universe and this Cauldron is illuminated.46)

We now are in a position to understand how the elements of lotus, navel, mountain, eternal bliss, serpent, (spinal) column, stream of ambrosia, brilliant lustre, foundation of the world, and tree, could be established as inter-identifiable, or closely associated, in Hinduism. How for instance, when we have come to know mount Meru, the Rgveda nevertheless can say:

What now was the wood-matter, what was the tree
out of which they constructed the heaven
and the earth, the stable, imperishable, eternal?

What now was the wood-matter, what was the tree
out of which they constructed heaven and earth,
you Sages, research it in the spirit,
that which, sustaining it,
safeguards all beings.47)

Of course all the above elements just might have arisen in Indian minds independently of any influence from Mesopotamia, theoretically; or rather, any one of them might have. But the specificity of these concepts in combination with their mutual relationship definitely belies such assumptions. Clearly, the older and more advanced culture of Mesopotamia impressed itself upon the Aryan invaders of the subcontinent - to such an extent that still today merudanda is the word for the spinal column. And what now of the name Meru itself? It has no convincing Hindu or Sanskrit etymology, nor any connection with the North East Iranian city-name Merv. Suffice it to say that Sumerian was retained, both the language and the name, as something sacred, i.e. priestly, deep into Babylonian ("Akkadian", Semitic) times, after the Sumerians as an ethnic-linguistic group disappeared around 1800 BC; and that the fuller-form name of Mount Meru is - Sumeru.

4. EARLY IRANIAN UNIVERSALISM

Even more pronouncedly universalist-expansionist than the Indian heritage is the Iranian. A Hellenist Syrian author avers that the supreme godheads of the Iranians are time and space.¹ He has in mind Zrvan akarana, "the time without boundaries", and Thwasha, "the space without boundaries". Thus, according to Parsi scripture, "the Creator Ahura Mazda created the world.. out of his own light and to the joyful cry of the Time without boundaries. Hence the Time without boundaries is without age, without death, without affliction, without thirst, without problems, and unto eternity no-one can rob her or of his own might render her powerless." Thus too, both Ahura Mazda and his evil counterpart Angro Mainyus were felt to have been created by the Time without boundaries.² Characteristically of Iranian thought, she is said to enjoy "domination". With her cognomen "The Old One" she has been thought to be identical with Baal "The Old One", "The Old of Days" of Babylonia. On the other hand the Space without boundaries was alternatively known, it seems, as Sipihr and Dyāus, referring to the heavenly sphere (cf the word Sipihr) - with Dyaus being related to European Deus, Zeus.³

Within Time and Space are two contending forces: the Unending absolute light, and the Unending absolute darkness. The representatives of these are, respectively, Ahura Mazda (the good Creator), and Angro Mainyus (the evil Creator), who lead an army of angels and good spirits and an army of demons and bad spirits in their cosmic battle for hegemony. As against the Chinese, and partly the Indian, ideal of harmony, this bespeaks a warrior ethos. And there are no limits to the battle, in which stars and planets too take part.⁴

In contrast to the Chinese, and quite like the Indian system, the Iranian view of the world is one of centre and periphery. The outermost component in this mythical geography is a ring of mountains "girdling the earth". This is called the Hara Berezaiti by the Iranians, Lokaloka by the Hindus. Inside the mountain-chain is the ocean - surrounding seven continents. Of these, six are known by name only to the Iranians and Hindus alike, and are thought of as inaccessible. The middle continent, and the biggest of the seven, is called Qaniratha by the Iranians and Jambudvipa by the Hindus. The centre of this continent is a mighty mountain reaching into heaven, called Çekati-daitik by the Iranians, Meru by the Hindus. Though located in the "middle of the world", it is thought of as lying in the north by both Iranians and Hindus. This is the abode of the blessed, where perfect bliss and longevity reign.

In the spring Ardvi-çura grows the Tree of Life, the white Haoma of the Iranians. The same tree is known by the Hindus under the Indian form of the name, Soma. The spring of life is likewise evidently found upon mount Meru - though Soma is not expressly localized. As the Indian Rgveda (146, 19-22) informs us:

Two birds...sit upon the same tree, the one eats the sweet figs, the other watches without eating. Where the winged ones unceasingly praise the offering of the drink of immortality, thither hath the Lord of the Universe, the Protector of the World, the Wise One, placed me, the scholar. Upon which tree the soma-eating birds alight and weight it down, upon the boughs of which the sweet figs are, they say: the one who does not know the Father cannot reach them.

All commentaries to Genesis compare the Tree of Life of the Jewish and Christian tradition with the haoma of the Iranians.⁴⁾ Indeed, our Paradise reproduces the notions found in both Iranian and Indian cosmology. Yet while haoma/soma is a central concept in this cosmology, the Tree of Life is characteristically mentioned only in this one isolated instance in the Old Testament, and left unexplained. Moreover, whereas haoma/soma is a divine blessing to man,

giving him immortality/longevity and letting him know god ("the Father" above), the Old Testament views the Tree of Life with animosity, as a potential threat to God if man were to enjoy it. The conclusion imposes itself: The Tree of Life was so familiar a concept to the ancient Hebrews, yet also felt to be so alien and inimical to other, more basic Judaic teachings, that it had to be introduced - and neutralized. As with the four rivers of Paradise, the Hindus insist that from mount Meru flow four world rivers. The Iranians believe that from the Ardvi-çura spring and its Tree of Life on the world mountain flow two rivers - one eastward (the Mehrva, or Indus), one westward (at its outlet known as the Nile).⁵⁾ If one followed these rivers to their source one would reach, according to the Iranian literary sources the Avesta and the Bundaheshn, the Hara berezaiti world mountain and its spring of life, tree of life, paradise. In addition, there are two other great rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. I.e. all in all, four. Now Jewish, Christian and Muslim tradition say, in the way of the ancient Iranians, that by following the four world rivers upstream, one will find (the terrestrial) Paradise - yet to prevent this God has made them flow part of the way underground. This, as it happens, is the Iranian conception: Just as all mountains are connected underground and really are simply offshoots of one single world mountain (the Hara Berezaity) all water too is one, flowing overground and underground - with the earth as it were a sponge.⁶⁾ Thus the four world rivers (and not merely the two) are connected.

In its centre-periphery structuring of the world Iranian tradition also speaks of the "navel of the waters"⁷⁾. Conversely, the central World Mountain with World Tree atop was certainly considered the link, or navel, between this world and heaven. Cf a Yakut Siberian tale of our days - bearing in mind that Iranians have roamed the whole heartland of Asia, as nomads (Scythians and Sarmatians) and as merchants (Sogdians): "Above the wide, motionless deep, under the nine spheres and the seven storeys of heaven, at the most central place, the navel of the earth, earth's stillest place, where the moon does not wane and the sun

does not set, where eternal summer reigns and the cuckoo calls unceasing, there the White Youth found himself." And here the White Youth, who is the First Man, sees a lofty hill and upon it a mighty tree. The tree rose above the seven storeys of heaven and was the horse-stake of the supreme god. The sap and resin of the tree give to the aged and tired their youth once more. The roots of the tree reach the underworld. Water bubbles forth perpetually from beneath its roots, and is the everlasting water of life. The peoples of the Altai mountains likewise tell of a gigantic fir tree which grows in the navel of the earth, in the central point, the highest of all trees on earth, its top reaching to the house of the supreme deity. The tree stands, they say, in the North.⁸⁾

In the tree dwells a spirit, a very ancient goddess: (shown by her having snow-white hair)⁹⁾ She gives the White Youth of the water of life and salvation. She has large, pendant breasts. In other stories of the Yakuts and other Siberian tribes there is upon a heaven-high mountain of the North a lake of milk. This lake of milk is re-found in Hindu beliefs concerning mount Meru in the far north of the world.¹⁰⁾ And of course the soma/haoma dripping from the Iranian and Hindu tree of life is white. Who is this woman deity? We may assert that she answers the question of who another female deity is: Ardvīçūra Anāhita, the personification of the water (of life) streaming out from the peak Hukairya to the Vōurukasha ocean, a woman with large, pendant breasts.¹¹⁾ In all probability she is an Iranian continuation of the Sumerian Mother-Goddess, "Queen of heaven", also called "Queen of the earth mountain", "Queen, the womb", "Queen who allots the fates"¹ - and "the pure Queen"¹²⁾ which happens to be the meaning of Ardvīçūra Anāhita.¹³⁾ In the Yakut tale she emerges from the tree only, to her waist. In the Sumerian version she is bare-breasted, "her navel is placed in a waist-band; from her waist-band to the soles she is covered with scales like a serpent". This description is a later, Assyrian one; yet plainly she is visible as a woman only, again, to the waist. She is a virgin, and with an eye on the Christian dogma of the immaculate conception we note that "the great and ubiquitous cult

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of the virgin Earth-goddess in Canaan, Phoenicia and Syria seems to have been entirely borrowed from Babylonia".¹⁴⁾ As to her lower-parts serpentine nature (cf the serpent as representing the nether, watery-creative part of the Sumerian cosmos), it cannot be a coincidence that the pictograph first used to write her name in Sumerian represents a serpent twining on a staff.¹⁴⁾ Here again we have the navel, or pillar/pole and tree, and the coiled serpent associated with the woman of creation - cf Genesis also. It comes as no surprise then, that the Iranian Ardivisura Anahita, upon her peak in the Hara berezaiti world mountain, is a goddess of conception and birth. (In the Iranian system she has been furnished with a male counterpart - who tellingly is associated with the source of the Tigris upon a mountain of the north, in the Caucasus, and who is called "the navel of the waters"¹⁵⁾.)

From the Hara Berezaiti in the North came, the Iranians held, the First Man. And the first Master of the World, the Iranian emperor Feridun announces that he is sent from the Hara Berezaiti, from the top of the central mountain, in order to cleanse the world.¹⁶⁾ The subsequent mythological history of Iran comprises several successful or would-be world conquerors - among them Qai Khusraw, who from his dwelling among the gods on the Hara Berezaiti is fetched down to rule on earth.

Indian and Iranian tradition have the fundamentals in common. ~~Thus they both also happen to~~ know the Deluge story. The ancient Babylonian basic version is like the Genesis one: The Babylonian "Noah" is named Xisuthros, he is warned of the flood beforehand, told to take along friends and animals, birds etc in an Ark, the world is inundated in the 10th generation of humankind, as in Genesis, and the Ark comes to rest upon a mountain in Armenia, as in Genesis. (This Masu/Ararat is identified with the Çekât-i daitik peak of the Hara berezaiti - in Armenia, or the Caucasus - by the Iranians.)¹⁷⁾ In the Hindu Mahabharata it is likewise related that Brahma appears before the hero Manu¹⁸⁾ in the guise of a horned fish¹⁹⁾, which warns Manu beforehand of the Flood and goads him to build a ship that he is to enter along with the Seven Sages and the seed of all plants and beasts. (The Seven Sages²⁰⁾ are an ancient concept of Mesopotamia.) In the course of the Flood the fish carries the ship

to the Himalayas, whence Manu descends to become the forefather of all men. Another version, in the Ātapatha-brahmaṇa, is older. : Manu is convinced by the horned fish to build a ship, which the fish carries upon its horn to the northern mountain. Here the fish orders him to fasten the ship to - a tree, and to descend from the mountain as the flood receded. Manu now becomes the forefather of all later generations. In the Vedas Manu is simply the First Man; in the Rgveda there are no traces, and in the Atharveda only uncertain ones, of the story of the Flood.

The oldest Iranian (Parsi) holy book, the Avesta, tells substantially the same tale, but in a characteristically muddled way. The First Man is introduced, along with that great mystical being "the native bull", which is thought to be present in the innards of the earth or as standing in the World Ocean and in some way upholding or connected with the entire world: we recall the Babylonian conception of a giant bull supporting the world upon its horns.⁴⁾ The ninth ruler of mankind is called Yima - the refound in Hindu as Yama ("twin"), who with his sister Yami is the first pair of humans. Yima's precursor, the eighth ruler, buries the sacred books in the ground under a palace to preserve them from the coming Flood - just as the Babylonian Noah Xisuthros does. In other ways too this eighth ruler betrays clear Babylonian origins⁵⁾ indicating where the Deluge story under Yima hails from.

Yima throughout his reign spreads happiness upon earth, all humans are content. Towards the end of his reign, however, the Creator Ahura Mazda informs him that a destructive winter shall assail the world, with so much snow that inundations would submerge the places where hitherto cattle grazed. The Creator counsels him to fashion a quadrangular place, and to bring into it the seed of the cattle, the beasts of traction and of man, as well as the burning fire. He was also to fashion dwellings for all these beings inside it, and to bring in the seed of all foods and all those trees which are the tallest and most pleasantly scented. Thus furnished,

Yima is to continue within this small space, called "the Garden", the state of bliss which he up till then had given to the world. In this Garden he and his associates live in unending light.²³⁾

In the Avesta there is preserved another, highly contradictory version as well: Because of the happy state prevailing under the long reign of Yima, the ruler gets vain and proclaims that he alone bears the honour for all this, demanding that his subjects revere him as a god. His power consequently flies from him (in the shape of a bird), and the age of Dahak begins.

Now Dahak, or Azhis dahaka, means "the destructive serpent", and as a monstrous serpent he is portrayed. His domicile according to the Avesta is - Babylon. His purpose is to exterminate the human race. There are many embellishments to this tale which surely are tribute to the fantasy of Iranian storytellers. Here, though, the Flood is not mentioned.

The third Iranian version is that of the Bundaheshn. Here in the early age of the world, during the battle between the Creator Ahura Mazda and his evil counterpart Angro Mainyus the star Tistrya sends a mighty rain upon the earth, because Angro Mainyus has filled it up with harmful and evil creatures. These are drowned, but the poison in their bodies mixes with the pure water from above, making the Ocean salty. This story is but a fragment (we are told that the star has three apparitions, yet learn only of two in connection with the rain-flood).²⁴⁾

All these three Iranian versions, it will be seen, recount a different aspect of the Deluge story as we know it from Mesopotamia. (There is even a fourth: The Parsis of our times, of whom the greatest contingent is some 7000 in India, expect a mighty rainfall at the end of the world which is to annihilate all creation, whereupon Yima and his faithful ones shall appear and populate the world anew.) That these versions in part contradict each other, and

appear as so disjointed, to my mind is proof that they reflect not one originally Iranian legend but half-digested lore from their southwestern neighbours.

These three versions, which so to speak "float" freely of each other, call to mind how the characteristics of one original World Mountain have come to be distributed by the Iranians upon three,^{u)} or even four, separate mountains. Though the mountains of the world are "really", originally, but one mountain according to the Iranians, we hear of the peak Taera reaching up into the light of sun, moon and stars, the peak Hukairya with the tree and spring of life, and the peak Çekat-i daitik in the Caucasus with its (vertical) bridge of light to heaven. Indian tradition stresses the one world mountain; i.e. that this conception is preserved among them, may be understood with reference to the Himalaya range rising as one mountain in the north. The Iranians, however, met with a multitude of mountains, and in connection with their theory of a division of the world into three political parts²⁴⁾, a similar division of the mountains may have seemed natural.

The two oldest versions above, those of the Avesta, plainly contradict each other (thus, in the first Yima lives without dying in his Garden, in the second he is hunted down in the remote parts of the earth and executed by Dahak). In addition, they add up to a logically incomprehensible picture - if we do not comprehend that the logic behind it originally was that of the Babylonian story, as bungled by Iranian rehashers. Thus, it is not at all clear why, if Yima created bliss on earth and kept down all evil (first version), he is to be succeeded by the evil serpent of Babylon. Nor why he should suddenly become vain if his rule was so righteous, or why the people of Iran should then accept an evil serpent from alien Babylon as their ruler (second version). Interestingly the serpent comes after, not before the "sinfall".

The first version, which is close to the Babylonian original, will repay additional attention. The Garden has but one window and one door, as the Ark has, and is somehow

transposed from the world of men to a mountain in the Caucasus. Here the themes of Ark and paradisaical mountain coalesce. The most intriguing detail, though, is this: The divine Garden is quadrangular - just as it is in Genesis. The Iranian traditions on mountains elsewhere say nothing about the form of the mountains, or of the World Mountain (except that it somehow encompasses the world) - natural enough, as the Iranians beheld a wide variety of mountains. The Hindus, though, on their lowland beneath the Himalayas, retained the idea of a quadrangle: Mount Meru, with the garden of the blest on top, is quadrangular. Where, pray, are quadrangles of obvious relevance found?

The ziggurats of Babylonia suggest themselves. "The tree-planted ziggurat at Ur, attached to the temple of the Moon-god, Nannar, no doubt rose, in the eye of the imagination, to the moon itself. It was the artificial image of the tree-crowned mountain that, in the later shamanist cosmology of Asia, ascends to heaven in the form of the world-tree."²⁷ It is rather vice versa, and it is not only the tree plantation but also the squareness that is important: The mythical World Mountain with four sides is an "artificial image" of the ziggurat, or more fundamentally, of Mesopotamian square brick buildings. Thus the concept of a square World Mountain could come to co-exist with the ones tending towards roundness observed in nature. Such a view is reproduced in a late mediæval Islamic source even: "Some people say that the earth is a plain even rooftop in the four directions of east, west, south and north."²⁸ If the World Mountain came to be visualized as quadrangular, might we not expect to find, even, specimens of the monstrously unnatural: the square navel?

We do find square navels! One such, and the latest one, is the Ka'ba; an earlier one is the Holy Rock in Jerusalem; a third, the stone over Eve's reputed grave in Jiddah, all three called or identified with navels.²⁹ More generally, altars are square, supported by four pillars or slabs (smooth stone sides), and symbolize, as we have noted, the World Mountain - or navel.

In the fragmentary Sumerian version from the 23rd century BC the form of the 'World Mountain' is not given; but the hero of the Deluge story, the Sumerian Noah, called Ziusudra, is given eternal life there, as the last of the preserved fragments makes clear:

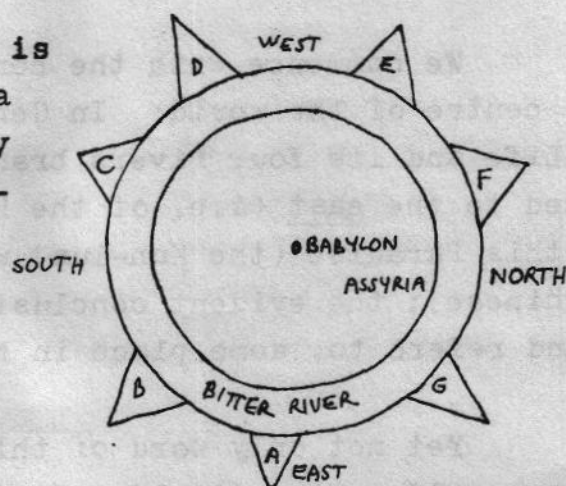
Ziusudra the king
 Before Enlil bowed his face to the earth.
 To him he gave life like a god.
 An eternal soul like that of a god
 he bestowed upon him.
 At that time Ziusudra the king,
 Named 'Saviour of living things
 and the seed of humanity',
 They caused to dwell in the
 inaccessible mountain,
 mountain of Dilmun.³⁰⁾

Though later lost in myth, and transposed to the far north, the original model of the 'inaccessible mountain of Dilmun' may have been envisaged as approximately square. In any case, with the square ziggurats symbolizing the World Mountain, there must have been belief in its being square, whether or not there was some original observation in nature.

