COSMOS

The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society

Volume 18 2002

Editor: Emily Lyle
Review Editor: Aude Le Borgne

CONTENTS

Printed by Airdrie Print Services, 24-26 Flowerhill Street, Airdrie ML6 6BH

ISSN 0269-8773

Editorial

EMILY LYLE

It is a pleasure to present in this double issue a selection of the papers from the vigorous conference on "The Ritual Year" organised by Aude Le Borgne on 4-10 July 2004. Two other papers from it appeared earlier in *Cosmos* 16.2 (with the cover date December 2000): "The Turning Point of the Year: Midsummer Satire in England" by Sandra Billington and "Calendar Celebrations in Early Seventeenth-Century South-East Scotland" by Eila Williamson. An important article first published in Russian by Nikita I. Tolstoy in 1997, which was referred to at the conference by Irina Sedakova, has also been included here.

It will be noted that the cover date of this double issue is 2002 although it is actually being published in 2005. Efforts to close the gap between the cover dates and the actual dates of publication continue and it is anticipated that *Cosmos* 19 will also appear in 2005. Submissions to the journal from any part of the world and on any cosmological topic are very welcome.

There has been a recent emphasis on the ritual year which turned out to be a topic that strongly engaged the interest of scholars, but this is only one facet of cosmology and I am keen to see a variety of topics covered. Readers of *Cosmos* may like to note that a working group on "The Ritual Year" (www.ritualyear.com) has now been formed under the aegis of SIEF (*Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore*) and that it is holding annual conferences and publishing papers from them.

A Year's Ritual Cycle in Japan: The Work of Humans and Divine Spirits

PETER KNECHT

A few years ago I spent New Year with a friend's family in the village where I do my main fieldwork. Shortly before the old year ran out my friend and I visited the small shrine of the hamlet to be there at midnight and express our reverence to the hamlet's deity at the moment the new year was ushered in. Exactly at midnight we made our offerings together with other villagers and then shared with them the sake we had just offered. During New Year's Day I decided to take a walk through the village rather than spend the time watching TV or dozing off with my friend's family. Snow had fallen during the night so I could see the footprints of people who had visited the small shrine, but otherwise I encountered only virgin snow and not a single villager during the two hours of my walk. The whole village was absolutely quiet and serene. While I was walking, an episode of many years earlier came to my mind. At that time a conference had been held in Tokyo during the days after Christmas. It ended on the last day of the year and we at Nanzan University were asked to take care of the invited foreign scholars over New Year. The Japanese colleagues felt that New Year was too important for them to spend it with guests but assumed that for foreigners this period was much less significant. The pervading quietness of the village on this day made me feel that for the villagers it was a very special day although I knew at the same time that most of them would spend it before their TV sets. In the large cities we would find more people in the streets on their way to a shrine or temple, but even there we can experience an unusual degree of quietness with, surprisingly, only a few cars circulating.

When I began my fieldwork some thirty years ago one of my purposes was to arrive at an understanding of the cycle of a year's celebrations and its relation to the people's work. From early on in my research it became increasingly clear that my previous knowledge about the traditional cycle of annual rituals, gathered from the existing literature, offered only a general frame for what I was finding

Cosmos 18 (2002), 3-17.

in the village. There was a significant amount of variation between hamlets and even between households in the kind of rituals performed at certain periods and also in the form in which they were performed. In this paper, however, I will outline the ritual cycle's main features, bypassing local variations, in order to offer a general picture of the ritual cycle in a Japanese farming village. Furthermore, I will not discuss the complications engendered by the villagers' use of the "old calendar" in the case of some rituals, when it better corresponds with the climatic circumstances necessary for the agricultural work.[1]

The introduction of motorised farming machines, fertilisers, pesticides, and the new methods in wet-field farming that resulted from it have greatly shifted the periods when certain farm work has to be done. Villagers told me, for example, that before these changes caught on they were busy with threshing until the onset of snowfall, which meant that almost immediately after the end of farm work they had to prepare for the celebration of New Year, while today farm work ends about two months before that time. Although today the main features of the ritual cycle follow the new calendar, in this paper I will use my own somewhat older material of thirty years ago in the belief that it is better suited to show the cycle's characteristics.

If we arrange the twelve months of a year as if they formed a circle, I suggest that we conceive of two distinct yet closely related circles in order to express two characteristic yet different features of the annual ritual events. One represents the work of humans, namely a year's sequence of agricultural activities and their related ritual events. The other shows the "work of the gods" by focusing on the ritual interactions of spirits and humans.[2] Neither of these circles represents an even progress of events; in each one we may notice two climaxes or times of intense activity that oppose and complement one another. If we connect the two high times we arrive at an axis which both highlights the character of the respective circle and divides the year quite neatly into two corresponding halves. The spring-autumn axis emphasises the work of humans. Figures 1 and 2 show the average situation in a Japanese rice-growing village.[3] The actual situation in my sample village differs somewhat from it because of the village being situated in northern Japan (northern Miyagi Prefecture), where spring begins about one month later than in the average village represented by the graphs. Spring begins in late March and almost immediately ushers in a period of intensive work in the rice fields: turning over the soil, flooding the fields, sowing the

seedbeds, and finally the period's climax, the transplanting of the seedlings towards the end of May. With this corresponds in autumn the harvesting season, beginning with the cutting of early fields in late September and ending finally in late November when the grain has been threshed.

The two seasons are distinguished by two kinds of ritual events. The first one is of a small scale involving basically only one household. At the beginning of the transplanting season people offer some bundles of seedlings together with a dish of glutinous rice steamed with red beans to the deity of the rice fields. After transplanting has been completed, some households select seedlings from seven planted bundles to offer them to the deity of the field or to Ebisu, the deity of good fortune. They also pound glutinous rice and offer the cakes made from it to the deity and to the people that had helped in transplanting. This kind of ritual is inconspicuous and mostly noted only by those immediately concerned. It is performed by each household individually and the time of its performance depends on the stage in that household's work process. A second kind of ritual events is of distinctly different scale and character. These are the official festivals celebrated in spring (May) and autumn (October) on a fixed date with and for the whole community of the village or of a hamlet. In these festivals the priest of the village shrine performs the religious rites of calling down the village deity, of presenting the offerings, and of sending the deity back at the end of the festival. In the sample village, the deity is paraded through the village streets in a portable shrine during the day at the spring festival. In fall, the hamlets tend to celebrate their local deity and to perform *kagura* dances for it.[4] The spring festival is only partially related to agricultural work; it is celebrated for the general wellbeing of the villagers. The fall celebrations are more clearly intended to be a thanksgiving for the harvest.

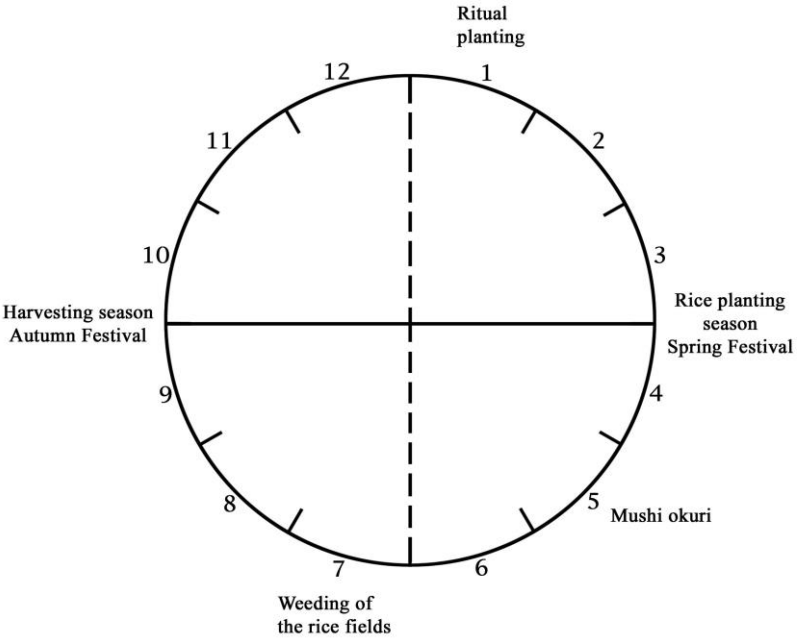

Ritual
planting
1
2
3
Rice planting
season
Spring Festival
4
5
Mushi okuri
6
7
Weeding of
the rice fields
8
9
Harvesting season
Autumn Festival
10
11
12
Spring - Autumn
Work of humans

Figure 1

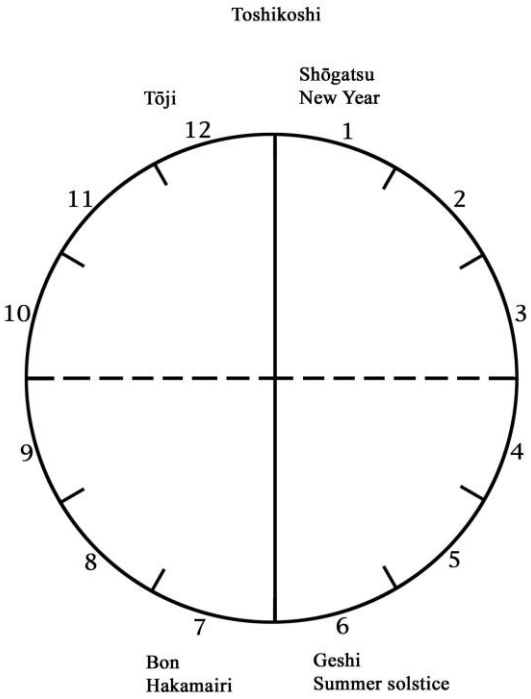

Toshikoshi
Shōgatsu
New Year
Tōji
12
1
11
2
10
3
9
4
8
5
7
6
Bon
Hakamairi
Geshi
Summer solstice
Winter - Summer
"Work of gods"

Figure 2

This axis, the work of humans, does not only contrast and link the planting and harvesting seasons – it also divides the year into two halves of different character: one a time of preparing for the work to come and of expectation for that work's good results; the other a time of trust in the work of nature, but also of anxieties about the unforeseeable vicissitudes of nature. For convenience's sake we may call one the cold, the other the warm season. The outstanding event of the cold season is the New Year period. I will return to this period again later on. At this moment I wish to underline only certain aspects as they relate to the work in the fields, especially the rice fields, but before I do this I should mention in what sense I use the term "New Year" in this paper.

In Japanese there are two terms which we might translate as "new year", but they do not have exactly the same meaning. One is *toshikoshi*. Its meaning, roughly translated, is "passing from one year to the next". Accordingly this term designates only a short period such as the passing over into the new year in the night between the outgoing and the incoming year. Another term, *shōgatsu*, is the term for the first month of the year, but it may also be used just for the first few days of the year. Literally translated the term means something like "true month" or "exemplary month". Understood in this sense the term is of particular significance because it points to the fact that this month is something like the year *in nucleo* and that therefore its ritual events either foreshadow what the coming months have in store, or express the expectations of the people for the coming year, especially in relation to their work in the fields. The 15th day of this month is called *koshōgatsu* ("little new year"). On the day itself or in its vicinity we find a number of rituals that anticipate the work that is to come and its result: at *nōhadate* on the 11th day a little bit of manure is thrown to the fields still covered with snow to signify the "beginning of agricultural work" In the afternoon of the 14th day a few twigs of chestnut are prepared as offerings to the deities of the house by having three or five flat extended pieces of rice cakes made from pounded glutinous rice attached to their branches. The name of these twigs, *awabō*, means "millet ear", but people explained to me that the twigs symbolise the heavy ears of rice and a bountiful harvest.[5] Another ritual that carries the wish for a good harvest is called *saku dameshi*, "testing the harvest". For this ritual people make small bundles of rice straw and the dried stems of beans and buckwheat or hemp as if they were bundles of rice seedlings. A field