Generally, then, both fundamentals and a number of trappings and details of Iranian cosmology share this common origin - which is natural enough, in consideration of close early contacts. The Assyrian texts of Shalmaneser III 858-824 BC mention Persians and Medes (close northern kinsmen of the Persians) for the first time. Though we should not take at face value the assertion of the historian Berossus that the Medes founded a dynasty in Babylon 2425-2191 BC, the country of Amadana mentioned as occupied along with Elam in an inscription by Tiglat-Pileser I around 1100 BC may well designate the Medes. The Medes and Persians overthrew the Assyrian empire in the 8th-7th centuries BC, and the Persian empire in the 6th came to extend to the Indus, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Libya. Adopting the solar disc of Assyria and belief in the "flaming" of royalty for its own, it was a successor-state to ancient Mesopotamian tradition. Herodotus claims that the Medes had been under Assyrian domination for 520 years before throwing it off.³¹⁾

One of the notions the "distant Medes" and Iranians at large must have appropriated early and passed on to even more distant peoples, is that of a world centre surrounded by four quarters and an encircling ocean.²²⁾ (Cf under China and India above.) Yet though the Chinese came to think of the world as square, this was not the Mesopotamian view: Though the world mountain might be square, and though there were four "quarters" and four winds and the world might be likened to a (square) rooftop,²³⁾ this does not preclude a more rounded and comprehensive view as well, with which we conclude this chapter.

The affixed map is the oldest expression of a centre-periphery cosmology ever found, as reconstructed from a clay tablet. It shows the earth (represented by the inner circle) floating on the sea (or water-abyss) and surrounded by "the Bitter River".



BABYLONIAN MAP OF THE WORLD CA. 2000 B.C.

Beyond this river are seven lesser continents - or more probably six, as the two continents marked A and G are a scholarly supposition by the 20th century AD reconstructor, who himself comments: "From this Babylonian cosmology the Persians obtained their idea of the seven Karshvars, of which the earth is the central one"²⁴⁾. We have seen it among the Hindus as well. Lastly, let us treat ourselves to the same discovery among the Chinese, where, however, the conception remained marginal. We quote a (critical) review of the opinions of Dzuyen, a sage from the state of Chi²⁵⁾ who flourished around 300 BC:

Besides China [there are other continents] similar to the Spiritual Continent of the Red Region²⁶⁾, making [with China] a total of nine continents, which are the real so-called Nine Continents. Around each of these is a small encircling sea, so that men and beasts cannot pass from one to another, and these [nine continents] form one division and make up one large continent. There are nine [large continents] like this, and around their outer edge is a vast ocean which encompasses them at the point where Heaven and Earth meet.²⁷⁾

5. EARLY SEMITIC AND EUROPEAN UNIVERSALISM

A good question runs: How could and did a narrow tribal religion, that of the ancient Hebrews, come to spawn the universalist follow-ups called Christianity and Islam? Though the three monotheistic faiths are manifestly close kin, and chronologically successors and continuations of each other, there is a world of a difference between the words of Yahwe and those of Christ or Muhammad. Is there a good answer?

We commence with the concept of the mystical, mythical centre of the world: In Genesis Paradise with its Tree of Life and its four rivers branching out across the earth is located to the east (i.e. of the Hebrews) - whereas to the Chinese this Paradise (the Kun-lun) was located to the west (i.e. of the Chinese); the evident conclusion being that the concept arose, and refers to, some place in between.

Yet not only word of this world centre was mobile, so was the world centre itself. It is attested not only among the ancient Hebrews but also among the nearly equally ancient Greeks: In the Odyssey of Homer (ca 700 BC) we meet the goddess Calypso on an island called "the navel of the sea"; the island is wooded, and the goddess is the daughter of Atlas, "who knows the depths of the whole sea and himself holds the pillars that keep earth and sky apart". The goddess is burning cedar on a hearth, and sits by a vine with abundant bunches of grapes. From her issue four streams, one in each direction. We may now compare, as has been done¹⁾, this tale with an Indian one on the origin of the Ganges: This river issues from the foot of Narayana, the divine radiance that upholds the world; from his foot it enters the moon, then the Zodiac, and approaches mount Meru, where a fiery wind divides it into four rivers which descend upon the four highest peaks of Meru and thence flow down the four sides of the mountain and across the continents out to the Ocean at the cardinal points of the compass.

"There never was a central navel of the earth nor of the sea," the poet Epimenides exclaims some time before 500 BC - demonstrating that the belief in such a centre existed among the Greeks, but also that it was not a basic element in Greek cosmology proper, as it could be doubted thus. A Pythagorean author corroborates the existence of this concept in approximately the same epoch in a fleeting reference to a certain Pelias who is cautioned "at the central navel of the fair-tree'd mother". The rather peripheral use of the concept here, if we may say so, as a literary embellishment, again indicates that a fundamental, sacrosanct Greek view is not involved - and, as is well documented, the Pythagoreans indeed fetched much of their inspiration from Mesopotamia. On the Greek mainland Miletus with its oracle was held by local patriots to be the centre of the world - in rivalry to Delphi. Delphi was known as "the navel of the earth" - probably, in turn, after the example of Paphos on Cyprus: "The navel of the earth" must have been connected with the most famous shrine and cult at Paphos, that of the Phoenician Aphrodite/Astarte.²⁾ From the Phoenicians the Greeks derived their alphabet and, we may now maintain, such notions as that of the central navel-mountain: The monument to the Phoenician goddess at Paphos was a cone-shaped stone, i.e. a mini-mountain. The glory of Phoenicia, the Lebanon of our days, was and is the mountain cedars - we call to mind Calypso's cedar fire in the Odyssey. And the cedar - of Lebanon, of the North, held a very special, sacred position, as we shall see, to the ruler of ancient Mesopotamia.³⁾

It may be stressed that the more basic ('to the teller) and the more mind-captivating (to the listener) a concept was, the easier it must have spread by trading routes. One such basic concept was that of the tree-cum-pillar-cum-mountain as the radiant (or "burning") centre, navel, of the world. (Tree, pillar and mountain are but manifestations of the same idea; they can occur all three together, or only two of them, or one.⁴⁾ To say they are interchangeable is an approximation; they are really inter-identifiable.)

As this tree, pillar or mountain is the source of

(divine) life, a navel-cord between heaven and earth, the life streaming through it is sometimes conveyed to man by a goddess, the Great Mother.⁶⁾ Thus in the Yakut tale from Siberia a goddess with large breasts emerges from the World Tree to suckle and raise the First Man. A painting in the tomb of Thutmosis III of Egypt (ca. 1500 BC) shows the young king being suckled by a female breast which emerges from a tree. Some legends of Eastern Europe place the Virgin Mary at the foot of a tree where she guides destinies and gives the souls to drink from the well of life beneath the tree. And of course, as has been pointed out, this basic notion is what the Old Testament is out to extirpate: In Genesis, man bears woman, not woman man - and while man is created before the animals, woman is created after them! She is to obey him, not vice versa. "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, cursed is the ground for thy sake." As Jeremiah says, quoting this same jealous god - and showing what notion he was jealous of: "Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She has gone up upon every high mountain and under every (green) tree, and there played the harlot."⁷⁾

"The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations" is a classic title - the message being that from ca 1500 BC a cult existed in Mediterranean and Near Eastern lands of a pillar associated with a tree; "sometimes the whole pillar, or more commonly its upper part, is represented as shooting forth rays of light". Some Spartan reliefs, though late (first century BC), evidently go back upon ancient antecedents: a goddess (Helen) is shown standing stiffly upright as a column, wearing a headdress called polos "which performs the function of the capital of a pillar"⁸⁾ - we recall the daughter of Atlas (i.e. the Pillar of the World). The name, as we shall see, is significant. From Egypt belief in a pillar (Dad, Ded) supporting the four quarters of heaven is also attested. A group of cylinder seals from Cyprus 15th-12th centuries BC show a navel sign and a sacred tree.⁹⁾ A late recording (5th century AD) relates how the Phoenician city of Tyre was founded - here the sacred flaming tree (with eagle on top and serpent below;

and the navel concept occur - and this may be connected with the words of Ezekiel on the prince of Tyre, who visited Eden and walked up and down in the midst of the fire of the holy mountain of God; in the 5th century AD source the "friendly fire" likewise "keeps to the middle of the tree". Yet as Ezekiel says, "by the multitude of thy merchandise.. thou hast sinned : the prince is to be burned, destroyed, by the fire. The Phoenician connection - meaning the trade between the Mediterranean and the lands farther east, Mesopotamia and beyond, is there again. And as to the beyond, there is an Indian tale on precisely merchants coming to the Tree of Life, with its great serpent underneath: First, like the prince of Tyre, they benefit from it, but getting too naughty they are burned to ashes. On the other hand, this need not be the sad outcome of man's contact with this central, divine tree (and/or mountain). An ancient Hindu story tells of the Buddha's enlightenment: He is approached by the best of serpents, who informs him that "thou shalt assuredly today enjoy the desired fruit" of knowledge, "thou shalt assuredly today become the Buddha", whereupon he takes some pure grass (i.e. a plant of life), and sits down to obtain perfect knowledge at the foot of the great holy tree. 7) Confer the invitation of the serpent to Eve.

The Judaic tradition is however not only hostile to this parcel of ideas. The notion of a central navel or mountain was accepted into Judaism - only that which amounted to an animate challenge to God (namely the serpent, the tree, the mother goddess) was combatted. Both the acceptance and the rejection show how powerful this cosmological package was.

Thus the prophet Ezeiel (38,12) mentions the navel of the earth, thinking probably of Jerusalem or of Palestine in general; while Josephus testifies: "In the very centre of it [viz. Judea] is situated Jerusalem; wherefore some call it, not without reason, the navel of the land." Where is the world's navel, later Jewish tradition asks, it is Jerusalem. Another tradition explains: "The Holy One created the world like an embryo. Like the embryo proceeds from the navel onwards, so God began to create the world proceeding from its navel onwards and

from there it was spread out in different directions."

In the Old Testament the concept of the world centre (or navel) as the highest mountain on earth is, when presented as a Jewish idea, limited to eschatology: And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of Yahwe's House shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills (Isaiah 2,1). In later literature Jerusalem is the highest place on earth in "normal" times too: "The Temple is higher than the rest of the land of Israel, and the land of Israel is higher than all other countries." This doctrine is reproduced in Islam. One tradition attributed to Ali the Caliph holds that "Jerusalem is the highest of all countries and the nearest to heaven", others maintain that it is 12, respectively 18, mil closer to heaven than the rest of the world. In Syriac literature also Jerusalem is the centre of the earth; one source says in a general way that the centre of the earth is situated higher than the four quarters, while another asserts that Paradise really consists of a mountain higher than any mountain on earth.

The navel mountain idea was characteristic of the Samaritans too. Already in Judges 9,37 a mountain near Shechem (Gerizim, one would think) is termed "the navel of the land". And in a later Jewish tradition it is related that a rabbi is invited by a Samaritan to perform his prayers on mount Gerizim; he asks why, and is told: "Because it was not submerged by the Deluge".

The same notion was applied to Mekka by the Muslims. With characteristic tolerance the traditions on Jerusalem and those on Mekka as the navel of the world coexist. Thus, "the origin of the clay of the apostle of Allah is from the navel of the earth in Mekka."¹⁰ In the Qur'an Mekka is "the mother of places", and the Prophet is instructed to warn all that are around it. In one tradition the Ka'ba is "the navel of the earth"¹¹ whereas another expatiates: "Know that the centre of the earth, according

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to a tradition on the authority of the Prophet, is the Ka'ba; it has the significance of the navel of the earth because of its rising above the level of the earth". The Prophet's widow A'isha is reported as saying: "In no place I ever saw heaven nearer to the earth than I saw it at Mekka." And a highly significant Islamic view, introducing an explanatory key, is the following: "Tradition says: The Pole star proves that the Ka'ba is the highest situated territory; for it lies over against the centre of heaven." This is further commented upon, with give-away uneasiness and clumsiness:

In the centre of this moving part of heaven (viz. the Great Bear) is a fixed star which does not move, and this is the Pole star, around which the Bear and the rest of the stars revolve. People are agreed that he who places himself opposite the Pole star has at the same time the direction of the qibla [Islamic prayer], because this star is above the Ka'ba, without ever moving. The Bear may move somewhat, but the Pole star never does. If now the Pole star, which is the centre of heaven, around which the other stars turn, is above the Ka'ba, this fact proves that what corresponds with the centre of heaven is most likely the centre of the earth.¹²⁾

Of course all this talk of Jerusalem, Gerizim or Mekka being the highest spot on earth, or untouched by the Deluge, or directly beneath the Pole star, is rubbish; but oh-so-revealing rubbish. For where was the historical Deluge - which defined "the highest spot on earth", and where a cult of the Pole star? Where was the origin of a cosmology reflected in a Jewish tradition that "the Ocean surrounds the world as a vault surrounds a large pillar. And the world is placed in its circular form on the fins of Leviathan." For Leviathan upon closer inspection is a serpent as well as a fish. In a number of Islamic traditions it is described as coiling itself up around the Ka'ba, dwelling in the pit beneath the Ka'ba, and as surrounding and glorifying the throne of Allah.

In Petra, on the border of the Syrian-Mesopotamian desert, stands a monument from some years before our era, i.e. long before Islam: a grave monument. It consists of a conic navel, two meters in height and diameter, surround-

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ed by a serpent in four circles, with an enormous head. A gigantic quadrangular stone block serves as the pedestal. Under the rock supporting this monument is a large room with niches for the dead.¹³⁾

Going deeper into antiquity, we note beneath Jerusalem the Stone of the Serpent (1 Kings 1,9) and the Spring or Source of the Dragon (Nehemiah 2,13) - dragon and serpent being the same creature, basically. This serpent from below is worshipped (2 Kings 18,4), and upon the serpent the power of the king is evidently grounded - in the same way that, in Muslim tradition, the throne of God, or God's house the ka'ba, is grounded upon and protected by the serpent of the world. In Hebrew mythology, the Ocean is conceived of as a serpent - cf the Midgardsorm, the oceanic world serpent, of the Norsemen in the Snorri Edda.

Hence such notions, indeed all the various interrelated notions discussed above? Despite the natural tendency of all who appropriate a foreign legend to make it their own, e.g. by saying that one's own sacred place, however flat, is the highest place on earth, there are enough vestiges in the above pointing in one direction. There is preserved an old tradition in Muslim geography, despite the diverse wandering navels of newer local patriotism in Arab, Palestine, Phoenicia and Greece: what was once Babylonia, Akkad, Sumer, also known as Mesopotamia, has another name too - سرة الارض - The navel of the earth.¹⁴⁾

How then, to take up on the question at the beginning of this chapter, did universalist ideas develop in Christianity, or in Judaism? The answer is: They arose in reaction to, and under the inspiration of, those from Babylon and Assyria - yet in the political, psychological climate of Palestine.

One ingredient thus is the ideas that shine through e.g. in the naming of Mt. Tabor (from tabbur, navel) or the insistence of Psalms 48,2 that Mt. Zion is

located in the north, or the tradition that the Holy Rock of the temple at Jerusalem is the closest to both heaven and the water-abyss or netherworld¹² as was the Babylonian one, or Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder. Several times the address is explicit even, as in Ezekiel 31 or Daniel 4, on the king of Assyria as the towering, earth-covering tree of life, or Isaiah 14, quoting the king of Babylon, who is "cut down to the ground...for thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." Yet the main thing, of which the Old Testament informs us, is the claim of Assyrian and Babylonian rulers - and of the "Lord" Ba'al, god of water and vegetation - to universal reverence.

The god of the Hebrews was a narrowly tribal god. Yet he could not be of lesser status and stature than those with whom the Hebrews were closely acquainted - in Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Assyria; from their mentors the Hebrews appropriated the conceptions of e.g. the Creation and the Creator. Paradise. and the Deluge, and these were grafted onto the local standard type of deity of the Semitic bedouin tribes - of which reminiscences are still found in Arabian culture: the tribal deity is represented by, and thought to dwell inside, a stone or a chest carried on camel- or horseback in a special litter.¹³

As to the psychological climate, statehood and even mere survival in Palestine was constantly precarious: Palestine was a thoroughfare of armies, and the question of doom or salvation loomed large. This was a cosmology of catastrophe. So was in some measure the cosmology of the Mesopotamians - yet in the case of the Jews this was accentuated by these very mentors and tormentors of theirs from the east. The god of the Jews is a very martial god, a god of annihilation.

In the dire situation of Palestine the crucial question was, ever and again: how to behave in order to survive? Of course there were the laws and commandments,

regulating "internal" behaviour, within the nation - much reminiscent of the Babylonian Law of Hammurabi. Yet how to behave as a nation, in peril? The Old Testament to a great extent is a record of the debate between the two obvious parties: the compromisers, appeasers, defeatists versus those that put their trust in the tribal god.

The perilous situation of the Jews produced, or accentuated, two natural beliefs. The first was that of Sin. Characteristically, whereas in the Mesopotamian versions the Deluge is visited upon the world ¹⁷⁾ because the gods are annoyed by the clamour and noise of human overpopulation, in the Mosaic version it occurs because of human depravity and iniquity, in particular godlessness, man's neglecting to propitiate God and act as He wishes. This fear of not doing as the gods wish, of incurring their wrath, in fact characterizes the Mesopotamian attitude to religion, and the concept of sin is well established.¹⁷⁾ Yet man could be righteous, fulfilling the prescribed offerings, libations, sacrifices and prayers.¹⁸⁾ The Judaic Old Testament view of human nature is gloomier, it seems, beginning on the note of the Sinfall.

The second belief is the one with a universalist implication: the belief in a Messiah, literally "the anointed one". The kings of old, such as David and Solomo, were the anointed, and a new such redeeming leader was the sole possible hope. Just as Babylon and Assyria had seemed invincible, but had been annihilated by the God of Israel, so too would surely the new world empire of the Romans - tellingly defined as the new Babylon. Though Jews in Palestine were hoping for a national redemption of Palestinian Jews, their God in taking on universal power claimants was a universal god.

The tension between the tribal deity role and the universalism inspired by contacts with Mesopotamia was resolved in favour of the latter by the earliest Christians, or if one will, by the earliest development of Christianity. The missionary commandment in Matthew 28

comes as an afterthought: Christ is dead, but has appeared to the two Marias, saying that his disciples are to meet him upon a mountain in the north (in Galilee). The theme is easily recognizable: Having become deified and immortal, he is now upon the mountain - promising the water of life (baptism).¹⁹⁾ In Mark 16 the same command that the disciples go to Galilee is given, but they evidently do not believe, and he appears to them during a meal instead, in Jerusalem. While in Luke 24 he likewise appears during a meal in Jerusalem, with no mention of Galilee. In all three versions the disciples are hard to convince; and it is conspicuous that the missionary commandment is given after he is dead, not before.

Both the Judaic "tribal" background and the rejection of Christianity by the Jews is palpable in the constitution of the Church as "the new Israel". What is new, yet explicable on the basis of the old, is the Christian insistence that: a) salvation is individual, b) salvation refers to the afterlife, and c) salvation is potentially universal (it can comprise all humans, and even all Creation).

Christ did not preach among, or direct his message to, all peoples within reach; nor did he preach a common salvation of Jews and non-Jews among the Jews. He addressed the Jews and their situation. (Had his concern at the outset been with non-Jews on a par with Jews, he would probably have travelled and preached among Syrians, Phoenicians, Romans etc, or among the Jews of the diaspora, e.g. in Alexandria, where he would have stood a much better chance of success than among the particularist, chauvinist Jews within Palestine.)