in the auspicious direction from where the deity of the new year is believed to arrive is selected. There the bundles are "planted" in rows as if they were seedlings transplanted into a rice field. Finally, on this day, or one close to it, people may call the shrine priest or another religious functionary to perform the "spring invocation" (*haru gitō*), a prayer for the household's general wellbeing, including a successful harvest. All of these rituals are held in anticipation of the work that has to be done in the fields. They are an expression of the farmers' ardent wish for a good harvest in return for their efforts.

Compared with the ritual-studded cold half of the year we find only a few rituals during the warm half. One of them is a rite to drive noxious insects out of the fields and over the borders of the village, the *mushi okuri*. It can be held any time during the growing season, most often in June or July. In some areas people bring the bamboo pole whose branches have been adorned for *tanabata*, the Star Festival in July, with coloured paper and strips containing their wishes to a rice field, where they push it into the ground at some convenient place on the field's border ridge or close to its irrigation gate. Together with the heavy work of repeated rounds of weeding, these rituals are meant to protect the growing and ripening crop from its enemies or make another plea for a good harvest. While the rituals of the cold half are oriented towards the yet unknown future, those of the second, the warm half, are concerned with the realities of the growing season and with overcoming its uncertainties.

As I have mentioned before, another aspect of the ritual year can be illustrated by a second circle which shows the cycle of ritual events from the point of view of the "work of the gods". Again we can notice two high points opposite one another. If we link them by an axis, the axis again divides the year into two halves, but it stands vertically on the axis of the work of humans, in other words, it links winter and summer. The high points of the earlier axis are the festivals in spring and autumn that involve the whole community. Before the impact of Japan's high economic growth made itself felt also in the villages the two seasons linked by the winter-summer axis, namely New Year (*shōgatsu*) and *Bon*, were probably the seasons with the highest degree of ritual activity. However, while the festivals of the spring-autumn axis are public and highly visible, the rituals of the winter-summer axis are of an intimate and not so visible character, with the possible exception of the *Bon* dances where everybody is invited to participate. They are rituals of the individual

households. That is why the village that I have mentioned in the beginning was so quiet on New Year's Day. It has been pointed out that the winter-summer axis links rituals that work to strengthen social ties. This is true insofar as these rituals often bring members of a household together who at other times of the year do not see each other. Yet I think we need to emphasise that the religious aspect of the rituals is the particularly important *raison d'être* of their performance by a household.[6]

As already mentioned, one of the terms for what we call "New Year" is *toshikoshi*, "to cross over from one year to the next". In a narrow sense the term refers to the night between the evening of the last day of the old year and the morning of the first day in the new year. On the calendar of my sample village, however, we find the earliest *toshikoshi* already in October or November.[7] In the year's last month there are even several, such as the *toshikoshi* of the mountain deity (*yama no kami*) or that of the deity responsible for horses or cattle (*sōdensama*), not to forget the *toshikoshi* for women on the 14th of January, the day before the "little new year". Leaving behind the old, separating oneself from it and getting ready for something new finds dramatic expression in the ritual cleansing of the house (*susubarai*) a few days before the yearend, and especially in the extinction of the fire in the hearth late in the year's last night. Extinction of the fire was particularly significant because all throughout the year the family had taken utmost care that the fire would not go out. However, in the year's last evening the extinction marked a border beyond which something new was to begin, demonstrated by the kindling of a new fire and the drawing of new water (*wakamizu*) from a spring early in the morning of the first day, both to be used in order to prepare the year's first meal. Today there is no open hearth anymore and most people draw water from the tap in their kitchen, but they still insist on ending the old year with an especially festive meal and on using special or entirely new plates and chopsticks during the first days of the new year.

The changing over from one year to the next occurs now ten days after the winter solstice. At the other end of the winter-summer axis we find another expression of a change from old to new, this time in relation to the summer solstice. Around this time one may find a large ring made of miscanthus reed erected before a shrine. People would rub their bodies with a human figure cut out of paper, pass through the ring and throw the figure away to be burnt or cast into a river

later. With this they intended to cleanse themselves from any impurity they might have incurred during the first half of the year and so have a clean slate to begin the second half. Although this simple ritual is not called *toshikoshi* and may be too modest to be compared with such rites as the extensive cleaning of the house at the yearend, it too expresses the crossing of a border into something new, and in this it directly corresponds with *toshikoshi*. Accordingly, the winter-summer axis divides the year into two halves, where each one's end is ritually marked and the new half introduced as an entirely new beginning. At this point I need to mention another and more significant aspect of the correspondence between the winter and summer rituals, an aspect which in my view is also the reason for the ritual cleansing.

A year's last few days are busy days. After the cleaning of the house people pound rice to prepare special food and offerings. They prepare and put up special decorations, and do not forget to clean and decorate also their farming tools. And when the evening of the last day arrives they sit down to a festive meal dressed in new clothes. Among the decorations, those made with a pine tree twig are prepared with special care by the head of the household. In tradition-minded houses he would take a bath in the afternoon of the year's last day, put on formal clothes, and spread out a new straw mat on the house floor, on which he carefully places everything needed to make the decorations. Most of these decorations are made of a small pine twig, a small rope of rice straw, a small streamer of white paper cut in a characteristic form, and a cut of dried tangle weed. For two, however, he binds a small pine tree together with a stem of leafy bamboo. These two bundles, called *kado matsu*, "gate pines", are put up one on each side of the house entrance or gate, while one of the small decorations is hung over each door in the house. In order to collect the twigs and trees for these decorations the head of the household had gone earlier to a mountain in a certain direction called *eh*^{o}, the "auspicious direction" (Figure 3). Each year this direction is different, but its meaning is the same. It is the direction from where the deity of the year, the *toshitokujin*, is led into the house where it is believed to stay in the specially decorated god shelf (*kamidana*) until the "little new year", when the decorations are taken down and put to rest at the small shrine for the household deity which is usually located in a corner on the premises of the house.[8] In some households of the sample village people prepare rice balls, put them on a tray and stick

a chopstick made from chestnut into each one of the balls, which then are offered to the household's ancestors at their house altar, the *butsudan*. In some areas the head of the household visits the graves of the ancestors or the ancestral temple in the morning of New Year's Day.

At the other end of the winter-summer axis we find very similar ritual activities at the time of *Bon*. The common understanding is that during the three days of *Bon* the ancestral spirits visit the household of their descendants. A few days before *Bon*, the family goes to the graves, either in the mountains or in the cemetery, in order to clean them. If they have old graves in the mountains, they will cut the grass and overgrowth to free a small path leading to them. Formerly, people went also to the mountains to collect a particular flower, a bellflower called *kikyō*, which is so typical that it is also called "*Bon* flower". Furthermore, in the evening before the first day of *Bon*, members of the household go out to the edge of their premises where they make a small straw fire. At this fire they light a candle in a paper lantern which is then carried into the house and hung up at the ancestral altar that has been specially prepared for these days. In other words, in the midst of the year people once more welcome spirits in their house, but this time they are only ancestral spirits, while at New Year they also welcome among them the deity of the year who is to protect them and grant them a good harvest. The social gatherings that are a conspicuous feature of these days in winter and summer are gatherings of family members at their ancestral homes. Therefore, the social gatherings of these seasons clearly differ from the village gatherings in the spring and autumn festivals. In reality they are gatherings that unite humans together with visitors from another world, deities and ancestors, all of whom are considered to have a special relationship to the celebrating family. For that reason the gatherings lack the noisy merry making of spring and fall festivals. They do not lack joy and festiveness, but these are not outwardly oriented and shared with the community. In fact, the villagers are quite reluctant to leave the house on New Year's Day, except for the first visit at the village shrine. They explained this to me by saying that leaving the house on that day would mean to squander the blessings just received. There is no such prohibition for the celebrations at *Bon*, but with the exception of the public dances, *bon odori*, people celebrate *en famille*.

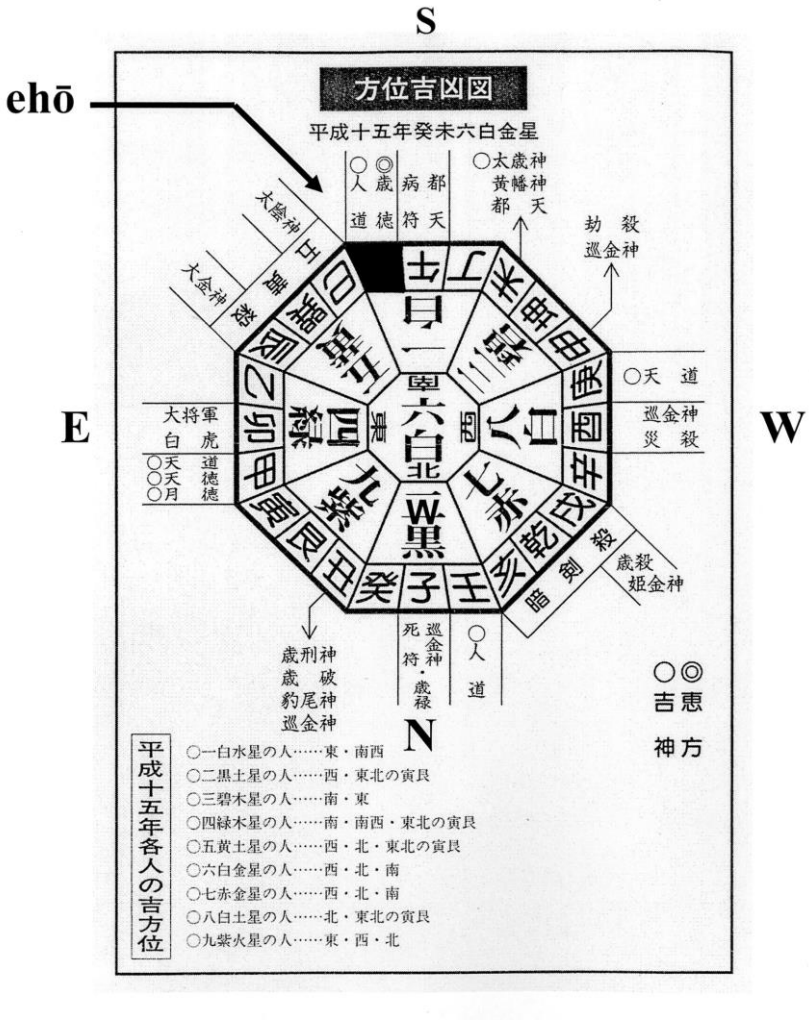

S
ehō
方位吉凶図
平成十五年癸未六白金星
E
W
N
平成十五年各人の吉方位
○一白水星の人……東・南西
○二黒土星の人……西・東北の寅艮
○三碧木星の人……南・東
○四緑木星の人……南・南西・東北の寅艮
○五黄土星の人……西・北・東北の寅艮
○六白金星の人……西・北・南
○七赤金星の人……西・北・南
○八白土星の人……北・東北の寅艮
○九紫火星の人……東・西・北
○◎吉恵神方