As all attempts at reforming or redefining Judaism collectively failed, there could only be question of individual adherence to this Messiah - of Jews and, as it turned out, increasingly of non-Jews. As the task of the Messiah was by definition to redeem the Jews, the individuals who cleaved to Christ had to be, by definition,

members of a new "Israel". Though to us this may appear as quite a conceptual innovation, in the climate of the age it was less so, for two reasons: The new Israel (versus the old) concept certainly arose only when it became more and more clear that the Jews stuck stubbornly, and lastingly, to their refusal to acclaim Christ, while gentiles and pagans flocked to his name; the original emphasis must have been ~~on be-~~ longing not to something new, but to something Israelite (i.e. Jewish). Moreover, and contrary to stereotypes of the Jews as exclusive, rejecting all others, in the times of Christ there was a considerable deal of two-way assimilation: Jews assimilated, and were assimilated into, Hellenic culture; and pagans flocked to Judaism, which in a number of places engaged in active proselytizing.²⁰) The Christians were one Jewish sect among several others.

Christians succeeded more than others, as we all know; but not because of this more or less improvised universality. (Like all improvisations, this one too hinged on practical considerations, we may hold, yet it also had a deeper basis, facilitating the practical considerations, viz. the implicit, Mesopotamian-based universalism of Judaism, the explicit universalism of the Jewish godhead.) Rather, the universal appeal of the message was explicated because of - the universal appeal of the message. The cult of Jupiter and other Roman and non-Roman deities was universal enough, but lacked what Christianity had: hope for the downtrodden. It promised a rapid cure of all ills, and in a psychologically realistic way. As the rising of the Maccabees had shown to the Jews, and other experiences had shown to others, overthrowing the might of the Roman empire and the local men of iniquity cooperating with it was unrealistic. There remained but two possibilities: Either redemption in a future beyond death; or through the intervention in history of a power stronger than the powers that be - i.e. a god, stronger than the Roman and local rulers, troops and deities - and who could be stronger. and what stronger god could be needed, than the Creator of the World, annihilator of Babylon and Assyria?

In (and because of) the state of oppression which the Jews of Palestine lived in for several centuries before Christ, both psychological safety valves developed - the belief in a coming Messiah as well as belief in redemption beyond death. (The same combination later evolved within Islam, where the oppressed have yearned for al-Mahdi, "the rightly guided one" sent by God to usher in a righteous millennium on earth.) Christianity stressed the urgency and imminence of the Last Days; indeed, the Messiah had already been here, and was expected back very soon, in the lifetime of his disciples even - and only those who had hastened to ready themselves for his coming would be saved. (Quite an incentive to conversion.)

Other themes doubtless also contributed to both the contents and the wide acceptability of the Christian message. For one thing there is the widespread theme, from Mesopotamia, of the only son of god and goddess-virgin who dies (is sacrificed) to secure verdancy, fertility and bliss for all creation. This cult of collective redemption through the sacrificial death of one young man "in Sumerian literature... occupies such an important position that it may be regarded as the principal aspect of their mythology and religious beliefs".⁴¹⁾ Of the Semitic pagan customs Eusebius writes: "It was the custom among the ancients, in times of great calamity, in order to prevent the ruin of all, for the rulers of the city or nation to sacrifice to the avenging deities the most beloved of their children as an atonement." The cult of the sacrificed young god Tammuz, or Accadian Dumu-zi, was introduced into the Temple at Jerusalem, Ezekiel says, in his lifetime (early 6th century BC). The name means "faithful son" or "risen son" - and is preserved in the monthname Tammuz in the Middle East. Once, in Sumeria, a young prince called Dumuzida probably was sacrificed:

The calamity which instigated this sacrifice may have been some impending national disaster; in Sumerian religion it was the death of a god who perished annually at midsummer with the withering grass and drying soil of the

drought-afflicted Mesopotamian valley. One son of a divinely appointed king had died for man, a perpetual atonement and a sacrifice to the merciless powers of the Underworld; a perpetual atonement in that he returned each year with the returning rains and spring sun only to die again in the torrid heat, when the flocks longed for water, and Tammuz their shepherd departed again to the mournful sound of the shepherd's lute..

One Accadian prayer opens: "O Dumuzi, lord, shepherd of Anu," and the shepherd of God is just what Christ is. A Sumerian hymn gives the words of grief of his mother: "...my Damu..The mother, queen who gives life to the afflicted.. In thy perdition, in thy resurrection." This mother of his is a virgin, and addressed as "My lady" of the Christian "Madonna" - "precisely as Bel, the kirios of late Greek writers, may have provided the Greek Christian title Kyrios Christos".²²⁾ The point is that Dumuzi was a man (not a deity) divinely appointed, sacrificed by men, but became a god through death. His genealogy is important - as in e.g. the Gospel according to Matthew. And he is "the firstborn son". He is also known as Adoni, Adonis of the Greeks - Adonai of the Hebrews²³⁾. Sumerian kings frequently proclaimed themselves to be sons of the Virgin-goddess, and not infrequently assumed the title 'god' and identified themselves with Dumuzi.²⁴⁾

Moreover, this cult became the "national" cult of the Nabatæan Arabs of Petra, centuries before Jesus of Nazareth. The deity dū-Šarā ("he of the mountain-range Šarā") was the offspring of the virgin Ka'bu (i.e. Ka'ba) and only son of "the Lord". He dies for mankind - and his birthday was grandly celebrated on the 25th of December. The Virgin's symbol is a square "navel-stone"; his is a pillar with a serpent coiled around.²⁵⁾

What was new then, furthering the rise of Christianity, was a concrete historical peg for old themes in the person of Jesus from Nazareth, a new accentuation or arrangement of old themes, and a propitious, receptive mental climate far beyond Palestine - for a message of salvation (literally, anointment, i.e. with the water or oil of life) through baptism (an ancient Accadian practice).²⁶⁾

The ancient Semitic heritage, with its Sumero-Accadian origin, lives on through death: through the symbolism of individual death and resurrection, in Christianity as in Islam. Muslim tombs of importance have traditionally often been equipped with a cupola - in Arabic qubba, symbol of both heaven and earth associated with the form of a navel (omphalos). Indeed, not only heaven and earth, but also the nether world, partakes of this symbolism: In the Babylonian conception we meet the navel of the nether world. Some Muslim tombs are covered with a square stone block, and both Muslim and Christian cemeteries sport tombs with a cupola upon four pillars²⁷⁾ i.e. the same edifice as is found in churches, covering the altar - which, we recall, in turn is an ancient symbol of the square navel at the centre of the world.²⁸⁾ Which is where we all were, once, when we were born, on the strength of our navel's string: just as we return, once, to Mother Earth. The invisible navel string of culture still nourishes our thoughts: The cradle of European culture may have stood in Athens and Rome, as text-books insist, and in other places too (a cradle is mobile enough); but the placenta, nourishing our central thoughts, on what is central and what is peripheral, was the Land between the Two Rivers.

Whence also the royal imagery of mediæval Islam: "This ṣultān al-Malik az-Zāhir, the most majestic lord, the wise, the just, the fighter in the Holy War, the guardian of the frontier, the pillar of the world and the Faith, undertook to help the Caliphate when there were few to help, and scattered the infidel armies which had penetrated through the land."²⁹⁾

6. ORIGINS: MESOPOTAMIAN UNIVERSALISM

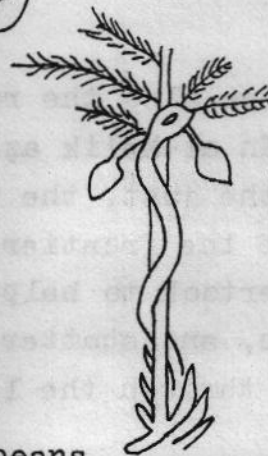


The Temptation, according to Sumerian myth"

In the presentation of Mesopotamian centrist/universalist concepts throughout the preceding chapters the pillar, staff, tree or mountain in association with a coiled serpent has been a recurrent theme. It may be a question of two themes, which tend to fuse. One is the above-earth serpent proper, 'symbolic of the generative and healing powers of the earth, and associated with both the earth-goddess and her dying son' - and known to Europeans through the figure of Esculap/Asclepius with his "pharmacist's staff" around which twines a serpent. The other, more threatening theme, is that of an (under-) water serpent."



PICTOGRAPH
FOR EARTH-
GODDESS



SERPENT
AROUND
TREE OF
LIFE, WITH
SUNWHEEL
AND CRESCENT
MOON

The Ocean is conceived of as a serpent in ancient Mesopotamia - as later among the people who according to the Old Testament once commenced their wanderings there, the Hebrews. How come that the serpent also is connected with the Jerusalem, and later the Mekkan, sanctuary, thought of as dwelling in a pit or source immediately under the ground? In the Muslim traditions the serpent is described in a curious wise: it has the head of a he-goat!

Enter Ea, the ancient Babylonian god of the water-abyss underworld. And "Ea's beast" or representative is precisely a fish (or water-serpent), with a goat's head. Moreover, this being is expressly called "the sanctuary of Ea". This threatening water netherworld is called Apsu in Babylonian, Tehom in Hebrew tradition - where it is affirmed that "the mountains dominate Tehom, lest it rise and inundate the earth".³⁾ Where in the ancient Near East was there all good reason to fear that this underworld would rise and inundate the world? In flat Mesopotamia - where the rivers, marshes and ground water surely gave primitive man the inescapable impression that the bottom layer of existence was this unfathomable cold wet darkness. A Syriac author expatiates on the beginnings of the world, evoking the navel concept by implication: Scripture says: 'The world was invisible' because of Tehom which was stagnant and surrounded it on six sides like the embryo which is surrounded by the membranes of its mother's womb".⁴⁾ The mountains are what change this, they are what is first brought forth by God, rending Tehom, making the dry earth appear and spread. Hence a cult of the mountains, or in particular of the World Mountain, the central first mountain to pierce Tehom, from where all other land spreads and of which all other mountains are really but offshoots. This is the conception refound in Iranian cosmology. In ancient Mesopotamian cosmology the earth is seen as a mountain, a semi-globe or cone - rising from and rooted in the Apsu/Tehom water abyss.

To modern as well as to ancient Indo-Europeans the very idea of mountains rooted in unfathomable water boggles the mind. Not so to the ancient

Mesopotamians⁵⁾ - who, as archaeology has confirmed, really did experience that world-effacing nightmare called the Deluge (and probably a series of minor inundations too, to keep them permanently mindful of it). As anybody is aware, a birth does not begin with the appearance of the navel. This makes sense only (and only barely) if the earth is conceived of as having been pulled up out of the watery womb or abyss by the connecting cord to its creator - which thus surfaces first. Indeed the Sumerian DUR.AN.KI and the Babylonian markas šamê u iršitum means "the bond of heaven and earth".⁶⁾ As the ever more towering mountains northward of Mesopotamia, culminating in the Caucasus, were the highest parts of the earth, it was here that the navel had to be. This veneration of the highest mountain must have been given a mighty stimulus, if not outright caused, by the experience of those surviving the Deluge: beseeching their gods, fleeing for their lives to the highest mountain within reach - and being saved!⁷⁾

Thus the highest mountain was really a divine mountain. "The head of the Deluge could reach the heels of Paradise only: it kissed its feet and prostrated itself; then it turned away in order to climb and to trample on the tops of mountains and hills."⁸⁾ Hence the invention of the altar: a mini-representation of the mountain, upon the top of which the deities are thought to be present - and to receive offerings. In Hebrew tradition, then, not only is Palestine higher than all lands and Jerusalem the summit of the world, the culminating point itself is the sacred rock or the altar of the temple.⁹⁾ In a Talmudic text the altar is a tower, while in one midrash it becomes the stair of Jacob, in another the navel of the world. In the Rgveda of the Hindus the altar is likewise called the navel of heaven - one telling indication of the early spread of Babylonian cosmology: "On the navel of heaven the priest of the sacrifice has set himself down."¹⁰⁾

Next, whence the garden of Paradise, or the World Tree - and why upon the World Mountain? The obvious answer is: Because only the summit of this mountain was untouched by the Deluge - only what was safeguarded here was not drowned. Characteristically, the ship of Noah

contained the seeds (or males and females) of all living - and, equally characteristically, it landed upon the one protruding, divinely safeguarded mountain before opening up for a new insemination of the world. "The relation between mountain and tree of life seems to be suggested by two lines from an epic called The King, The Day, The Sheen of whose Splendour is Far-famed," a perceptive scholar notes. Here the god Ninurta "Scaled the mountain and scattered seed far and wide,/ And the plants with one accord named him as their king."¹¹ Here, be it observed further, are not only the mountain and a (royal) tree of life but also the "friendly fire" or glow, the brightness of heavenly, divine light, that we have encountered before as "keeping to the middle of the tree" or "in the midst of the mountain".

The king of Babylon was, when celebrating each New Year's festival, titulated Ninurta. Indeed, the ancient Mesopotamian ruler was himself envisaged as the tree or plant of life.¹² The Tree of Life is a (or the) basic religious symbol of ancient Mesopotamia, whence it as an art motif has spread across the world. A tree of course is the most stately representative of the fertility of the earth, especially when bearing sweet fruit or, even better, all the seeds of creation. Since there is one World Mountain it is but natural to envisage one (world) tree.

In three passages from Sumerian royal hymns the king is addressed as, or calls himself, a cedar. And the most ancient epic of the world, that of Gilgamesh king of the Sumerian city-state Uruk (present-day Warka in 'Irāq), of which the oldest fragments go back to ca 2700 BC, tells how the hero travels north to the cedar mountain - the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges. No wonder elements of Mesopotamian cosmology could and did spread out from ancient Phoenicia across the eastern Mediterranean! That the cedar was esteemed as the tree of royalty is demonstrated in Solomo's insistence on procuring cedars from the Lebanon for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The purpose of Gilgamesh was evidently a raid on the cedar forests for building materials for a temple/palace.

In the epic Gilgamesh confronts and destroys the guardian of the cedar forest Humbaba. This being is identified as "the bull of heaven"¹²⁾, yet also equated with the cedar and the mountain themselves, and with a brilliant glow or radiance - which fades when the cedar is felled. We may think of the impression made upon a lowland-dweller from 'Irāq by the sun-glittering snows of the Lebanese cedar forests. This is the most probable background to the "rays of light" which in the epic are said to issue from the great cedar,¹³⁾ and which we have found reproduced in legends on "the friendly fire" or glow from the middle of a tree or mountain. (A source of water is also mentioned: Before departing from Uruk the hero gives as his wish to find and to bathe his feet in Humbaba's river.)¹⁴⁾ In an Akkadian fragment we hear what Gilgamesh dreamt on the slopes of the mountain: that he is thrown down by the mountain, which catches him by his feet (of the roots of a tree), while his surroundings become glowing bright.¹⁵⁾

In the tale of Gilgamesh the mountain with its tree are something to be conquered, originally alien - and the plant and water of life are sought out in quite another episode of the epic, in another direction. In subsequent times the themes were fused. I believe, however, that the reason for the creation and the dramatic popularity of the epic of Gilgamesh lies in its relating how, historically, fundamental themes of subsequent Mesopotamian cosmology were introduced: Here is both a revolution and a revelation. "Humbaba" is overthrown, and hence to be seen as a predecessor of Gilgamesh, who takes over his mountain-and-tree-of-the-north-(abode-of-the-gods¹⁵⁾) function and power. That the epic relates of a historical personality, by a wide margin the first in world literature and that its themes are both separate (and only later fused) and geographically, historically explicable or explained, are good indications that this is what we here have: the story of a founding father of cosmology.

The story of the Deluge occurs in the Gilgamesh epic too - as an insertion, unconnected with the other themes and the name of Gilgamesh. This Deluge occurred around 3950 BC it seems, before the times of Gilgamesh - while

another is dated at about 3300 BC, after him.¹⁶⁾ In my opinion it is the latter Deluge which may have served to fuse and "verticalize" themes found in the epic. Alongside the horizontal wanderings of the hero, to the Lebanese north with its cedars, mountain and snow, to the goddess Siduri with the water-plant of life at the "confluence of the two waters" in present-day southern Irāq, with the Land of the Blessed even farther to the south¹⁷⁾ (perhaps in 'Uman)¹⁸⁾, a vertical axis arises, or is accentuated, the elements of which we shall presently explore.

Hero, whose body is shining splendour,
Who in the forest of cedars is acclaimed with joy,
Standing in the oracle-place of Apsu,
the adorned,
Purified with sparkling lustration

runs one of the Sumerian royal hymns: an illustration of how the trappings of royal power derive from Gilgamesh and his exploit. This tree is associated with a stream - and later, when the (royal) tree takes on the aspect of not merely a cedar but a tree of life, with twin streams.¹⁹⁾ Why this latter development? With the fusion of themes, which two themes are here fused? Obviously, the tree is fused with the original water-plant of life at the confluence of the two waters (meaning either the Euphrates-Tigris, or the river and the sea).

Where is this notion refound? In Iranian mythology. Upon the mountain Ardvi-cura of the north grows the white haoma tree (of life/immortality), and from it flow the two world rivers encompassing the inhabited world. This can hardly be a recollection of the rivers and mountains of the Iranians when dwelling in Central Asia. It rather goes back upon Babylon - Mesopotamia, literally the inhabited land between the two rivers. (The Iranian tradition speaks of another tree as well, not of immortality but containing all seeds of all living, and standing in the middle of the World Ocean, fertilizing the world by its rain-moistened seeds - suggesting that it reflects the creative, paradisaical and divine summit of the world mountain as submerged by the Deluge.²⁰⁾)

So far we have seen how the radiant and paradisaical mountain-summit and tree could come to be established in Mesopotamian (Sumerian and Akkadian, and later on Babylonian and Assyrian) cosmology. Yet they are but the middle part of the world navel concept, which extends higher above and deeper below, vertically as an axis throughout the universe. As noted above, not only is there a central mountain of the world; the world itself is conceived of as a mountain rising out of and rooted in the water-abyss. Yet the roots of the tree too must, as any Mesopotamian or modern farmer knows, reach down into the depths of the water - i.e. (to the ancient Mesopotamian) down through the world mountain all the way unto the level of the sea, which is both outside and beneath the world. Thus we are in a position to envisage how the Iranians could come to insist that the 2144 mountains of the earth are really but the offshoots of, branching out from, one single mountain;²¹⁾ that this mountain was raised first from the still, smooth water-abyss and subsequently, spreading out from it, the rest of the earth; that its roots go under the earth, as do the channels and apertures by which water seeps through the mountains and the earth - in the way of capillaries (again, roots); and that upon the world mountain summit stands the tree of life (with its spring of life, where again its roots obviously are sunk).

The verticality of this cosmology is manifest in its further elements too: Inside and underneath the World Mountain lies - or stands - the underworld, in the form of a mountain, and with the underworld kiškanu tree, a parallel to the Tree of Life, and somehow related to it.²²⁾ Inside the underworld mountain the dead were judged, some to descend, others to ascend. The very bottom centre of this cosmology, the interior of the apsu water-abyss, was a deep well. It is tempting to see it as reaching up to the summit of the World Mountain, the Holy Rock, to the spring of life at the foot of the Tree of Life; we have here a shaft of liquid patently akin to the Memudanda of the Hindus.