Figure 3

In conclusion, I think it is possible to conceive of the Japanese ritual year as a cycle where two kinds of events occur on two different levels. On one level rituals are concerned with production activities and with the physical wellbeing of individual households as well as of the entire village community. On the other level, rituals enable the villagers to come into intimate contact with those spiritual beings, deities and ancestors, whom they consider to be the guarantors of the peace and prosperity of their families, i.e., their households. Within the ritual year the two levels become articulated in turn with the changing of the seasons. The correspondence or axis between opposite seasons both highlights the character of each level either as the "work of humans" or the "work of the gods" and divides the year into two halves. The axis "work of humans" contrasts the wishes and expectations of the year's first half with the anxiety and the final gratefulness of the second, while the axis "work of gods" reminds people of the deeper source of their wellbeing and gives them a chance to renew their relationship with this source – namely, the gods – in the midst of the year.

Nanzan University

Notes

1 The new calendar (*shinreki*) is the western calendar which had been introduced in the fifth year of Meiji (1872). The third day of the twelfth month in that year was declared to be the 1st of January of the sixth year of Meiji (1873). However, in many rural areas the older calendar was followed even many years after the War. People told me in the early 1970s that they had used the old calendar until about ten years earlier (see Miyata 1997: 19). The old calendar (*kyåreki*) is a combination of a solar and a lunar type of time reckoning. As a rule of thumb it can be said that the months of the old calendar fall about one month behind those of the new calendar. For that reason people often specify a date by saying that it is a day in the old calendar or a *hitotsuki okure* date, i.e., a date "a month behind (the modern calendar)". A well known example of this is the celebration of *Bon*, the days for the dead. In the old calendar *Bon* is celebrated from the 14th to the 16th day in the 7th month, but nowadays it is often celebrated on these days in August so that it roughly corresponds with the period in the old calendar.

There are areas where the climatic circumstances make the celebration of a festival impossible. In Tohoku, for example, the Girls' Festival on the third day in the third month could not be celebrated according to the new calendar, since the arrival of spring happens about one month later than in central Japan. As the festival's older name, Peach Festival (*momo no sekku*), suggests, a distinctive feature of the festival is the use of peach flowers. In addition, fresh mugwort is needed to prepare the offerings. In the villages of northern Japan, though, it is still too cold in March for these flowers and plants to appear, while they can be found a month later, the third month in the old calendar. Therefore, a *hitotsuki okure* celebration of the festival corresponded better with the climatic circumstances.

2 I borrow this term from Raymond Firth (1967) in order to underline this cycle's characteristic emphasis on the interaction between humans and divine or ancestral spirits.

3 It is important to emphasise this point. Research of recent years has increasingly shown that there are significant differences in the form and content of annual rituals depending on whether the people performing them rely on wet-field (rice) farming, dry-field farming or fishing. In particular due to the research by Tsuboi Hirofumi, attention has been directed towards the better appreciation of the special character of ritual behaviour in villages of dry-field farming (see, for example, 1989, 1982 and also note 5 below).

4 The term *kagura* is used for several different kinds of ritual dances. In the sample village it refers to a type of costumed ritual dances of the *Nanbu kagura* tradition of the Tohoku region. Here the dances represent actions of a particular deity or famous scenes from mythology and ancient history. *Kagura* may be performed as part of a ritual in a sanctuary or at the occasion of the completion of a new house. Nowadays, *kagura* performing competitions are held as part of the "revitalisation of villages" (*mura okoshi*) in order to foster or re-establish their traditional performing arts.

5 The fact that this decoration is called *awabō*, "millet ear", – although people see it as representing the heavy ears of the rice plant – is significant. Another decoration, made for New Year's Day, is made by attaching numerous round lumps of pounded rice to the branches of a twig of *mizuki* (dogwood). This is called *mayudama* ("cocoon balls"), yet it is said to represent the flowering rice ears. The discrepancy between the names of these characteristic decorations and their

interpretations by the villagers suggests, as Tsuboi has demonstrated (for example 1989: 47-68; 1982), that wet-field rice farming did not always have the importance in the villagers' life that it has now. It suggests that there was a time when they relied instead on dry-field farming and sericulture for their livelihood. Although I do not have reliable data for the sample village to demonstrate this point, I believe it to be safe enough to assume that the decorations represent an earlier situation in that mountain village where even today rice cultivation is precarious and all too vulnerable to unusual weather conditions, as the disastrously cold summer of 1993 demonstrated.

6 Miyake Hitoshi (1989: 406-7), in discussing the world view of Japanese folk religion, characterises this axis as one emphasising social bonding (*shūdan ketsugō*). Considering the fact that for New Year, and perhaps even more for *Bon*, tens of thousands of people visit their ancestral villages and households, Miyake's point is well taken. Yet I believe that the ultimate motive for this massive movement, especially at *Bon*, is the celebration of their ties with the ancestors. Social bonding is, of course, an aspect of this celebration, and for many participants it may be the main aspect, yet its significance cannot be sufficiently understood if it is not related to the celebration's other aspect, the visit by the ancestors. I am indebted to Miyake's analysis for the idea of a year's cycle divided by two axes.

It should be kept in mind that the distinction of two circles is an ideal one. It certainly does not exclude a degree of overlapping. The circle of the "work of humans" emphasises two high seasons of agricultural activities (spring, autumn) which are also the seasons of the main *communal* rituals. However, an *individual* household may perform rather inconspicuous religious rituals during the same time, especially at the beginning and sometimes also at the end of work in the fields. These rituals are directed to the deity of the rice fields.

Many Japanese folklorists would agree that the deity of the rice fields (*ta no kami*) is believed to descend into the fields in spring, at transplanting time, and after the harvest to return to the mountains, where it becomes a mountain deity (*yama no kami*). In this latter form it merges with the ancestors who also are often said to dwell in the mountains which are an image of the otherworld (Knecht 2002). Under this aspect it may be possible to consider these rituals in relation to those of the spring and fall equinox. The day of the equinox falls into the midst of a week called *Higan*. In spring as well as in fall people celebrate their ancestors during this week by preparing special offerings at the *butsudan*, the ancestral altar, each day, and may also visit their

family tombs. These rituals belonging to the circle of "work of the gods" are a family affair. In my understanding they emphasise the character of the "work of the gods" circle once more in the midst of each of the two halves of the year created by the winter-summer axis. At the same time they roughly fall into the periods that highlight the spring-fall axis and, therefore, represent a link with that axis and the circle of the "work of humans". It seems to me, therefore, that their overlapping at the periods of the equinox emphasises the close relationship of the two circles with one another and the belief that the good outcome of human work depends on the cooperation of ancestors and deities.

7 It is the *daikon no toshikoshi*, the *toshikoshi* of the long white radish on the 10th or 11th of October or November. On that day radish is offered to its deity, and it is forbidden to enter the field where radishes are grown lest they should crack.

8 The "auspicious direction" is determined every year by divination and announced in calendars published by certain Shinto shrines or renowned houses of divination. People consult these calendars also in order to know the character of a particular day, whether it is suitable for a planned activity or not.

References

Firth, Raymond W. (1967). *The Work of the Gods in Tikopia*. London: The Athlone Press.

Knecht, Peter (2002). Mountains are not *just* mountains. *Shaman* 10, 143-59.

Miyake Hitoshi (1989). *Shūkyō minzokugaku*. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

Miyata Noboru (1997). *Shōgatsu to hare no hi no minzokugaku*. Tokyo: Daiwa Shobo.

Tsuboi, Hirofumi (1982). *Ine wo eranda nihonjin: Minzokuteki shikō no sekai*. Tokyo: Miraisha.

---- (1989). *Shintōteki kami to minzokuteki kami*. Tokyo: Miraisha.

Thunder's Pipe: The Blackfoot Ritual Year

ALICE BECK KEHOE

PROLOGUE

Blackfoot occupy the Northwestern Plains of North America (southern Alberta, Canada, and north-central Montana, USA), a region of short-grass prairie in the Rocky Mountains rain-shadow, with conifer forests in the foothills. Its rivers are in the watersheds of the North and South Saskatchewan and Missouri Rivers. Winters are cold but relieved occasionally by warm chinook winds; summers are short, with some hot days.

The Siksika or Blackfoot, the Kainai or Blood, both in Alberta, and the Pikuni or Piegan (Amsskaapipikani), divided into a northern branch in Alberta and a southern branch in Montana, constitute the Blackfoot alliance.[1] They are inferred to have moved east from the Columbia Plateau region perhaps two thousand years ago, with related Proto-Algonkians continuing east to become Anishinaabe, Cree, and Eastern seaboard Algonkians. The Blackfoot nations are composed of a number of independent bands, formerly nomadic but settled on reservations since the 1870s. Their language is within the Algonkian stock, with gender distinguishing animate from inanimate. Before extermination of wild bison in the early 1880s, Blackfoot depended on bison herds for subsistence and trade materials. Conical tipis sewn of bison hides, grouped in camps housing about one hundred persons, were moved several times each season, with the assistance of large dogs bred to carry loads. In the mid-eighteenth century, horses became available to the Blackfoot through trade with Indian nations bordering Spanish colonies in the Southwest. Horses were then used for transport, war and hunting.

Traditionally, bison herds were driven into corrals built against a bluff or at the end of a ravine. Pursuit from horseback became an alternative during the final century of Blackfoot independence, with corrals remaining the principal method. Meat was sliced thin, air-dried for preservation, and pounded with berries and rendered fat to make pemmican, a highly nutritious, compact, storable food. Some bison corral sites near river transport routes contain such large kills

Cosmos 18 (2002), 19-33.

that archaeologists infer they were used to produce surplus meat for trade to farming towns on the Missouri River. Hides were tanned for tipi covers, winter robes and bedding. Bison bones were made into cutting blades, scrapers and tool handles. Bison wool could be spun and woven, although historically Blackfoot preferred to purchase woven plant-fibre bags from neighbouring Plateau nations and cloth from European traders. Elk, deer, antelope and smaller game were also hunted; fish other than trout were disdained. Women harvested prairie turnips (an indigenous root vegetable), and camas bulbs (a lily) from carefully sustained fields, and collected berries, an important source of vitamins. They made pottery until European kettles supplanted ceramics in the early nineteenth century.

THE RITUAL YEAR

Blackfoot culture had neither writing nor a precise calendar.[2] The Blackfoot ritual year was quite different from calendar-based observances among sedentary societies. It began with the first thunder in spring, and complemented that ritual with tobacco offering in the fall, when winter ended the season of thunder. Instead of a cycle of plant generation, growth, dying and regeneration, the ritual year is a matter of presence, sensible presence of the powerful embodiment of the Almighty, then absence of that presence during winter. Imaging Thunder as a huge bird strengthens the concept that it migrates, north into Blackfoot country with other birds in spring, south with them out of Blackfoot country in autumn.