The supreme deity of the Sumerians is An (Anu), and the pictograph for "An", "god", "high", "heaven" and

"bright" is a star. "That this star was the Pole star, about which the heavens revolve." a perceptive researcher notes. "appears from a prayer to the Pole star which begins with the words: 'O star of Anu, prince of the heavens'." ²³⁾ A tree - beneath this star, we must infer - was also sacred to Anu.

A scholarly opinion has it that the entire Sumerian pantheon evolved by theological elaboration from a monotheistic belief in Anu, i.e. that all later deities represented aspects of Anu. Enlil came to be the godhead of the middle world, below Anu yet above Ea and the underworld; in a hymn he is addressed thus: "O great Enlil, im-hursag (wind of the underworld mountain), whose head rivals the heavens, whose foundation is laid in the pure abyss..". Cf Atlas. Enlil dwells in (or on) a mountain reaching through the world from bottom to top; hence he represents the vertical axis through the centre of the world.²⁴⁾

This far-northern world axis concept of the Sumerians was and is transmitted to posterity (by way of the Greeks): We all know, as did the ancient Mesopotamians that the earth revolves around its axis, an imaginary line drawn through the interior of the earth and out through the Pole. We saw the same Mesopotamian-based conception among the Hindus, in connection with the cakras (e.g. the god Indra as the axle between the visible and invisible, or earthly and celestial, worlds = revolving wheels). Now the English word pole is of dual meaning. It signifies the geographical poles of the Arctic and Antarctic (hence the tertiary connotation of antitheses, "poles apart"); and it designates a long staff or stick, preferably of wood. The Greek polos in a way combines both, showing up the original conception: Polos means an axis, an axle-beam, around which something revolves, i.e. (two) wheels. The Pole star is where the axle of revolution, the world pillar of light and of strength²⁵⁾ if one will, is supposed to pass, as in Mesopotamian minds.

Fragments of this cosmology surface in other times and climes as well. To take one example: "A very remarkable bronze, apparently from North Africa and dating to imperial times, seems to give us clear evidence of the nature of the cult of Zeus-Ammon" it is said, Ammon being the Egyptian sun god. This bronze shows a snake with a head in either end. The serpent head at the lower writhing end is bearded, while the upper end has a human head with ram's horns (the mark of this Ammon cult). The serpent of this figure has been identified with Kundalini of the Hindus;²⁶⁾ yet there is more to it: The goateed, double-headed serpent ultimately goes back upon "Ea's beast", the world serpent - which has a goat's beard, horns and often two heads.²⁷⁾

To take a second, more extreme example: One place where (geography and common sense forbid!) no notion from Sumeria should ostensibly occur is among the Lapps. Yet occur it did, 190 years ago among the Lapps of North Sweden, a central conception of the Mesopotamians some five thousand years or more before - and (though this is not the place to discuss the question) its parentage is clear.²⁸⁾ Briefly, the story is of a bird who hitches a hike on the back of an eagle. In the Middle East originals the eagle is in, or at the top of, or above, the tree of life upon the summit of the mountain of the world.²⁹⁾ The spiraling upwards of the eagle (cf Kundalini/serpent) is stressed by the Lapp reciters. And what does the bird exclaim when on high? "Vah! The circumgyrations of this being! From up here the island of the world looks like an erect pole!"

This legend is a Sumerian one (preserved in Babylonian and Assyrian versions), which tells of the attempt of the antediluvian king Etana to reach heaven on the back of an eagle. During the ascension the eagle says things to Etana in the nature of the following (unhappily the texts are fragmentary):

Here must have arisen what has been thought of as "the Hindu idea" that the known hemisphere of the world had a centre or "world cupola" or "summit", arīn, situated at an equal distance from the four cardinal points; a theory which found its way into a Latin work published in 1410 - inspiring Columbus with the belief that the world was shaped in the form of a pear and that on the western hemisphere opposite the arīn was a corresponding elevated centre.³⁹ The word arīn significantly means, literally, a water-spring⁴⁰ - such as once flowed, in the minds of men, from the "world cupola"⁴¹ or summit of the Mountain of the World.

7. INSTRUMENTALITY: PERIPHERY UNIVERSALISM

Universalist, centrist-expansionist ideologies are not necessarily either the product or instrument of established "centre" groupings. On the contrary, they are espoused by periphery groups as a means for defining the way to become centre ones. Though the first of these ideologies did arise in the one-time "world centre" of Mesopotamia, we are free to surmise that main elements of it were adopted and adapted to form new world-rule and world-centre ideologies, in e.g. India, Iran and the east Mediterranean area, by rising. power-hungry groups in what had hitherto been (i.e. was seen by them to have been) a geographical and social periphery.

With Christianity a periphery universalism is particularly clear. Jewish Palestine was itself a periphery of the Roman, and earlier of the Babylonian and Assyrian, Empire. Christ hailed from a periphery of Jewish Palestine, to wit "gentile Galilee". He had little or no success among the "centre" population of Palestine, the Jews. let alone their social and ideological centre, the Pharisees etc. He did have some success among a religious periphery such as the Samaritans, though, and what little success he had among the Jews was mainly confined to the commoners, and in particular, it seems, to the social periphery - to which much of his preaching was directed ("easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"). The gentiles who took up Christianity were socially, politically distinctly "peripheral" with regard to both Jerusalem and Rome.

The function of ideologies is all too often seen as something static: it is, purportedly, to uphold the established order. Undoubtedly this became the function of Christianity, as it has with every other ideology within few decades of their establishment. (This is

something of a tautology.) The question is rather: why and how are new ideologies established, which generally happens through bitter strife? The dynamic, creative function of ideologies, i.e. in their formative years, is to mobilize and transform social peripheries into the actors of history - for the while. This entails a turnover of the social centre as well; of the dictum of Christianity in its formative period, that "the last shall become the first, and the first the last".

Thus the function, or the appeal, of Christianity and Islam initially - and of Marxism, Fascism, Peronism, Arab Socialism etc in our century. They mobilize "the little man", "the masses", in an individually meaningful collective effort to transform reality, to translate individual hopes and frustrations (potential energy) via a collective release of energy into a new state of collective safety, dignity, stability and "justice" - and individual advancement.

Five Eurasian periphery universalisms have been left out of treatment in the preceding chapters: that of the Huns (4th-5th centuries AD), that of the Turks (7th-9th c.), that of the Tibetans (from 7th c.), that of the Mongols (13th-15th c.), and that of the Yugrians (or Khanty-Mansi) in Northwestern Siberia (as recorded in the 19th-20th c.)? None of these are "primordial", "born of the steppes", or the likes. The sources at our disposal strongly indicate that all are born of the contact of these peoples with sedentary populations and their cosmologies. More precisely, with Iranians (in particular the Sogdians of Central Asia), in all five instances; and with Buddhist thought, in the case of the Huns, Tibetans and Mongols; finally, in the case of the Mongols, with Nestorian and Muslim thought. What we find in Northeastern as well as Northwestern Siberia of our times (19th-20th c.) is relicts of the ancient, pre-Islamic Iranian cosmology, which in turn encapsules even more ancient Mesopotamian conceptions.

We note that the universalism of the Huns,

Turks, Tibetans and Mongols is activist, militarist: In all these cases it is a question of some supreme representative or other of the given people acquiring, or aspiring to, world domination by force of arms (and, in the case of the Tibetans, by magic and cunning). In the case of only one of these peoples, however, is world domination positively presented as an imperative, a historical mission, a duty ordered by Heaven: That was the message of Činggis Qān, hammered into his followers and foes alike. His universalism was quite as aggressive as the missionary urge of Christianity; the difference being that he imposed his rule by external violence, yet practiced internal tolerance: the subjugated were left to their own ideological devices, to believe and think as they wanted. On the other end of the scale, the Yugrians of Siberia never aspired to world rule; their universalism is confined to the imported, ultimately Mesopotamian belief in a deified, originally human world ruler and in the creation and extension of the world from one mountain protuberance in the midst of the primeval ocean. These convictions coexist with particularist ones regarding an afterlife reserved for Yugrians - Russians no admittance.

As an instance of periphery universalism, let us cite the still-preserved report of the Danish king's sheriff on a peasant rebellion in a rather isolated valley of Norway (which was then under Danish rule). The year is 1541: "...And these same peasants had made themselves a great club with many sharp spikes. The one who carried the club they held to be a Hun leader (hune herre, probably from hune her, Hun army). These same peasants whom I captured confessed that they were meant to slay all tax gatherers and lawmen and then to raise the common man and proceed all over the world..".

As can be substantiated, in Scandinavia traditions on the world-harrying Huns were preserved among social and in part geographical peripheries through eleven centuries and more. The Huns could serve as an example, to commoners and their potential leaders, of a force trans-

cending and upsetting an established local or regional order of oppression - by being stronger, more universal.

The ultimate tragicomical attempt of a would-be periphery-centre leader to bolster his position and appeal for support was that of Vidkun Quisling, Nazi dictator of Norway 1940-45. His grand design, which never got off the ground, was - from the basis of a marginal following within the rather peripheral state of Norway, to give the whole of Europe a new philosophy called, fittingly, "universalism".²⁾

Our contention is, then, that when and where universalist expansionist/centrist ideologies arise they are a) patterned on and inspired by a precedent ultimately traceable (via Iranian, Buddhist, Christian, Islamic and other intermediaries) to Mesopotamia, b) functional tools of mobilization for the establishment and subsequent preservation of a new (social, political, geographical) centre in or from what had hitherto been a periphery. Thus, interestingly, the very first attested "universal ruler", Sargon I, was according to tradition a foundling, a real "outsider". His mother abandoned him, putting him in a basket of rushes which she left to float on the river, like Moses. By divine help he, a Semite, became cupbearer to a Sumerian king, whom he overthrew. Sargon established a new capital, Akkad, somewhere in central Mesopotamia.³⁾

Europe is a western periphery of the Asian heartland. And European expansion has in turn flowed from the western peripheries of Europe - the Iberian peninsula, Holland, Britain - in modern times. The sustaining ideology, quite as with the Crusades, was that expansion was of benefit both worldly and otherworldly, to the greater glory and power of both God and King (and their subordinate executives).

To ask what was the stronger, the religious or the secular profit motive, is to ask what is the stronger in the procreation of a chicken, the cock or the hen. To

ask what was the basis or cause of such expansionism, either an expansionist mentality or a material opportunity, incentive or need for expansion, is to ask what came first, egg or hen (or, possibly, cock). The reason for any conscious human act may be defined as a (rightly or wrongly) perceived opportunity. What makes one perceive an opportunity? In a word, a need.⁴⁾ In another word, words: the concepts we use, in defining and discussing the world, are the extension - in all possible directions of time and space - of our perceptions. Thus to a rapacious nomad chieftain, for instance, bent on raiding and ravaging the riches of his self-experienced surroundings, knowledge that the whole wide world could be and had been subjugated, indeed that nomads from the periphery of civilization were destined to subjugate it, would be gefundenes Fressen - whetting and extending appetites in the way of modern commercials. (The same discussion, of whether commercials "create" needs, is pertinent here, with the same general answer - that they create extensions of needs, that they direct needs to new objects, to new, initially unheeded and unneeded horizons. Naturally, showing someone an object, or a conceptualized goal, is what "creates" the need for the given specific object or goal. As with so many engrossing discussions, both parties to it are parties to, again, a tautology.)

The question of periphery universalism is but an instance and illustration of the greater question of creativity, or causation, in human history; and not merely human: Animal husbandry knows the concept and principle of cross-breeding fertility. The idea - and the experience - is that mating of two different strains, lines, stocks, breeds or races of one animal is what may produce, in the offspring, a great potential for subsequent betterments; whereas a steady selection of the best within a strain (etc) for breeding purposes (i.e. killing off the "inferior" calves, kids etc) secures improvement not through the offspring being superior, more creative than their individual parentage but through - deus ex machina - eliminating

both parentage and potential offspring.

These are the two mode(1)s of animal breeding.

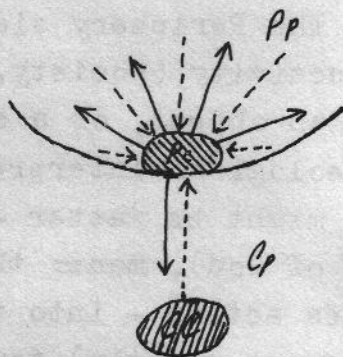
The first has been tagged with bad names such as miscegenation and bastardization - when not controlled by man (the deus ex machina himself) - and much decried by the Nazis. The second was the model of the Nazis, as put into coldblooded rational practice in the establishment of human studderies and the sterilization and murdering of unwanted "inferiors". In practice, animal husbandry is a combination of the two. Even in selective breeding (the Nazi principle) of course no two animals within a strain or breed or race are alike, thus there will always be a slight effect of (what the other model defines as) cross-breeding hyper-fertility.

This fertility is then, otherwise put, the creative potential resulting from a meeting - a mating - of opposites. In animal breeding selectivity within a strain, race etc is coupled with equally select crossing-in of top-rating representatives of another one, or other ones - in order to enjoy the booster effect of cross-breeding fertility with regard to the qualities that interest man (in livestock, beefage, milk productivity, low/effective consumption of fodder, high number of births, low level of birth problems etc). Whereas in domestic animals these processes (or processings) may be centrally controlled by man, by one set of criteria, in humans the selection is multi-centered/individual, with each person seeking out different specifics in one's sexual partner(s) - and for that matter in friends, human relations, work, travel; a process of ecological adaptation (finding one's niche). This process is controlled too - by our needs, which may be needs for security, the accustomed, the similar and assuring (keeping within one's strain, so to speak), or for something new, exciting, inspiring, making for change, such as is felt to be needed.⁵ Needs is the same as saying, again, perceived opportunity, perceived functionality.

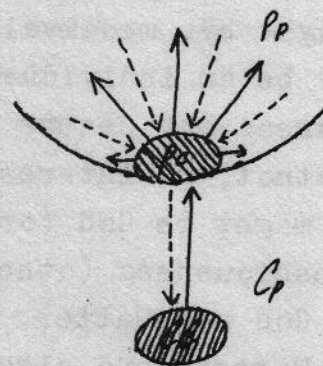
Which is where a discussion of cultural creativity takes us. The idea here is that creativity, or the inspiration to newness, is this perceiving, use and adaptation of something "from the outside"; that it is a matter of impression, association, incorporation, reworking, re-expression. (Strictly speaking, cultural reaction, "reactionary" attitudes, rejection - i.e. of something new, from the outside - is in itself something "new", created by the perceived pressure of outside influence.)

Thus defined, cultural creativity (whether collective, e.g. national, or individual) is a centre-periphery relationship; as illustrated below. The terminology is from the Galtung centre-periphery theory. We operate with an established Centre (Cc) dominating its surrounding area, the centre periphery (Cp). Thus for instance a government dominates the population at large, or a capital city dominates the countryside, or a capitalist or "socialist" boss dominates his subordinate workers, or a pater familias dominates his household. Outside these Centre areas (comprising the Cc = centre of the Centre area, and the internal periphery) there is a "real" outside, a real Periphery area (ideally, all the rest of creation). Here a periphery centre may arise.

CREATIVITY



IMPERIALISM



(Pc), thus defining the remainder as the peripheral area within the periphery (Pp). A classical example: A third-world area colonized/subjugated by a European government (Cc) which establishes a local colonial capital, and even a native puppet government - the (Pc) - to ensure local

control, on behalf of (Cc) interests, with the whole colonial (Pp) area and its resources. The dotted lines may be said to represent the input side, the fully drawn lines the output side of a given production process.⁹

It is no coincidence that the "Creativity" side of our illustration is also an illustration of the ~~rise and functioning of the eye~~, or of our sensory cells/centres whatsoever. As has been said, sight (and generally sensation) arose uncounted millions of years ago as abnormally, sickly sensitive cells - which proved functional, and were retained, refined. In our "Creativity" illustration, Cc may stand simply for an object, any element in its environment (Cp) influencing an "outsider", e.g. us, the subject. The input into the situation consists of the emanation/influence from Cc-object, across a space (Cp) structured by Cc being its perceived centre, plus (i.e. in confluence with) ~~pre-given, pre-integrated~~ data within the observing, receiving periphery. Thus far, the dotted lines. The creative phase consists in the integration/understanding of the Cc-emanation and in the consequent action. Thus the Pc representing integration and structuring (orders to) action, in whatever direction: thus, lastly, the fully drawn lines.

This model has the microcosmos-macrocosmos applicability and flexibility that characterizes, or was sought by, mediæval ideology. The Periphery side to it may be an individual or a collectivity (society, out-group) whereas the Centre side may be an object, or a society or whatnot, of interest; in a theological interpretation, Cc might be God (or Spirit), P might be Matter - and Pc consciousness (other than that of God), man = the focus of God and Matter, whence ensues action - into the fields of Matter, and also (if man chooses rightly) towards God.⁷

In purely humanly-defined history (without transcendent overtones) Cc may be a sedentary, established civilization, while the Periphery is any beyond-the-pale less developed society, whether sedentary or nomadic. A common theme of history is precisely what is illustrated

in the Creativity pattern above: An impulse from Cc impinges upon the Periphery - and evokes a rallying, structuring, concentration, of forces, political/economic/social, ideological and/or artistic. The point is that this must not be thought of as merely the incorporation of something alien into the Periphery party, an encapsuling of a cultural import from somewhere and something superior into somewhere and something inferior, less developed, less complex. On the contrary, the impulse is a catalyst, it calls forth not its own image and reproduction but a reaction - from the combined resources and basis of the Periphery society. In other words, something new arises, related to yet different from the seminary impulse, in the way of, as stated already, cross-breeding fertility in genetics.

This mechanism explains, or is the mechanism of, a lot in human affairs. By way of examples we may think of the rise of nomad or barbarian states on the fringes of, and challenging, the civilized centre of old standing; though this may be highly destructive to the old centre-state (re: fall of the Roman Empire, or the swamping of Central and Western Asia and Eastern and Central Europe by the Mongols), it is creative with regard to the nomads/barbarians, with regard to opening their home regions to new cultural impulses after a successful subjugation of a former centre state as well, and even with regard to the old centre state area, by bringing in literally fresh blood and by enstating a new social experiment in the chaotic-creative laboratory of man.

Or, take fringe cultures (in any sense of the word). It is in a context of contact with foreign lands that Viking culture¹⁰ blossoms up, expressing (and impressing us with) its originality (and not least the so-called dragon-style, dragons being no Northern invention, and the emphasis on boats, boat-burials etc, suggesting precisely a significant contact with abroad). It is in

contact with abroad that Irish culture of the early Middle Ages unfolds in its uniqueness.¹¹⁾ It is not as a product of isolation but, likewise, of relative isolation, relative contact, that the Permian style flourished in what is now eastern-central European Russia some twelve to fifteen centuries ago. It was as a result of interaction with its Slavonic, Norse and Volga Muslim neighbours and partners that the Vepse culture of the Onega-Ladoga area nearly a thousand years ago developed, and left us, its very un-Slavonic, un-Norse, un-Islamic artefacts.¹²⁾ It was around a foreign, Middle Eastern germ that the Tibetans developed their national epic, by accretion like a pearl within an oyster around a speck of sand from outside.¹³⁾ It was in the meeting of imported slaves with European culture in the Americas that Blues, Jazz and Voodoo were born.