Lists of "moons" were elicited by ethnographers during the early reservation period (Table 1). I do not know whether Blackfoot normally talked about units of time as "moons", or whether ethnographers expected and inquired about this because it has been part of the stereotype of American Indians. Clark Wissler with his Piegan collaborator David Duvall, and Walter McClintock, working slightly earlier with other informants, both published lists of "moons". Table I indicates there was no formal authorised set of months; this is congruent with the Blackfoot ethos valuing individual judgment and experience. Wissler pointed out that the people who kept tally of days and moons were the owners of Beaver bundles, largest and most powerful of the medicine bundles. Because their songs and ritual movements are in sets of four or seven, they spoke of

two sets of moons, Winter and Summer, with seven moons in Winter but only six in Summer, according to Duvall's informants.[3] Pairing of Winter and Summer hints at a moiety structure such as that of the Osage and Omaha in the Midwest, or some of the Pueblos in the Southwest, but nothing else in Blackfoot culture supports such speculation. It is more likely that the division is in accord with the presence and absence of thunder.

Practically, the Blackfoot calendar was a seasonal round (Table 2) attuned to corralling bison herds and harvesting berries. It adapted to year-to-year weather changes by using plant growth and animal movement cues.

Since each band held its own Okan (Sun Dance), the only community-wide ritual, there was no need for elaborate notification systems to bring distant people in at certain dates. Big multinational trading rendezvous, such as that at the Black Hills, went on for two or three weeks. Individuals or small parties often travelled to visit, trade, and perhaps obtain a new medicine object, song, or ritual. They could be gone two or three years, for example from Canada to Mexico and back (e.g., McClintock 1910: 435-6).

Thunder, to Blackfoot, is the voice of the Almighty. The first thunder in spring proclaims the Almighty again has an active presence in the land. Thunder has its own pipes, holy pipes kept in medicine bundles, which must be offered to it when it announces its return. Pipes are instruments for invoking the holy Power through tobacco smoke. Tobacco was the only crop Blackfoot planted (as opposed to cultivating native plants including prairie turnips and camas). Beaver bundles do not include thunder pipes, but connect with these by requiring ritual opening when tobacco is planted in spring and when it is harvested in fall.

According to Blackfoot, all the holy pipes – that is, those that are the agents, not merely accessories, to their bundles – originate from the one, said to be one of the Kainai pipes, that came to the people in this way:

> A girl was considered too good for any young man her family knew. One day, she heard Thunder and said, "I will marry him." Soon after, she fell behind her camp when it was moving because her packstrap kept on breaking. A handsome young man appeared, saying, "You said you would marry me, and now I have come for you." He took her to a tipi on a high

> mountain where his parents sat. When his father looked at the girl, lightning flashed from his eyes. The elder Thunder instructed his daughter-in-law how to prepare sweet-pine smudges and care for the pipe in its bundle. After she had borne two sons to her husband, her father-in-law offered to let her visit her human family and announced he would give them his holy pipe, "that they may live long." The woman remained in her family's camp with her younger boy until a dog snapped at the child, upon which both mother and boy disappeared, presumably rejoining Thunder and the older boy whom he had taken with him after he had transferred the pipe to the people. At that time, Thunder said, "he was going away, but that he would return in the spring, and that tobacco and berries should be saved". (Wissler and Duvall 1908: 89-90)

There are other versions. George Bird Grinnell gave it as a man whose wife was stolen by Thunder. The man goes a long journey to find her, is befriended near Thunder's lodge by Thunder's only challenger, Raven, enters Thunder's lodge and bests him with instruments given by Raven. Thunder lets the man take his wife back, and gives him his pipe, saying,

> "Now you know me. I am of great power. I live here in summer, but when winter comes, I go far south with the birds. Here is my pipe. It is medicine. Take it, and keep it. Now, when I first come in the spring, you shall fill and light this pipe, and you shall pray to me, you and the people. For I bring the rain which makes the berries large and ripe. I bring the rain which makes all things grow, and for this you shall pray to me, you and all the people." (Grinnell 1892:115-16)

McClintock's version told by the North Piegan leader Brings-Down-the-Sun has the narrator's own father hunting elk on the upper St Mary's River and then following a herd of mountain sheep above the timberline on Chief Mountain. On the summit of the mountain he discovered a deep cavern from which sulphurous smoke was rising. Suddenly he fell and saw a woman standing over him, her face painted black with zigzag lightning streaks below her eyes. She sang, "When it rains the noise of the Thunder is my medicine." The man found himself inside the cavern, Thunder's lodge, with Thunder in

the form of a huge green-taloned bird and Thunder's wife and many children, each with a drum. The Thunderbird said,

> "You have witnessed my great power and can now go in safety. When you return to your people, make a pipe just like the one you saw me smoking, and add it to your bundle. Whenever you hear the first thunder rolling in the spring-time, you will know that I have come from my cavern, and that it is time to take out my pipe. If you should ever be caught in the midst of a heavy thunder-storm and feel afraid, pray to me saying, 'Pity me, for the sake of your youngest child,' and no harm will come to you." (McClintock 1910: 425-526)

Brings-Down-the-Sun explained to McClintock that the Thunder pipe was a Long-Time-Pipe that should be transferred to new owners rather than buried with its bundle owner.