Or lastly, contemplate individual works of art. For instance in that far northeastern periphery of Eurasia, Norway. It was offspring of the towns and the coast, and not of the troll-infested interior, that bequeathed to posterity its picture of the trolls and all associate national forest-and-netherworlders - and they did so after, and in reaction to, living, painting, writing and thinking in Central and Southern Europe. One of the most Norwegian paintings there is, Theodor Kittilsen's squirrel jumping into the quiet of forest space off a snow-burdened fir-tree branch, is inspired by the pictures of waves by Hokusai.¹⁴⁾ And that much tourist-sought symbol of Oslo, the human world monolith of Vigeland, with bodies fighting, trampling, climbing each other to reach the top, surrounded by a periphery of other sculptures, of the old and young, the frail, the left-out, out of what soil did its first beginnings rise?

"That 'centre and periphery', a model originating in geometry, could have been used so successfully to bring together geography and political science is a sign of the times," a distinguished editor exclaims by

way of introduction to a 1980 collection of studies analyzing the world (of geography and politics) in these terms.¹⁵⁾ It is, rather, a sign of the times now immemorial, from the days of the sacred songs of Sumer and Accad, Babylonia and Assyria. "A model originating in geometry" - from what then does geometry originate? From our needs to measure the earth (i.e. the productive property of each owner and user in agrarian society), the standard answer runs. Just like "the earth" is a dual-level, microcosmos-macrocosmos concept, so too are geometrical concepts: they symbolize, in the shapes of small lines on a piece of paper or on the ground, or more fundamentally and originally in our minds, the (microcosmos-macrocosmos) structures of the world in our minds. Now geometry as we know it is a hand-me-down from the Greeks - who in turn, in their initial capacity as a northern barbarian periphery people receiving impulses from long-established (Cc) centre states, benefitted from, and built with, the tools of both Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization - partly by way of Phoenicia, where both met. From the Egyptians originate the Greek, and subsequently Latin, European, alphabet; from the Egyptians, the square basics of geometry/trigonometry. From the Mesopotamians, amongst other things the basics of defining time. And space? While the daily-life down-to-earth Egyptians were occupied with measuring out their small square plots of land, the people of the Land between the rivers gave us space: the concepts of the heavens, the constellations of the stars above and beyond. And the concept of something, of power and control, or understanding, stretching out in all directions from one centre, unhampered by the small squares, trapezoids or triangles dividing off this snitch of soil from that, to the rounded ends of the earth. The very awkwardness (or "irrationality") of the concept π (π = the measured relationship between the diameter and circumference of a circle, the diameter being the distance from the centre to the circumference on opposite sides) is testimony to the incommensurability of fundamental Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultural concepts. Although already Archimede found that π

is somewhere between $3 \frac{1}{7}$ and $3 \frac{11}{70}$, modern mathematicians with calculators have pinned it down with (so far) an accuracy of 10017 decimals. When it was proved in 1882 that π is a 'transcendental' number,⁶⁾ what was proved was that it transcends the (cultural) framework of the Egyptian-Greek basic tradition.

This present study is, if a sign of 'the times', then of times immemorial. It is tribute to the creativity unfolded, outstretched, in all directions from one central conceptual complex. The final following chapter examines how and why the Mesopotamian heritage has lived on through the millennia in the minds of illiterate millions, and in the learned works of ideologists too, in the northern, central and southern reaches of Eurasia, under that quaint caption: the Alexander legend. Not amiss is commemoration of those who in the great 'Irāqī plain, themselves unknown by name, gave us that fabulous conglomerate of tall (and wide) stories; who gave us, too, a concept, a structure of entirety: not our petty plots and parcels of land but simply, monumentally, to be filled up and extended through the creativity of ever later ages, the world.

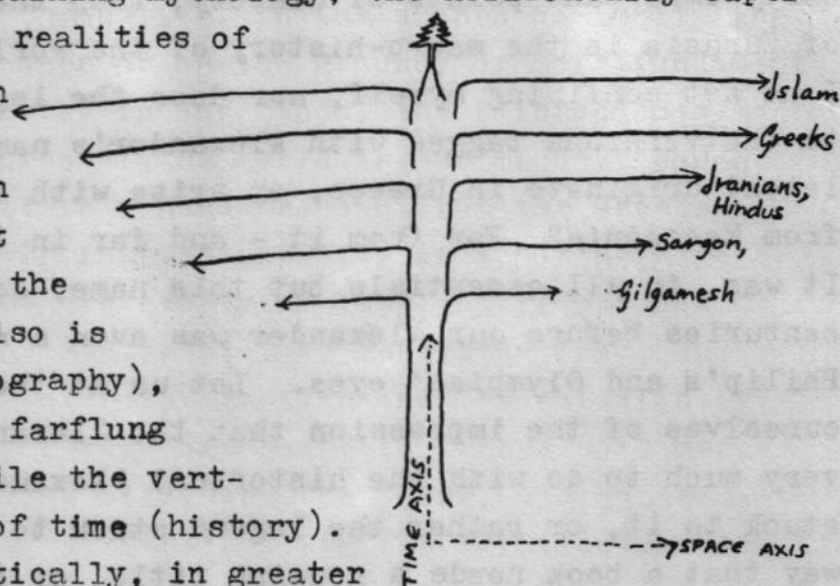
8. THE ALEXANDER LEGEND OF EURASIA

If macro-history were defined to comprise not the objectivist, universal rules of history set up by a few modern élite macrohistorians, but the subjective views of the masses concerning the foci of time and space, the universally important points of history, then the Alexander legend of Eurasia is the macro-history of the world par excellence. I am not confining myself, nor does the legend confine itself, to the versions tagged with Alexander's name. For did this legend originate in Greece, or arise with the rise of a hero from Macedonia? Far from it - and far in both time and space. It was, in all essentials but this name, conceived many long centuries before our Alexander was even a naughty twinkle in Philip's and Olympias' eyes. Let us at the outset disabuse ourselves of the impression that the Alexander legend has very much to do with the historical Alexander. His name stuck to it, or rather the legend stuck to his name, in the way that a book needs a rousing title, or a bunch of clothing needs a peg.

In rough outline: First the historically concrete peg is introduced, i.e. Alexander defined usually as the son of Philip and Olympias (but sometimes of Olympias and the ruler of Egypt or Persia, and even as a Yemeni prince). We generally get to hear of his fabulous horse (Bucephalos), the tribute that his father and the Greeks had to pay to Darius of Persia, and Alexander's victories over Darius and Porus of India. Yet even here his name in several versions is missing: In some Syriac sources and habitually in the Arabic ones our hero is called the Two-horned. (Other names also occur, as a fringe phenomenon.) Thus far the going is good. It presently becomes a rough ride, for any modern-minded Occidental at least. This regards the wild adventures of the world-conqueror in the extreme East, North and West (i.e. of Eurasia); the South is represented somewhat more scantily.

Years of studying this legend have led me to a conclusion: It is structured in the way of a T. In other words, it has both a wideranging horizontal and a central, supporting vertical dimension. The primary, vertical one is the Mesopotamian universalist (centre-periphery) cosmology explored in preceding chapters. By its very nature it predisposes to a spreading-out, a symbiosis with the achievements and ambitions of politicians and merchants alike, through the expanses of Eurasia. The vertical stem, then, is the basic, sustaining mythology, the horizontally superimposed lines the realities of

history with which it has been bound up, and with which it has grown. It will be seen that the horizontal axis also is that of space (geography), with increasingly farflung ramifications, while the vertical one is that of time (history). Drawn less schematically, in greater detail, the whole figure might resemble a tree - of life - with ever widening branches, and with twigs and foliage innumerable.



One problem for historians is which horizontal layer a given recording, or complex of recordings, ultimately goes back upon. To give one example: Many Siberian and far-north (Fenno-Ugric) European peoples know of the world mountain, tree of life etc. These peoples have all, either directly or through intermediaries, enjoyed commercial and cultural contacts with Islamic peoples (Iranians, Arabs and others) in the Middle Ages - and the Muslims must have talked of these concepts, in the context of their Alexander legend, in their dealings with them. But are the Muslims the originators of these concepts in the far North of Eurasia? Or are representatives of pre-Islamic Iranian civilization, which also knew these concepts? Or, in the case of Mongolia and adjacent parts, is it Buddhism, which likewise knows them? Is it not conceivable that

diffusion of concepts and legends from e.g. Babylonia may have taken place even before, and without, the role of Iranians? On the other hand, even though there may have been several successive waves diffusing the same basic concept or myth (though often in slightly different ways, and with different contextual emphasis), will this always, or even generally, be traceable? Will not the later waves often mask the earlier ones? (They will; and the only way of proving the reality of earlier diffusionist waves is to detect either cultural/ideological vestiges specific to the waves, or archaeological/written vestiges of, or references to, their bearers.)

Be these questions and answers as they may, the general relationship between horizontal and vertical aspects to this phenomenon of an ideological-political complex may be given as follows: a) Whenever a major new historical crust is superimposed upon Mesopotamia and its environments, in the form of conquest and/or conversion, the well of Mesopotamian ideas breaks through the crust and bubbles over, spreading out its water over and fertilizing the crust. (This holds good until the dawn of modern times, i.e. including the Islamic and Mongol conquests.) b) In much impoverished form the basic (vertical, horizontal expansionist, solar) orientations of Sumerian/Mesopotamian power, and some of the mythical paraphernalia (e.g. cherubim, two-headed eagle), have been borrowed by other, more distant power-holders.

The conquests of Alexander the Great furnished Mesopotamian mythology with a new peg. As the most successful 'world' conqueror in history (before Činggis Qān) he not only was an obvious pole of attraction for this lore, superseding such a long-faded figure as Sargon, he also encouraged this (as is evident from his coins, where he appears with the bull's horns of Mesopotamian divine royalty - whence his name 'the Two-horned' in later ages, including in the Qur'ān). Alexander's conquests also added - word of his conquests. In all versions of the basic Mesopotamian story with Alexander in the hero's role we hear of, prominently ~~described~~, his vanquishing

Darius of Persia and Porus of India. Yet in keeping with the fantastic tenor of the Mesopotamian lore, these more 'historical' parts are highly colourful and fantastic too. More precisely, the 'horizontal' history of Alexander has been in goodly measure assimilated to the 'vertical' Mesopotamian divine-hero-story stem through the nature of the narrative, that is by relating the bare, general, skeletal facts of his victories but by emphasizing, fleshing them out with, 'good stories', flashy anecdotes. This, and the proportion and prominence of the Mesopotamian materials, increases the closer one gets (or the versions get) to Iraq (or the farther from Greece). Thus, in the Arabic versions (many of which were penned in 'Irāq, and all of which were permeated with Islamic tradition, much of which was codified in 'Irāq) the fabulating Mesopotamian heritage is more palpable than in e.g. the Egyptian Pseudo-Callisthenes (ca 200 AD) version.

Breaching of the Islamic crust from desert Arabia by the Mesopotamian spring of lively water, and impregnation of all of the lands of Islam by this legend, was effected through the Qur'ān. A few references to the Two-horned and his exploits, not very exhaustive and calling for comment and interpretation, and the lid was off the box - or off the well and its freeflowing contents! Mention of the Two-horned as a hero of the faith created so to speak a vacuum of legitimate interest, a pump which all manner of theologians and traditionalists were eager to work. (Likewise, knowledge of the pre-Islamic pagan pantheon of Arabia has been preserved: This was a legitimate object of scholarly interest during Islam because some of these deities were mentioned, deprecatingly of course, in the Qur'ān.) Thus cosmological conceptions which otherwise would have had little chance of acceptance in Islam could be insinuated into the new faith - the more easily so in that several major traditionalists were recent converts from Christianity or Judaism in 'Irāq,

and that traditions on a historical personality called 'the Two-horned' were flourishing precisely in 'Irāq (and Syria). "The enemy of God is lying," one renowned traditionalist could exclaim of another, "this is a Jewish story which he is trying to introduce into Islam!" As modern comparative research can substantiate, such ideological infiltrations were often successful.

Representatives or close partners of Islam brought the Alexander legend with them to Tibet, the Mongols (within a few hundred kilometers of Peking), northern Siberia, to the shores of Novaja Zemlya and the White Sea, to Lappland - with the most varied results. The historical-ecological functionality of our legend was threefold, i.e. there were three main reasons for it to flourish and strike root, develop and survive in the soils of Eurasia. One was the vertical ("water-of-life") funnel function touched upon above, then. It may be qualified as both a pressure-from-below and a suction-from-above phenomenon: The subterranean pressure consists in all manner of heterodoxies seeking an outlet after the superimposition of a new ideological 'surface'; the vacuum from above consists in the need of the new surface crust for watering, for deepening its roots - in this instance, for deepening and consolidating an understanding of who the Two-horned was and what relationship he had to the world and cosmos (is there a better cue for redefining man's relationship to cosmos, and for characterizing cosmos itself?).

The other two functions of the legend refer to the horizontal, geographical dimension: a) There is the process of bringing its contents out to the (cultural, geographical, non-Islamic) periphery, or the question of their relevancy to the periphery. The Alexander legend here enjoyed the unrivalled advantage of serving Muslims for a mental map of the periphery of the world. Muslim merchants and missionaries alike, add even the Caliph in Bagdād, had but this legend to rely on for information

concerning the farthest-off regions of Eurasia.
(Cartography and travelogues show up its influence.)

b) There is not merely a to-the-periphery but also an in-the-periphery function: The legend struck roots. It did so not only in the centre of Islam (both geographically and theologically speaking), but also in the inner as well as the external periphery of Islam. In the Caucasus, in the Bulgar realm by the Middle Volga, in Turkic Islamic Central Asia, in the mountain crossroads of what has become Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gilgit, Swat, Chitral, Badakhshan etc), even on the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean, the Two-horned has been revered down into modern times not merely as an overall Islamic hero, but also as a local one, a founding father. This all concerns the internal periphery of Islam.

As to the external periphery, the faith of Islam has by definition had no sustaining influence; nor have historical memories and traditions of Alexander (or "the Two-horned"), as these regions lie outside the compass of not merely Islam but also the one-time conquests and exploits of the Macedonian. Nevertheless, traces of the legend are to be found among Lapps in Scandinavia and Khanty-Mansi aborigines in northwestern Siberia, among Mongols and Tibetans. (I have in mind here the Alexander legend proper, and not the world-mountain-plus-water-of-life basic imagery from Sumeria, common to both our legend and to Hindu/Buddhist tradition.)

These vestiges are explained again, ecologically, by their having filled a niche in the cosmology, the mental (and physically visual) landscape of the natives. Some details of this are explored elsewhere, but the general argument may be stated here: i) The initial (Muslim, sometimes also Nestorian Christian) conveyors of the legend were generally upper-status people in native eyes; their words carried weight for this reason, and also because of the dramatic, mind-captivating nature of the contents of the legend, lastly because of the resultant earnestness and persistency of the conveyors, who - ii) pestered the

natives for information as to the localization of key elements in the legend (e.g. "where is the heaven-high Mountain of the World, where is the defile where the Two-horned shut in a host of horrible fiends - who may soon burst forth upon you and us, where is the Land of Darkness - and of jewels?"), which in turn - iii) made the natives carry on the search, in their minds at least. With the passing of contacts with mediæval Islam (and Nestorianism, in some cases), the contents of the legend would have passed into oblivion, however, nay did pass into oblivion, but for those which iv) ~~had struck inde-~~ **pendent, local roots in the landscape.** This consists in some element(s) of the legend lending name to, or purporting to explain, a local natural or social/historical phenomenon, or by its being enshrined (fossilized) in local religion, epic tradition, or fairy tales (in which cases locally un-typical traits may have been retained precisely for being 'otherwordly', impressive, outlandish, i.e. foreign).

Instead of giving a rehash of Pseudocallisthenes (the oldest extant version of the legend, from Alexandria around 200 AD), or trying to compare the numerous variants of the legend throughout Islamic (and Christian) lands, we shall follow the T structure outlined above, and concentrate on the first and the last of the three functions. Exemplification is far from exhaustive; it is meant to be illustrative only. In the following will be found a Mesopotamian catalogue of themes constitutive of the so-called Alexander legend of Hellenic and Islamic times. It is followed by rudimentary illustrations of how elements of the legend could come to be adopted and adapted by Mongols, Tibetans and aborigines of North Russia. Finally there is a map showing all localities I have as yet discovered where there are toponyms or traditions concerning that originally dread element of the legend, the Iron Gate whence the Doomsday hordes are destined to break upon the world. More than any other possible visualization I believe this map demonstrates why we may indeed speak of the Alexander legend of Eurasia.

9. MESOPOTAMIAN INVENTORY OF ALEXANDER LEGEND

(Themes according to eldest preserved sources:

S = Sumerian, A = Accadian, B = Babylonian,

G = Gilgamesh epic, O = Odyssey, T = Babylonian Talmud,

M = Manichean, I = Islamic, V = Vedic)

- 1 World conquest (A)
- 2 epithet Two-horned (S)
- 3 quest for immortality (G)
- 4 via water-plant of life (G)
- 5 at Meeting-place of the two seas (G)
- 6 or tree and spring of life (S, G)
- 7 upon World Mountain in far north (S)
- 8 named Mashu (G)¹⁾
- 9 named (Su)meru (V)
- 10 held in hand of angel (M)²⁾
- 11 in/near Land of Darkness (G)²⁾
- 12 near half-human monsters (G,B)³⁾
- 13 and unclean tribes shut in behind barrier/mts (B)⁴⁾
- 14 twin peaks, moving rocks (A, O, T, I)⁵⁾
- 15 eagle-borne heaven-flight (S)
- 16 terrestrial paradise found (G)
- 17 with column/tree and talking bird (S)⁷⁾
- 18 and/or (Doomsday) angel (I)
- 19 with eye-stone gift (T)
- 20 horse bound at world mountain/pole (T)⁸⁾
- 21 and weapons hung upon stars (T)⁸⁾
- 22 the (bitter, encircling) Ocean braved (G)
- 23 quest for wisdom, to Seven Sages (S)
- 24 yet quest for immortality fails (G)
- 25 having succeeded for another (G)

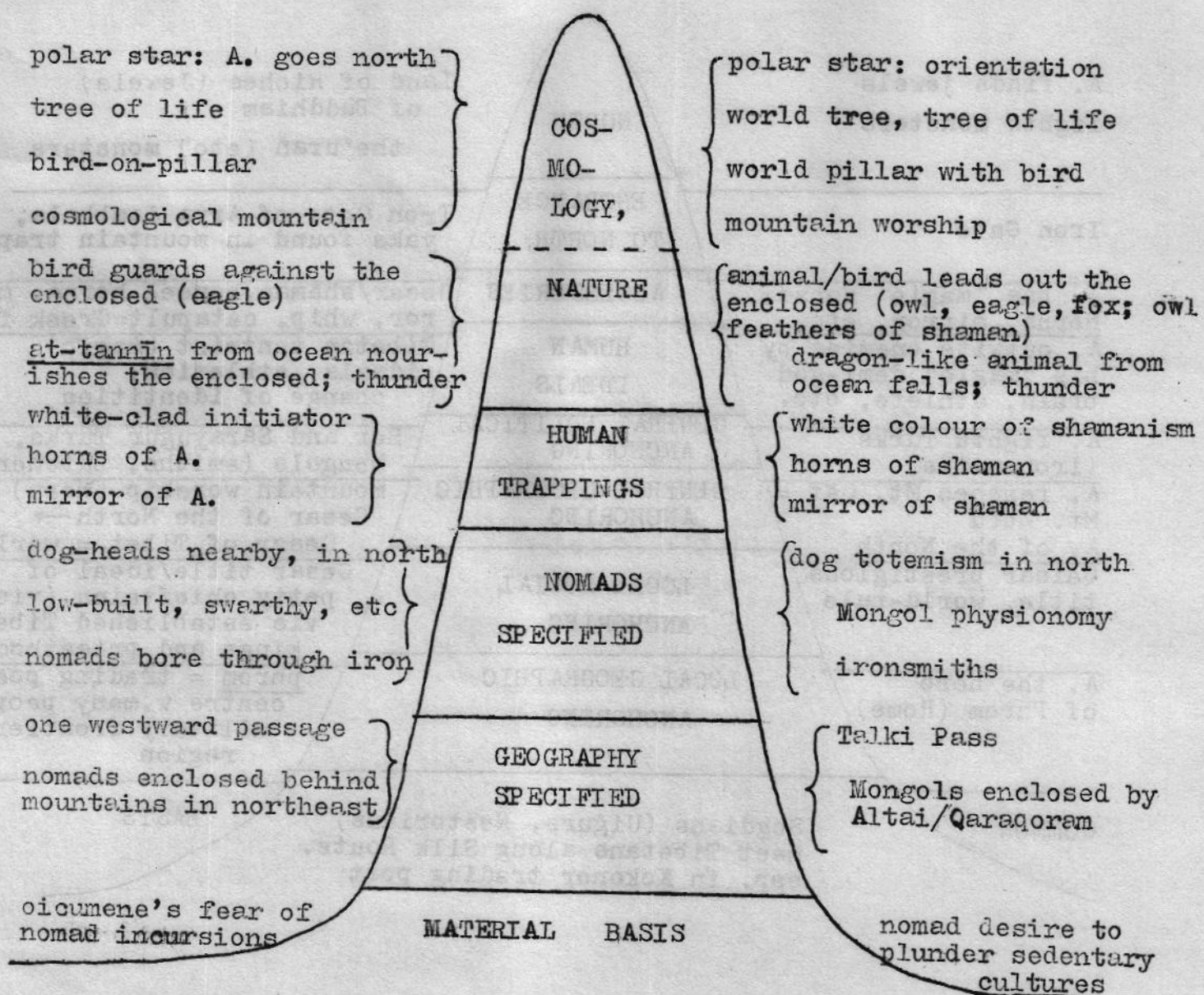
NOTES:

- 1 Langdon p 209 n 11; Anderson (1932) p 21 n 1
- 2 Langdon p 210
- 3 same pp 290, 295
- 4 same pp 129, 303, 320
- 5 Butterworth pp 5, 55; Wensinck (1916) p 45;
Toivonen p 110 n 1; Anderson pp 43-44
- 6 Spiegel II p 216
- 7 Langdon p 115 (?)
- 8 Friedlander p 139 n 9

10. THE LEGEND IN MONGOLIAN CULTURAL ECOLOGY

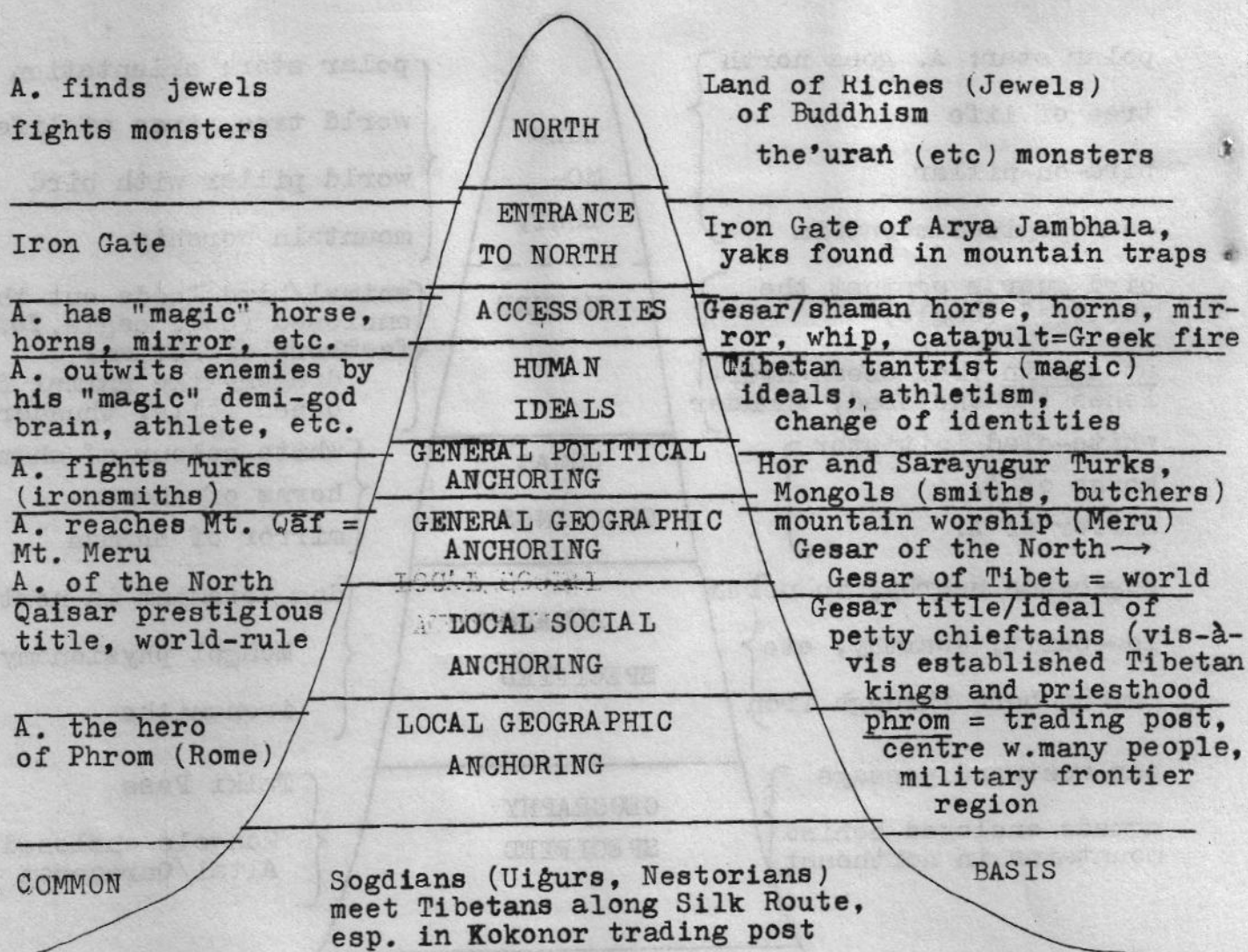
The legend

The Mongols



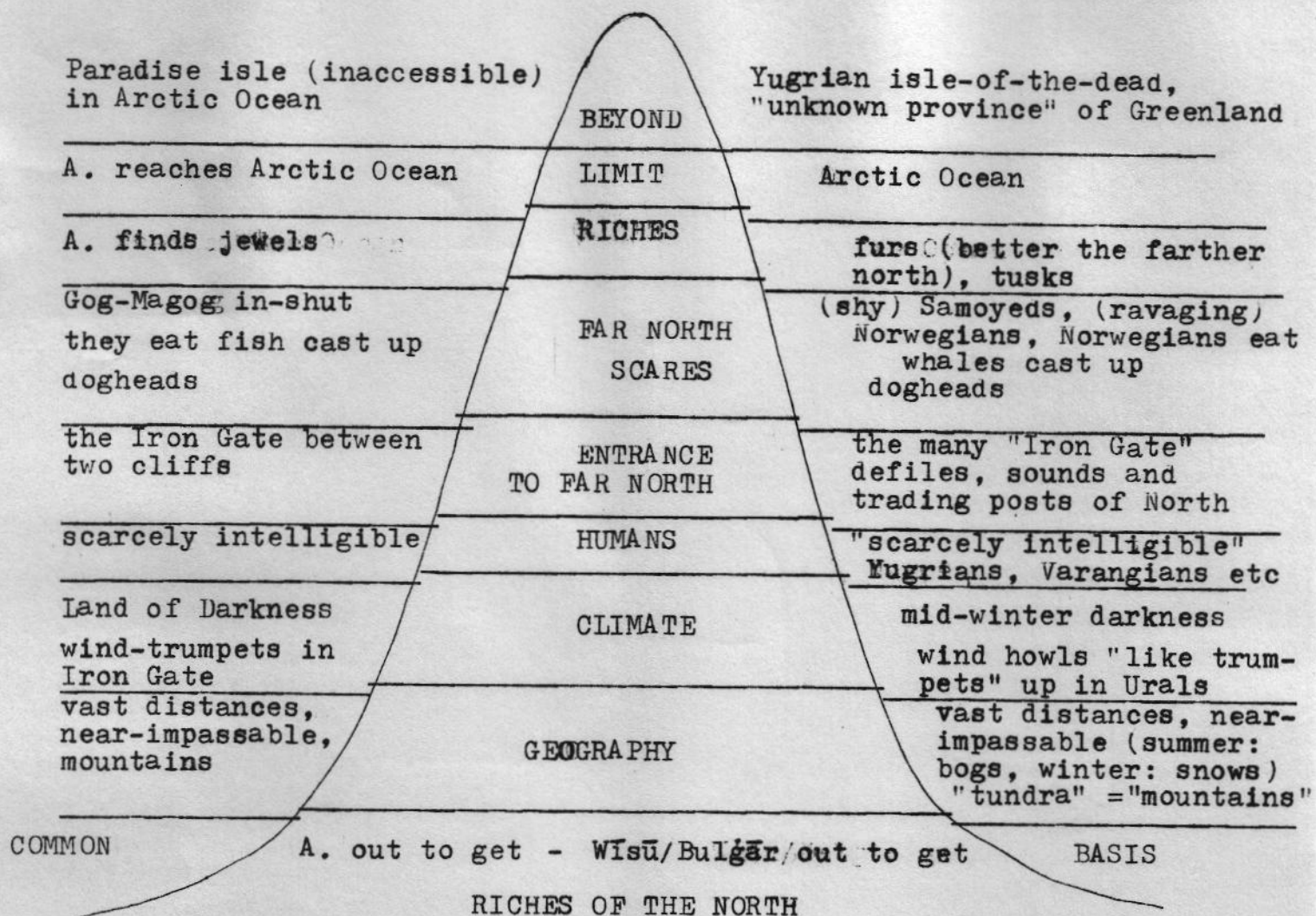
A chart of elements common to the A. legend and to Mongol reality: ground(s) for a symbiosis, a coreaction in history. The two other sides to this coreaction are explored in this study, but not charted here: a) Who effected and furthered it? b) What were its expressions and results?

1) an Iranian A.-connected motif



11: THE LEGEND IN TIBETAN CULTURAL ECOLOGY

(Details in: HS, Rise of the Mediæval Central Asian Ideal
of World Domination.)

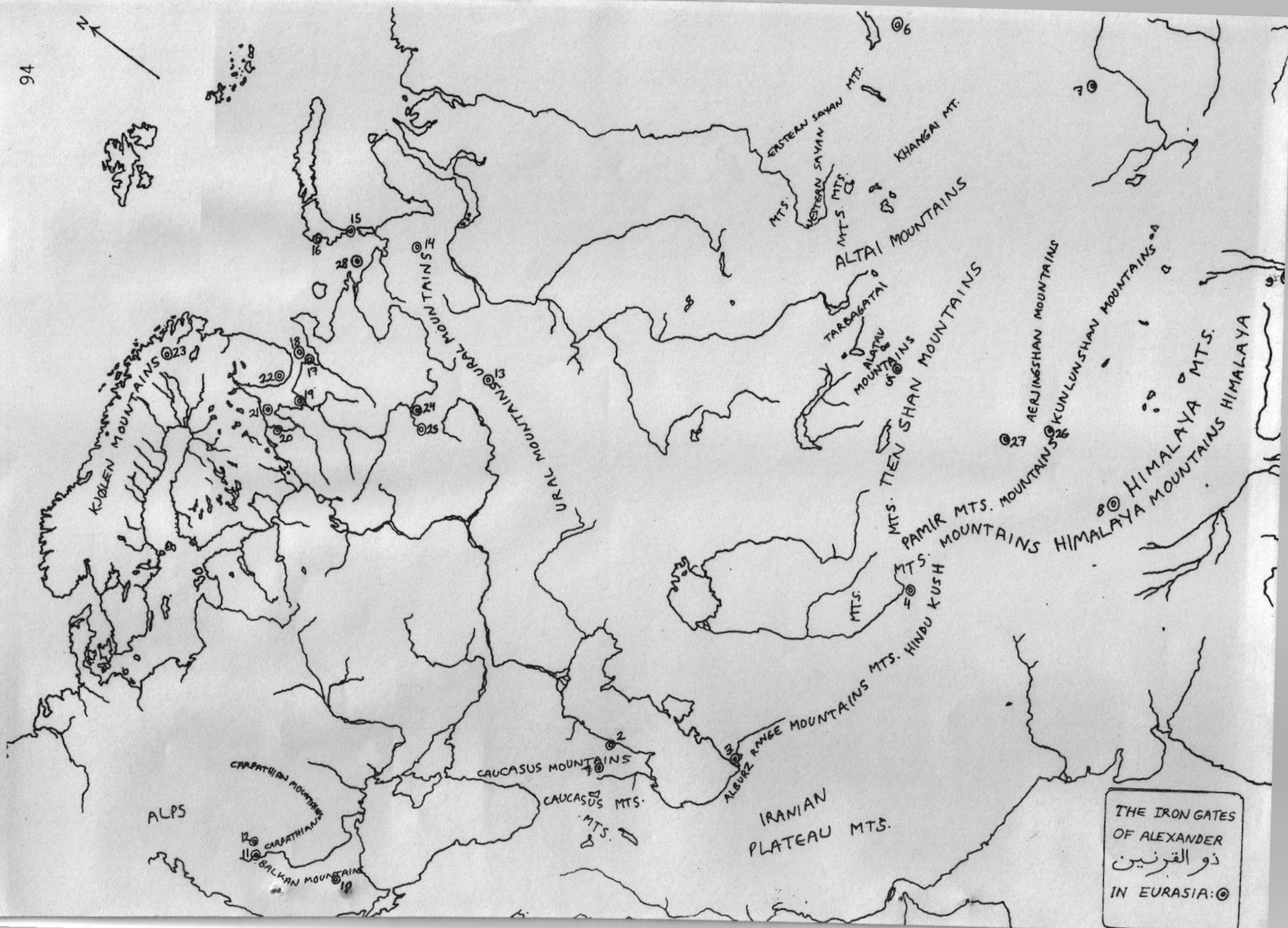


12: THE LEGEND IN NORTH RUSSIAN CULTURAL ECOLOGY

(Details in: HS, Myth of the Man of Many Lands.)



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THE IRON GATES
OF ALEXANDER
ذو القرنين
IN EURASIA: ©

THE IRON GATES OF ALEXANDER IN EURASIA

- 1 Pass of Dariel, Central Caucasus¹⁾
- 2 Pass of Derbend, Eastern Caucasus²⁾
- 3 Gushtasp Wall, East of Caspian³⁾
- 4 Kesh Defile, Hindukush
- 5 Talki Defile, Alatau/Tien-shan mts
- 6 Northeasternmost Mongolia
- 7 Kalgan gate, Great Wall of China
- 8 Kailasa mt, Tibet⁴⁾
- 9 Lintsong, Eastern Tibet⁵⁾
- 10 Balkan mts, 20 km north of Sliven, Bulgaria
- 11 Danube, between south Carpathians & north Balkans
- 12 by Bistrita river, Rumania, 90 km north of Danube
- 13 middle Urals
- 14 north Urals
- 15 Yugorskij Shar, between Vaigač & Novaja Zemlja
- 16 middle South Novaja Zemlja
- 17 between Ponoï (Kola) and Samoyedia
- 18 between Ponoï and Kanin peninsula
- 19 Mudjužskij island, north of Arkhangel'sk
- 20 Ponomarjovskij peninsula, White Sea
- 21 Solovets archipelago, White Sea
- 22 Turjan tunturille, i.e. Ter coast, Kola peninsula
- 23 Ruijan tunturille, i.e. (North) Norwegian mts
- 24 Kört-Keres village, Komi ASSR⁶⁾
- 25 Vodča "Karill", Komi ASSR
- 26 mts between Khotan and Tibet
- 27 north of Khotan (Hodien)
- 28 Voronovsk inlet

- NOTES:
- 1 AR Anderson, Alexander at the Caspian Gates, Amer. Phil. Assn. Tr. LIX (1928), pp 135-152; same, Alexander's Gate, Cambr./Mass. 1932, pp 7, 12, 15-16
 - 2 Anderson (1928) pp 152-159, (1932) p 26; J Markwart, Iranšahr, p 315
 - 3 B Dorn, Caspia, SPb
 - 4 R-A Stein, L'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet, Paris 1959, pp 139-140, 518
 - 5 same p 128
 - 6 oral info by A Afanasev, Director of USSR Toponymic Registry, Moscow June 1981 (of Komi nationality)

APPENDIX: ALEXANDER AND THE SANDAL-WOOD

As a humorous instance of cultural synthesization in the Alexander legend we shall take the tale of the hero's ill-reeking mother, as recounted by Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dīnawarī (d. 895 AD). His "Book of the Long Stories" is one of the earliest extant sizeable works on history in Arabic, but what he gives us is a Persian view in the following story. He first introduces the Persian emperors Dārā (Darius, Dareios to Occidentals) I and II:

On his deathbed, after twelve years of rule, Dārā (I) handed over rule to his son Dārā, he is the one who is called Dārayawāš, the enemy of Alexander. Having acceded to power he became tyrannical, supercilious and criminal. The address of his letters to his governors ran: "From Dārā the son of Dārā, who enlightens his subjects like the sun, to so-and-so. He possessed great power, numerous troops, and in his age there was no king any more on the entire earth who had not obeyed and paid tribute to him.

At the same time Alexander grew up. As to his pedigree the learned ones are of different minds. The Persians insist he is not the son of Philip, but his daughter's son; his father, on the contrary, is Dārā (I) the son of Bahman. For as they say, when Dārā ravaged the land of the Romans in war, Philip had bound himself to paying tribute in the peace agreement. Then Dārā (I) had demanded his daughter for wife and, after she had been given to him, brought her along home with him. Yet when he wanted to sleep with her, he noticed that she smelt foul, and was taken with disgust at her. So he gave her back into the custody of the mistress of his wives and ordered her to use remedies against that stench. And the smell indeed partly disappeared through the power of a herb called Sandar. When now Dārā let his wife in again, he noticed the smell of the sandar and exclaimed "Āl sandar!" meaning "how strong the smell of the sandar is", āl designating strength in Persian. So he slept with her, and she became pregnant by him, yet as his mind was against her because of the odour, he sent her back to her father Philip. Then she gave birth to Alexander; thus she named him, after the name of the herb with which she had been treated, in the way of Dara's words in the night of the cohabitation.)

Whereas this tale comes across to modern readers as the first mouth-detergent commercial ever, to Persians of any epoch it is full of hilarious malice. Those arch-enemies the Greeks are really at the receiving

end! Not only do they reek (even their royalty), and not only is the Greek princess shipped back to her father in ignominy (a gross affront only weaklings would take gently to), but the only "Greek" who ever managed to set the world on end is (which explains it all) of imperial Iranian blood.

There is another version of the tale too, by the historian at-Ṭabarī (from Tabaristan in northern Persia, d. 923), emphasizing that Dārā II and Alexander were brothers, sons of Dārā I - who could not stand the foul stench from the breath and sweat of the Greek princess Halāi (= Olympias). The remedy unanimously suggested by the erudite was to treat her with "the wood of a tree which in Persian is called sandar"; this was cooked, and she was washed (rubbed) with it and with the broth. Nevertheless, the smell did not quite go away, and she is returned, in a pregnant condition. Her son is called Halāi-Sandarūs, giving rise to the later Al-Iskandarūs.³⁾

A mere folk etymology? If so, it is not a very good one, as it does not account adequately for the name Alexander with its -ks- and still less for the Arabic and later Persian form with its -sk- (Al-Iskandar, Iskender). If it is a folk-etymology, would one not have found an easier expedient - such as suggesting that the Greek and Arabic forms were mere corruptions of e.g. the ancient Iranian hero's name Isfendiar? It is hardly plausible that both the reeking princess and the sandalwood stories were concocted simply to substantiate a folk-etymology. The whole thing bears the stamp of legend, and legends are not simply let down from the air, (they have their origins, we must suppose, in anterior human observations. What is it that is "observed" here? Definitely not a characteristic of Olympias (who never was Darius' wife). It is, rather, an ancient ritual of royalty.

In Buddhist thought, the sanctity of a world-conquering and righteous monarch, the cakravartin, is evident from the belief that the perfume of sandelwood issues from his mouth.⁴⁾ Likewise the Egyptian god exhaled

a scent on approaching the human queen, and the dying Hippolytus senses the nearness of Artemis by the breath of heavenly fragrance emitted by the goddess.⁹ Sandar indeed is sandelwood in Persian, and it is (primarily) the breath of the princess that has to be changed - before she can conceive the world-emperor, who evidently here is the righteous antithesis to his half-brother the tyrannical Darā II, i.e. an unproblematic cakravartin figure. The ancient emperors of Persia were of godly descent; the Hindu cakravartin is a partial incarnation of the god Viṣṇu; and Alexander according to the dominant legend of later times, as penned by the Egyptian writer Pseudo-Callisthenes (ca 200 AD) was fathered by the Egyptian sun-god Ammon, and was his partial incarnation. (In Pseudo-Callisthenes the ruler of Egypt in the guise of Ammon gets Olympias with child, whereupon she is returned to Philip and gives birth to a future world-ruler from Egypt⁹ - very similar to the Persian version, in fact.)

The Persian story, then, shows up a synthesis, or a symbiosis, of old and newer elements. There is the patent patriotic wish, nay duty, of converting the world-conquering Alexander figure from an alien invader into a legitimate continuation of a native (Persian and Egyptian) tradition and lineage. The sandelwood is still there, as a mark of godly blessings and divine mission, in olden times, yet this is forgotten - characteristically, it is the learned ones who have knowledge of sandelwood, at-Ṭabarī says.⁹ The sandelwood having such fragrance, it so to speak evoked its contrast in the minds of the Greek-hating Persians, the smelly princess. This latter myth should not be seen as merely a snubbing of the Greeks, however. Its occurrence is also an indication that the original function of the sandelwood was being or had been forgotten, though the sandelwood itself was remembered still, and that a new functionality was called for: in other words, that the sandelwood would either have to be forgotten, to dry up completely, or be replanted and strike new roots in a new psychological, political ecology.

NOTES

THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY MYTH OF THE WORLD (Frontispiece)

- 1 (Arabic text, translation:) "The mountain of Qāf: The theological commentators have said that it is a mountain surrounding the world, made out of green chrysolite⁹ and that the green colour of the sky is from it.⁹ Behind it are worlds and creatures which none knows but God.⁹ Some of the commentators have said that there is absolutely no mountain among the mountains of the earth which does not have one of its roots connected with Qāf.⁹ If God wishes a people to be destroyed He orders the angel entrusted with Qāf⁹ who then moves one of its roots⁹, which gives way under them."¹⁰
- al-Qazwīnī, *Kosmographie* (كتاب عجائب المخلوقات), I, ed F Wüstenfeld, Göttingen 1849, p IV. (170).
- 2 "...a godly holy iron pole, serving to fasten the pied-flanked holy beast.. a holy pole of seven stages consisting of pure silver"¹¹ - B Munkácsi, *Die Weltgottheiten der wogulische Mythologie*, in: *Keleti Szemle*, VIII, Budapest 1907, p 101
- 3 President Jimmy Carter, Notre Dame University, May 22 1977, quoted in AK Henrikson, *America's Changing Place in the World: From 'Periphery' to 'Centre'?* - in: *Centre and Periphery, Spatial Variation in Politics*, ed J Gottmann, London 1980, p 73¹²
- 4 a mineral, very hard, cf "adamantine"; the Kalmucks west of Astrakhan and the Caspian Sea likewise hold that the outermost ring of mountains, outside the outermost salty/bitter Ocean surrounding the world, is of iron - U Holmberg (Harva), *Der Baum des Lebens*, Hels. 1922, p 49; cf EAS Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth*, Berlin 1970, pp 164-165 (on seven-banded sacred central tree, and ziggurats of Babylon)
- 5 In a modern recording from Central Asia, an expedition beginning to ascend the mythical World Mountain notices that the sky was starting to turn white - from the reflection of the Lake of Milk upon its summit. (- *Baum des Lebens*, p 78.)
- 6 thus it is a real, absolute periphery line, dividing off our 'inner' circle of knowledge from the periphery area = total non-knowledge by man
- 7 an Iranian basic notion, probably inspired by (but only inspired by) the Babylonian idea of a single World Mountain, cf ch. 4 (Early Iranian Universalism) below
- 8 according to Manichæan and subsequent Islamic tradition an angel holds the World Mountain, Qāf, in his hand, cf ch 8 p 90 below (Babylonian inventory of A. Legend)

- 9 the word عرق in Arabic significantly means both "root" and "vein" (botanical and anatomical), as well as "stem" of a plant or leaf; it thus captures, and sums up, the ancient Mesopotamian as well as the subsequent Iranian view in an orthodox Islamic nutshell, as later chapters will demonstrate; the name 'Irāq عراق is a derivation of the same word, interestingly
- 10 the notion of this mountain demonstrates the close conceptual, associative affinity between centre and periphery: the original idea (cf the Meru of the Indians) is that of a central (though northern) World Mountain, which accounts for its being supported by an angel and having contact with all other mountains of the world (hardly applicable to a circle of mountains beyond both the landmass of the earth and a vast ocean); the Iranian 'world mountain' indeed is said to surround the world, yet passing through the Caucasus, Himalayas etc, while the Indians (Hindus and Buddhists) operate with both a central (though northern) 'world mountain' and a peripheral ring of mountains, the Lokaloka. The Islamic Qāf appears to be a valiant try at combining both - i.e. both centre and periphery!
- 11 the centre of the world is envisaged variously as a pillar/pole, a shaft of light (thus in Manichæism, "the pillar of praise/fame"), a towering tree or (or: upon) a mountain, as will be seen in this study. In the quotation here, from a holy hymn of the Mansi (Vogul) tribe of northwesternmost Siberia, it is a pole - for binding the supernatural horse of the supreme God - outside the dwelling of the God, where, incidentally, a towering holy tree is also found
- 12 the quotation is selected both for its juxtaposition of how young the USA is with how old the imagery is, and for its explicit and compressed imagery: Here is both the horizontal and the vertical dimension, combined just like in ancient Mesopotamian imagery. There is the rise or ascension, to world eminence, literally "high position" or "lofty protuberance", which evidently, in juxtaposition with a lowly, base periphery, constitutes "the international order" (whether old or new)

NOTES

I: PURPOSE OF STUDY

- 1 J Galtung, T Heiestad, E Rudeng: On the Last 2500 Years in Western History and some Remarks on the Coming 500, Trends in Western Civilization (TWC) Program no. 14, p 17
- 2 Etienne Lamotte, *Le chemin de Bouddha*
- 3 cf the Asoka edict ca 260 BC (India); in Tibet 7th-8th century AD the kings used Buddhism to strengthen their central power at the expense of the feudal lords, and laws enjoined drastic punishments for anti-Buddhist "crimes", e.g. mock a monk and your tongue is to be torn out, steal from a monastery and off goes your arm; the Buryat Mongols in the 16th-17th century were eager "crusaders" against the pagan shamans
- 4 Three waves of Buddhist proselytizing have impinged upon the West: Theravada Buddhism before the First World War, Zen Buddhism after the Second, and exile Tibetan Buddhism from the mid-1960's. Yet it may be stressed that traditionally and generally Buddhism makes none of "that claim on other people's soul" as Christianity. Though e.g. Tibetan history is replete with "religious wars", these are predominantly wars between monasteries concerning economic and political resources. Buddhism has little of the theological strife characterizing the monotheist faiths, and does not demand personal faith and conformity of conviction. It tolerates non-Buddhist deities, and has a pantheon of its own. Thus "secular deities" according to Buddhist doctrine may receive "secular sacrifices" (only blood sacrifices being repugnant); these deities are thought to be subject to the rule of birth and death, merely on a longer time-scale than humans, whereas Siva and other suprasedular gods, in reality Bodhisattvas (Buddhas), are immortal.
- 5 H Stang, *On Historical Ecologism, Diogenes*, Paris/Florence 1981
- 6 Irminsul, generally translated as "mighty pillar" (but possibly rather = "Heavenly pillar") was destroyed by Charlemagne in 772. The connection with classical Greek concepts of a pillar of the sky was observed by AB Cook, *Zeus, II*, pp 36 ff (*Zeus and the Sky Pillar*), cf EAS Butterworth, *The Tree at the Navel of the Earth*, Berlin 1970, p 11.
- 7 Pnom Penh = Mountain of the Land, from Hindu concept of Mount Meru. Communication by Prof. H Henne, Oslo
Peak of Adam is the same basic idea, from Babylonia
- 8 W Heissig, *Mongolische Volksmärchen*, Düsseldorf 1963, pp 194-200

2. EARLY CHINESE UNIVERSALISM

- 1 B Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, *The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, Bulletins 16-17 (1944, 1945), (reprint) Stkh 1950, no. 303, p 263
- 2 Dung Dzobin, *Yin lipu* (Year list of the Yin Dynasty), 1945, reprint Taipei undated; cf W Eichhorn, *Die Religionen Chinas*, Stuttgart-Berlin.Köln-Mainz 1973, pp 15, 17
- 3 Eichhorn p 22
- 4 Guo Mojo, *Chingtung zhihdai* (*The Bronze Age*), *Beidzhing* 1945, p 15; Eichhorn p 22 n 4
- 5 Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, I, trsl D Bodde, Princeton 1952 reprint 1973, p xv; the Deluge is traditionally placed in the years of Yü's predecessor 2255-2206, the Hsia dynasty dated to 2205-1766 (or 1751); the first authenticated date in Chinese history, however, is 776 BC (a sun eclipse)
- 6 Karlgren no. 304, 305, pp 264-266; on sacrificing to the four quarters, see fx no 212, pp 166-167
- 7 Eichhorn p 34 n 23
- 8 *The Mythology of All Races*, V: Semitic, SH Langdon, N.Y. 1964, pp 221, 372
- 9 age of the "world conqueror" Sargon of Akkad (Agade), on whom see below,
- 10 Cf also Langdon p 145: "prophecy" on havoc of Subartu, Assyria, Elam, Akkad, and mention of these peoples by Sargon I
- 11 Fung Yulan pp 30, 33; Karlgren no. 241, p 194: "Heaven established for itself a counterpart (on earth).. God made a state, made a counterpart of himself.. so there was given him [sc. the king] brightness.."; same no. 275, p 243: "you are able to be a counterpart to Heaven"
- 12 e.g. Karlgren no. 259, p 226
- 13 Langdon p 205
- 14 Fung Yulan p 29
- 15 Langdon p 310; Fung Yulan p 26
- 16 Eichhorn p 47
- 17 same p 22 n 5
- 18 Langdon pp 117, 169-173 (both benevolent and hostile)

- 19 Eichhorn p 23
- 20 same n 8
- 21 Karlgren no. 257, p 222: "the Vaulted Blue"
- 22 Eichhorn p 166
- 23 same p 151
- 24 There exists no good Chinese etymological dictionary, and this suggestion is made with all reserve
- 25 Eichhorn p 32. The "songs from diverse lands", or "from the (four) quarters", Guofeng, comprises the first 160 odes of the Zhihching or Book of Odes, trsl B Karlgren, cf note 1 above
- 26 Eichhorn p 33
- 27 same pp 68, 71
- 28 same pp 72, 76
- 29 Herodot 7,114 mentions as a custom of the Persians at the time of Xerxes the live burial of nine boys and girls at the nine roads dedicated to the god of the underworld; F Spiegel, *Eranische Alterthumskunde* Lpz 1873, II, p 191 n 1, imputes this to Babylonian tradition, yet the Babylonians and Sumerians venerate the number seven, not nine, and this was passed on to the Iranians
- 30 Eichhorn p 74, discussing also the four-mountains, five-mountains and nine-mountains conceptions of the Chinese
- 31 Ling Zhunzheng, K'un-lun-hillock and Hsi-wang-mu, *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology, Acad. Sin.*, no. 22 (1966)
- 32 but see end of chapter
- 33 Eichhorn p 75; "King mother" recalls Iranian Ardvicura Anahita and the ancient Mesopotamian mother goddess, on which more in ch.
- 34 Eichhorn p 78
- 35 same p 82
- 36 same p 64
- 37 same p 76
- 38 K Shiratori, *Über den Wu-sun Stamm in Centralasien*, *Keleti Szemle* III, Budapest 1902, pp 110-111

- 39 Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, London 1888, I, pp 255-259;
J Marquart, *Guwainī's Bericht...*, Deutsche Akad. der Wiss., Ph-h. Kl., 1912; H. Stang, *Cinggis Qan and the Role of a Legend*, ch. 2 (forthcoming)
- 40 Shiratori pp 136-138
- 41 the ultimate origin of Kun-lun may nevertheless be Sanskrit Kuru, cf. end of chapter
- 42 Shiratori p 120
- 43 same p 139
- 44 Eichhorn pp 86-87
- 45 Bundahešn, ed K Justi
- 46 Spiegel, II, pp 18-19: { "...attraction to the light and aversion to the darkness is no Indogermanic peculiarity yet the systematic use of both concepts as the basis for a religious system can as yet only be attested in Iran and Babylonia" - plus Daoism
- 47 Ill.a: Yin-yang of Daoism, b: the Hindu vajra (Tibetan rdo-rje) - inspired from Western Asia - symbolizing universal growth and universal consciousness, as spiralling upwards like Kundalinī the serpent, while the top and bottom lotus ornaments represent polarities in conscious existence, e.g. man-woman, light-darkness, destruction-creation. ~~EAS Butterworth, The Tree at the Navel of the Earth~~, Berlin 1970, pp 113, 129, 205, pl.XX. G Tucci, *Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala*, London 1961 pp 26-27, 59, 70, 126: the Buddhas as "father and mother", the struggle between light and darkness, the deity Heruka's coupling of the "mother" and the "father" = the two coefficients of salvation, the Buddhists through their thesis of the implicit duality of the thought of Illumination (divided into gnosis and praxis and reunited) were perhaps the first to define a soteriology in which the male-female binome plays a predominant part. The yin-yang vajra shown here is from Per Kvarne, *A Norwegian Traveller in Tibet*, Manjusri, N. Delhi 1973, p 106:
- 48 Ming-tang, ruled by the god-and-human Lord of Longevity; those who are destined to live are entered in blue ink in the registry, those destined to die in black. Eichhorn p 142
- 49 Same p 141: Taiping (complete harmony), from three stages= three steps (spheres) of heaven - cf Iranian and ultimately Mesopotamian three heavens concept (later seven). Langdon pp 94-95, 171-173
- 50 Eichhorn p 91
- 51 Fung Yulan p 23; Eichhorn p 93
- 52 Eichhorn p 95
- 53 Laodzu was supposed to dwell "above in the Jade Capital, below near the Polar Star" - Eichhorn pp 157, 101-103



- 54 same p 128
- 55 same p 150
- 56 Fung Yulan, p 397, quoting the Huainanzu ca 130 BC. The heavenly pillar tellingly is atop a mountain
- 57 cf note 56 (p 11)
- 58 Fung Yulan p 200
- 59 same pp 47, 73; whereas Fung Yulan states that the Princess, possible chief deity of the Tai-zhan, is "a purely Daoist deity", we note that the Iranian (and surely Babylonian-based) many-coloured Ardviçura Anahita of the Iranians upon the mountain with the spring of pure water (of life) has the same function as this Princess, of inspiring and aiding childbirth, cf F Spiegel, *Iranische Alterthumskunde*, II, p 55. The many-colouredness is stressed in the Yakut tale, in turn based on the Iranian, of the Mother-goddess and the First Man, see
- 60 Fung Yulan pp 167-168;
- 61 Butterworth pp 28-29
- 62 Spiegel, II, pp 55-56; Budahešn
- 63 countless versions and variations; for the oldest, Pseudocallisthenes from Alexandria ca 200 AD, see (ed) J Zacher
- 64 E Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan*, 1910, pp 424-425; B Karlgren, *Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions*, *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, no. 6, Stkh.1934, p 29; G Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, London 1961, p 141; Eichhorn p 73
- 65 Tucci p 141
- 66 Fung Yulan pp xxii-xxiii; "This concept (of world ruler - HS), in fact, is implied by the very term T'ien hsia."
- 67 Eichhorn p 105
- 68 same p 131
- 69 same pp 41-42, 116
- 70 These five colours are refound in other Hindu and Buddhist contexts, see Tucci pp 38 (coloured threads for making mandala), 52-53 (colours of psyche), 68-69 (deity Heruka)
- 71 *The Five Thousand Dictionary*, Harvard 1966, p 593

- 72 R-A Stein, Recherches sur l'Epopée et le barde au Tibet, Paris 1959, pp 254, 304 n 45
- 73 K Shiratori, Chinese Ideas Reflected in the Ta-ch'in Accounts, in: Mem. of the Res. Dept. of the Toyo Bunko, no. 15, Tokyo 1956
- 74 Stein pp 306-307 n 71
- 75 E Chavannes, Documents sur les T'ou-kiue or., 1903, p 121 (Tang Zhou)
- 76 Études Mlle Lalou, Paris 1971, A MacDonald, Une lecture des Pelliot..., p 385
- 77 though in the latter case as transmitted by way of China
- 78 Études Mlle Lalou, op cit
- 79 Fung Yulan p 92
- 80 same p 94
- 81 same p 272
- 82 same pp 211, 267-268
- 83 Tucci p 142
- 84 Eichhorn p 111
- 85 cf next ch. pp 29-30

3. EARLY INDIAN UNIVERSALISM

- 1 a popular Buddhist concept - cf. e.g. W Heissig, Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichte der Mongolen, Asiatische Forschungen V, p 50. On the wheel paradigm of Hinduism and Buddhism below; the brahmacakka. "the excellent wheel", denotes the doctrine of Buddha.
- 2 J Gonda, Ancient Indian Kingship, pp 38, 60; W Kirfel, Die Kosmologie der Inder, Lpz 18.., G Tucci, The Theory and Practice of the Maṇḍala, London 1961, p 43
In the Ethiopian version of the Alexander legend, based upon an Arabic original, A. seeks the seven treasures of Solomo in Babylon - EAW Budge, The Life and Exploits of A. the Great, London 1896, p cvi
- 3 Gonda pp 124-125
- 4 Fung Yulan, op.cit.
- 5 Gonda ppl26-127
- 6 J Galtung, A Structural Theory of Imperialism, Journal of Peace Research, VIII, 2, pp 81-117.
- 7 for centrist conceptions of the USA, see AK Henrikson, America's Changing Place in the World - From 'Periphery' to 'Centre'? in: (ed) J Gottmann, Centre and Periphery - Spatial Variation in Politics, London 1980, pp 73-100
- 8 Gonda p 122
- 9 same pp 125-126
- 10 I follow Maurice Pézard, and not the earlier view of Ludvig Müller (Denmark) and Oscar Montelius (Sweden)
- 11 L Laroche, The Middle East, in: Monuments of Civilization, London 1974, p 47 (Hittite empire)
- 12 Langdon p 346
- 13 same p 414 n 29
- 14 Tuccipp 42, 25, 116
- 15 M Eliade, 1969, p 33

- 16 Wensinck (1916), pp 44-45;
the tent idea could naturally catch on and be preserved among Central Asiatic tent-dwellers
- 17 Tucci p 35
- 18 same pp 28, 40, 119
- 19 same pp 28-29
- 20 same p 26
- 21 L Chandra, Mandalas of a Tantra Collectaneum, in: Collectanea Mongolica, Festschrift Rintchen, ed W Heissig, Asiatische Forschungen 17, Wiesbaden 1966, p 137
- 22 a prominent characteristic of the Tree of Life in Islamic versions of the Alexander romance too, cf Friedlander
- 23 Tucci pp 43, 109
- 24 dagoba=omphalos, Butterworth pp 49
- 25 dagoba=omphalos, Butterworth pp 49, 61
- 26 same p 49, plate xii
- 27 T Ling, Buddhist Mysticism, in: Religious Studies, I, no. 2, April 1966
- 28 Tucci p 138
- 29 again a prominent characteristic, of the mountain in the Land of Darkness in the Alexander romance upon which stands the Tree of Life, as well as of the pillar with the talking bird which Alexander, failing the Tree, finds in the Land of Darkness, e.g. 'Umāra version, Friedlander pp 144, 152, 156
- 30 Butterworth pp 165, 170; Wensinck (1916) p 40; Spiegel II p 14; Langdon pp 90, 159, 309
- 31 the common Meru traditions stress its depth along with its height (both 84000 leagues) but not its water, cf
- 32 A Avalon, The Serpent Power, Madras 1958, p 323; Keith
pp 59, 149
- 33 Butterworth p 130
- 34 same p 24
- 35 same plate xvi, Tucci p 129
- 36 Butterworth pp 112-113
- 37 Tucci p 138; Butterworth p 85; Langdon p 103
- 38 Butterworth p 84, plate xviii

- 39 cf also, Langdon pp 284-5: "...Ningishzida, a vegetation deity and form of the dying god Tammuz. Sometimes he has not only the Mushussu [serpent - HS] springing from his shoulders but also a serpent twining about his body." Cf also same p 78.
- 40 Wensinck p 62
- 41 Avalon p 351; Butterworth p 84
- 42 Spiegel I p 464

4. EARLY IRANIAN UNIVERSALISM

- 1 Damascius, in Spiegel II p 15
- 2 Spiegel II pp 6-7, 9, 15-16, I p 436
- 3 same II pp 124-125, cf Langdon p 130
- 4 Spiegel I pp 464-5
- 5 same I p 192
- 6 Bundaheshn ed Justi, Spiegel I p 206. The Iranian conception is evidently reflected in Aithikos (Aethicus) from Istria, ed H Wuttke, Lpz 1853, pp lxxiv-lxxv, 83.
- 7 Spiegel II pp 51-52 n 2
- 8 U Holmberg (Harva), Der Baum des Lebens, Hels. 1922, p 57; Butterworth p 1
- 9 we recall the white-haired Queen Mother of the West, above p
- 10 ~~and Buddhist~~, cf e.g. W Heissig, Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen, I, Asiatische Forschungen 5, Wiesbaden 1959, p 45 (a colophon from 1620): "Hormusta, ruler of the heavenly spirits like unto the milk ~~sea~~, was transformed when the lucky holy Cinggis Qān was born."
- 11 Spiegel II p 55
- 12 Langdon pp 108-110; as to "Queen who allots the fates", cf Holmberg (1922) p 66 on East European St Mary figure
- 13 Spiegel II p 54 n 1
- 14 Langdon pp 108, 90 fig. 46
- 15 Spiegel pp 51-54

- 16 Spiegel I pp 509, 523, 542
- 17 same I p 482; cf AR Anderson, Alexander's Gate..., Cambr. Mass. 1932, p 21 n 1
- 18 the tree sacred to Anu (the supreme god) in Sumerian mythology is called Ma-nu, cf Hebrew manna = exudation of tamarisk (plant of life), Langdon p 97
- 19 cf Wensinck (1922) pp 64-65
- 20 in the Alexander legend, cf Iqbāl-nāma by Nizāmī Gangēvi; "The Alexander Legends in Persian Literature", British Library (exhibition brochure, Dept of Oriental Mss & Printed Books 1/3-31/7-1977)
- 21 Langdon pp 28, 98-99; BA Rybakov, Kosmogoničeskaja simbolika..., in: Finno-Ugry i Slavjane, Len. 1979, pp 7-34
- 22 Langdon p 204, Spiegel I p 521
- 23 Spiegel I pp 528, 479
- 24 same I p 480
- 25 also by Hindus, cf W Kirfel, Die Kosmographie der Inder, Bonn/Lpz 1920, p 175
- 26 legend of Feridūn's sons dividing the world, Spiegel I p 547
- 27 cf. Langdon, ch V "The Lunar Crescent and the Bowl", esp. p 122, and Laroche, The Middle East, p 66, A Text of Tiglath-Pileser I: "Two great ziggurats... have I constructed... A sanctuary as a dwelling place of their pleasure, as a seat for their celebrations, which radiate like the stars of heaven, I would imagine, I made these ziggurats raised unto heaven."
- 28 Wensinck p 40, where "rooftop" ^{سقف} is inaccurately rendered "plate", cf also p 39
- 29 same pp 40-43
- 30 Langdon p 208
- 31 Spiegel II pp 246-7
- 32 al-Mas'ūdī, Murūğ ad-dahab, ch. xiv (ed Paris p 269): Iranian view of central golden cupola upon four pillars - of green, red, blue and yellow gems, cf Indian and Chinese colour schemes above - from which a water dripples that does not mix with common water but forms the four world rivers
- 33 "like a roof the hedged park was levelled", etc, Deluge legend in Gilgamesh epic, Langdon p 221
- 34 same p 217
- 35 significantly, cf ch. 1 p 18 n 67
- 36 i.e. China
- 37 Fung Yulan pp 160-161

5. EARLY SEMITIC AND EUROPEAN UNIVERSALISM

- 1 Butterworth p 8; cf also al-Mas'ūdī p 45 n 32 above
- 2 Butterworth pp 35-37
- 3 and to his emulators, cf Solomo
- 4 thus all three in e.g. 'Umāra ms of A. legend - while a modern Vepse legend on "the flaming pillar" knows but one, MI Zajceva & MI Mullonen, *Obrazcy Vepsskoj reči*, Leningrad 1969 pp 71-72
- 5 Sumerian Mah; in Lesser Asia Ma, cf Mansi (North-West Siberian Mā-ankw, "Mā-mother" - B Munkacsi, in *Keleti Szemle* 5, Budapest 1904, p 350
- 6 Butterworth pp 14-15
- 7 *Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, xxi, 1901, by AJ Evans; Butterworth pp 24-25, 39
- 8 cf our (Greek-derived) concept of the Pole star, and North Pole
- 9 Butterworth pp 79-80
- 10 Wensinck (1912) pp 55, 19, 14-15, 21
- 11 cf Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus (4th c. AD), in *Langdon* p 16: the Nabateans worship the virgin **Xaapōv** meaning ka'bu "Square stone, cubus" = ka'ba, a black stone 4 ft high 2 ft wide on a base of gold
- 12 Wensinck pp 36, 15, 47-48
- 13 same pp 61, 60
- 14 al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ ad-dahab*, *Bibl. Geogr. Arab.* (ed de Goeje), v p 209 line 14; Wensinck p 36
- 15 Butterworth pp 88-89
- 16 cf Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, N York 1928, on the markab; and the mahmil custom discontinued by ibn as-Sa ud
- 17 Baroche, *The Middle East*, pp 52, 41, 60, 63; *Langdon* pp 183, 222-223, 266
- 18 the Muslim view too, cf H Stang, *Westernness and Islam, Trends in Western Civilization*, no. 6, *Chair in Conflict & Peace Research*, Oslo Univ. 1976
- 19 cf John, 4
- 20 tradition in *Pesahim* 54 a,

that "seven things were created before the world: the Tora, conversion, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the divine Throne, the Sanctuary, the name of the Messiah," cf Wensinck p 17

- 21 Langdon p 336
- 22 same pp 344, 341
- 23 same p 77
- 24 same p 158
- 25 same p 16; Wensinck p 60
- 26 Langdon p 106
- 27 Wensinck p 59; Lane, Customs and Manners of the Modern Egyptians, pp 528 ff; cf also E Goldziher, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, x, p 356, on the tents dressed on Muslim tombs
- 28 cf again al-Mas'ūdī, note 1 above; and at-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, I, p 409, line 14 ff: "Ibn 'Abbās said: God placed the holy House on water, upon four pillars..."
- 29 inaugural hutba (speech) of the Caliph al-Ḥākim, quoted

from: PM Holt, The Position and Power of the Mamluk Sultan, in: BSOAS, vol. xxxviii, part 2, p 246. Interesting is the title 'pillar of the world' otherwise 'pillar of the Faith' is common

6. ORIGINS: MESOPOTAMIAN UNIVERSALISM

- 1 illustrations from Langdon pp 179, 90, 177
- 2 same pp 281-6 on the two serpent rôles
- 3 Wensinck pp 65, 2
- 4 same p 3
- 5 or the (Khanty-Mansi) Yugrians of North-Western Siberia, where similar conceptions, of ultimate (Iranian-transmitted) Babylonian origin exist, cf B Munkacsi in *Keleti Szemle* 9, Budapest 1908, pp 209, 235, 243, KS 10, 1909, pp 75-76 et al.
- 6 Butterworth p 33
- 7 cf Psalms 74, 12
- 8 Wensinck p 16
- 9 Butterworth p 88
- 10 Wensinck p 47
- 11 Butterworth pp 70-71
- 12 whence possibly the epithet "two-horned" of Mesopotamian royalty
- 13 Butterworth pp 139-141

- 14 Langdon p 248
- 15 same p 252; the dimensions of the cedar tree (70 cubits high by 24 cubits wide) are given - and this is one tree, though talk is of a cedar forest; cf Islamic tradition on forest covered with a forest so dense that the trees just about form one tree - Friedländer
- 16 Langdon pp 203,237
- 17 and also, incongruously, to the west, Langdon pp 223, 226
- 18 report of Thor Heyerdal's 'Tigris' raft expedition, on excavations of Sumerian pyramid in Uman; another, more probable suggestion is Bahrain, excavations reported in National Geographic Magazine 1978
- 19 Butterworth p 147
- 20 Spiegel I pp 465-7; AJ Carney, The Mythology of All Races, Iranian (vol 6), N York 1964, pp 281-2
- 21 K Justi, Der Bundahesh; Carnoy p 280
- 22 Langdon p 226, Butterworth pp 69, 71, 159-161 n 52, 182 on the problem of cedar versus or identical with kiskanu tree
- 23 Butterworth p 70
- 24 Langdon pp 88-94
- 25 hence probably notions of a world mountain of iron (cf Carnoy p 299) or a pillar/pole of iron (U Holmberg/Harva, Baum des Lebens, pp 12, 46; KF Karjalainen, Die Religion der Jugra-Völker, FF Communications xi, nr 44, Hels./Porvoo 1922, II, pp 47 ff
- 26 Butterworth pp 93-94
- 27 Langdon pp 103, 106: thrice coiled sea serpent, goat-fish, ram's head
- 28 the Skadesi suolo legend, cf H Stang, Myth of the Man of Many Lands - and the Lost Horizons of the Vepse (forthcoming, NAVP)
- 29 Langdon p 173
- 30 Laroche p 21
- 31 same p 66
- 32 e.g. by Činggis and Kuyuk Qān, 13th century AD
- 33 PK Hitti, History of the Arabs, Edinburgh 1970 (10th ed) p 292; B Lewis, The Arabs in History, London 1970, p 82
- 34 Laroche p 31
- 35 E Burrows, Some Cosmological Patterns in Babylonian

Religion", in: SH Hooke (ed), The Labyrinth,
London 1935, pp 46 ff

- 36 whence the height, and the stressing of verticality,
cf Laroche p 30
- 37 Butterworth pp 33, 59, 165
- 38 W Brandenstein, Die Sprachschichten im Bereich der
Agäis, Festschrift H Hirt, Heidelberg 1936, II,
p 38 (ed H Arntz): Arin "Quelle" (pr.), vgl. ved.
arna- "quellendes Wasser"
- 39 Hitti pp 570-571, and p 384 where another etymology
is proposed
- 40 of the al-Mas'ūdī cupola above

7. INSTRUMENTALITY: PERIPHERY UNIVERSALISM

- 1 treated inter alia in H Stang, Rise of the
Mediæval Central Asian Ideal of World Domination -
Činggis Qān and the Role of a Legend, NAVF ms,
Oslo 1981; same, Myth of the Man of Many Lands -
and the Lost Horizons of the Vepse, NAVF ms, Oslo
1981
- 2 Diary of Maria Quisling, Oslo 1981
- 3 L Laroche, The Middle East, p 21
- 4 though not necessarily an immediate one, or in the
given context a realistic one - cf the existence of
a conditional tense in many languages
- 5 some discussion in H Stang, On Historical Causality
and Cosmology, TWC Program no.18, Chair in Conflict
and Peace Research, Papers no. 91, Oslo Univ.
1981, pp 16-23
- 6 only the Creativity, not the Imperialism side is
discussed in the following; it will be seen that
the sole difference between the two consists in
reversal of the lines between Cc and Pc. A rough
interpretation of the Imperialism side: raw materials
and work are input; orders (monetary, political con-
trol) and finished, refined products (stamped with
the characteristics of Cc cosmology and needs) are
output; on the one side, obedience, on the other,
power, on the one, something as yet unfinished in
shape, on the other the shaping (of lives, ideas,
material environment, objects)

- 7 the rationale of God's creating man is not apparent, let alone evident, from the Judaic/Christian Genesis tradition; that He wants praise is fair enough, but as it is Heavens and earth and all creation sing His praise; in the Sumerian religion, however, the nature of both the dotted and the fully drawn line between Cc and Pc is clear: man was created by the gods to fill up their food-chambers for them! (Langdon, p 192)
- 8 one point made in O Lattimore, The Periphery as Locus of Innovation, in (ed J Gottmann) Centre and Periphery, London 1981, pp 206-7
- 9 a recurring experiment up to the stage where the Centre state is militarily (economically etc) strong enough to check and even reverse the tide, i.e. the Periphery is a source of Centre innovation - another point in Lattimore (n 8, above)
- 10 and the so-called 'pagan reaction' in early Viking times, cf T Sjøvold, The Iron Age Settlement of Arctic Norway, I-II, Oslo-Bergen-Tromsø 1974
- 11 A Toynbee, A Study of History, characterizes Irish and Norse culture as 'abortive civilizations', which emphasizes that they were overwhelmed by mainstream European culture when contacts became intense enough, but ignores the part played by this culture - at a level of medium contact - in bringing them to blossom
- 12 cf e.g. AM Tallgren, Biarmia, Eurasia Septentrionalia Antiqua, Hels. 1931 (English text, with illustrations)
- 13 H Stang, Rise of the Mediæval Central Asian Ideal of World Domination - Činggis Qān and the Role of a Legend, ch. 6-9
- 14 or that utterly Norwegian Kittilsen motif of Soria Moria castle - ultimately named from some islets off Southern Arabia, in which direction the Sumerians also once sought Dilmun, Land of the Blest
- 15 J Gottmann, in Centre and Periphery, op.cit., p 11
- 16 by CLF Lindemann (Germany), who thus answered the 2000 year old question on the squaring of the circle: it is impossible to construct a square with the same area as a given circle

ALEXANDER AND THE SANDELWOOD - NOTES:

- 1 T Nöldeke, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans, pp 35-36; (ed) W Girgas, Leyden 1888, pp 31 ff
- 2 Tabarī I, pp 693 ff; Nöldeke pp 42-44
- 3 J Gonda, Marks of Kingship in Ancient Indian Rel., p 60;
- 4 cf W Heissig, Geschichte der Mongolischen Literatur, I, p 283, quoting the biography of an illustrious 19th c. Mongol author/officer: he died in his palace, "wunderbaren Duft verströmend" ('spreading abroad wonderful scent'); cf Langdon p 71, on Astarte the Queen of Gebal (Byblos in the Lebanon) who was attracted to Isis in Egypt by the divine aroma which Isis had breathed upon the queen's handmaidens
- 5 (ed) J Zacher, Halle 1867, pp 87, 89, 114-115
- 6 Nöldeke p 44

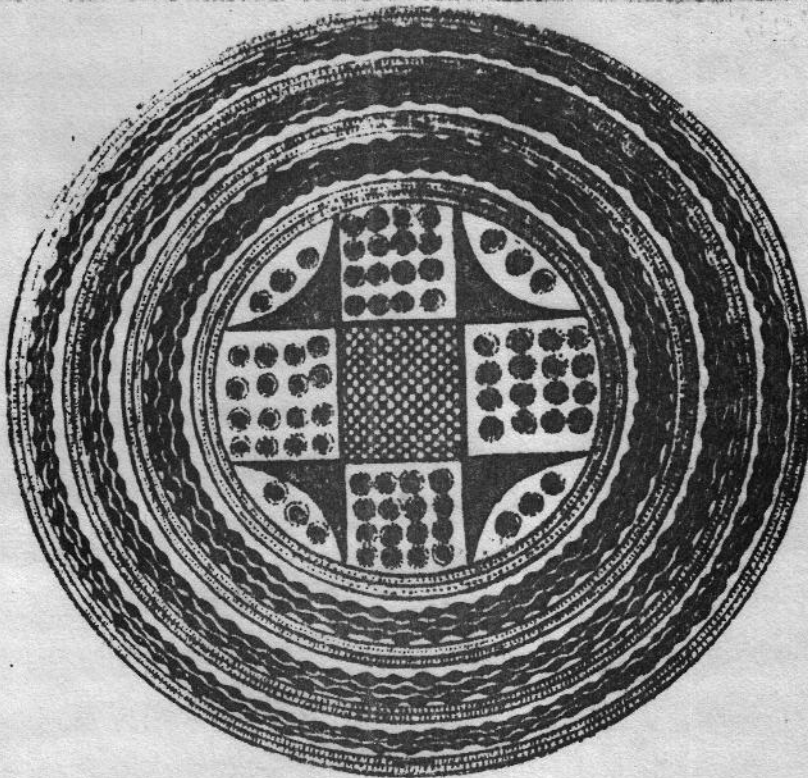


SUMERIAN. Head of a horned god, in copper. Early 3rd millennium. Royal Cemetery, Ur.

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Polychrome plate discovered at Arpachiyah. Tel Halaf period. 4500 B.C.
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