Tatsey, the linguist Uhlenbeck's principal informant and interpreter, was a Kainai who had settled with his mother's Amsskaapipikani people. He told how Four Bears, a powerful medicine man and orator, had as a young man (early nineteenth century) one summer morning seen a thunderbird sitting near the Elk river, west of Crowsnest Pass in southern Alberta. The bird's "feathers were all of different colors, its bill was green-colored, its legs were colored the same. It had three claws. … When it opened its eyes, then it flashed lightning. … When it flew, then the thunder roared." (Uhlenbeck 1912:65-6)

Medicine pipe (i.e., Thunder pipe) bundles conform to the general pattern of Blackfoot medicine bundles. Wissler (1912: 137) describes one collected for the American Museum. The pipe itself is actually a pipe-stem without a bowl, which is kept separate in the bundle. Two pipes in the Scriver Collection, owned by Richard Little Dog and by Theodore and Emma Last Star before Scriver acquired them, have duck heads lying tied on their ends,[4] and the Little Dog pipe has a small green parrot laid along its middle. Thunder pipes are kept in cloth cases along with a white buffalo-skin headband and an eagle feather to be tied on the owner's head. A second bag contains a smaller pipestem, owl, loons, swans, cranes, muskrat, otter, fawn, prairie dog, rattle, whistle, and tobacco. These two containers are wrapped in an elk skin and then a black bear skin, and tied with an elk-skin strap. Accessories to the ritual are kept in a "square fringed

bag": paints, smudge, beads and necklaces for the owner and his wife, a wooden bowl, a whip, and a rope. Also kept with the bundle are forked sticks to handle the smudge, an eagle-wing fan, a pipe-stoker, and a tobacco-cutting board. Everything is smeared with red ochre. The entire bundle is wrapped in a large woollen shawl. The pipe owner had a bison robe painted red on one half, spotted on the other, representing hail, and four talons of the thunder bird along the middle. He requires a horse for his exclusive use, because if anyone else rides his horse, either the animal or the rider will be injured. Seven drums are required in the ceremony, and songs are in sets of seven.

The medicine pipe ritual is held, i.e., the bundle opened, to honour the first thunder or upon request, any time that someone petitions the owner to do so that the petitioner may dance with the pipe to show gratitude for recovery from illness or misfortune, prayed for earlier. When it has been announced that the bundle will be opened, other people attend either to fulfil their vows or simply to partake of blessing. The ritual is interrupted to serve a "feed" that always includes berry soup. When the bundle is opened in winter, the owner adds tobacco and dried berries to ensure they will be ready at the first thunder of spring. Care of the bundle must be entrusted to a woman, the owner's wife or a woman herself an owner (such as the late Mollie Kicking Woman, whose bundle had belonged to her mother). Only a woman may take the bundle down from where it hangs on a wall, and unwrap and rewrap the objects: thus women are intermediary between men and the Almighty. As the various animals are taken, one by one, from the bundle they are held up while their song is sung and, for some, the woman or she and her husband make motions appropriate to the animal. Finally, those who had vowed to do so, in hopes of relief from misfortune, dance one by one around the central fire, holding the holy pipe stem. Wissler notes (1912: 137) that the wrapped pipe stem inner bundle was sometimes carried to war.

OTHER MAJOR MEDICINE BUNDLES

The Okan, Medicine Lodge or Sun Dance, is the only ritual that people regularly plan to attend at a certain time of year. Okan are held in summer, usually July, which before the reservation period was a time when bison were well fed and more easily corralled to feed a large camp. Okan are also the only Blackfoot ritual for which a special structure is built, and never used again; not only among Blackfoot, but generally among Plains nations, sun dance lodges are left to decay naturally. The last part remaining is the centre pole, an axis mundi with a thunderbird nest on top. Conforming to Blackfoot principle, even the Okan is occasioned by a person vowing to sponsor it if a prayer for relief is granted. A highly respected woman must agree to act as Holy Woman, carrying the Natoas (Sun) bundle. The role is onerous, as she must fast and pray, with her attendants, for days before the public ritual. Traditionally, her party camped for two weeks, moving camp four times; today, four days is considered sufficient for an Okan camp, the Holy Woman coming from her seclusion in a tipi into the Medicine Lodge on the last day, and presiding over a series of dances and prayers. Other dances are held by their sodalities in the Okan camp, nowadays notably the current version of the Crazy Dogs, yelping in a pack outside and around the Medicine Lodge, seeming to threaten it.

The Natoas bundle contains a plain elkskin dress given, according to the origin legend, by an Elk Woman, a digging stick said to have been used by the Woman Who Married Morning Star, and a headdress with these appurtenances: a bison rawhide headband cut to represent a lizard, painted half red, half blue; ermine strips hanging around it; two tall plumes (owl or rooster) and a pair of eagle or raven feather tufts; in front, a weasel stuffed with human scalplocks and a ball, called a doll but representing the prairie turnip in the Above world, containing tobacco seeds and with a flint arrowhead hanging from it; at the back, a lynx tail and, on some headdresses, a small water-bird. Wissler does not list it but the illustration of the Natoas headdress in the American Museum collection shows a crane head protruding from the back, with two small birds hanging from it; this may be a crane whistle. Crane Woman helped Woman Who Married Morning Star when she disobeyed her parents-in-law, Sun and Moon, by trying to dig up the forbidden prairie turnip. Wissler and Duvall's

informants said that Natoas bundles had formerly been included in Beaver bundles, the most powerful bundles.

Beaver bundles, as mentioned, were to be opened when tobacco was ritually planted and when it was harvested, i.e., in spring and fall. In addition, they, like medicine pipe bundles, were opened and their ritual performed upon petitions, or when the bundle is ritually transferred to a new owner couple who wish to earn merit by caring for it. Beaver bundles contain a number of animals and birds, even mice, each of which has its song and dance or dancing motions made while sitting and singing. The ritual is therefore long, occupying a day, with a "feed" breaking it up in late afternoon. Beaver bundle owners were supposed to observe a large number of taboos, thereby being visibly set apart from ordinary people. The ritual uses only rattles, no drums, and drums are not to be kept near it. To keep time, two or three men beat the rattles on a long piece of rawhide. Wissler and Duvall give a long list of Beaver bundle owner taboos (Wissler 1912: 173), of which one shall suffice here: the man bundle owner "must not beat his wife without singing the appropriate song; she has a defense song, if she can sing that she is safe. Otherwise, she cannot escape, as running away will do no good." (Wissler 1912: 173)

DISCUSSION

The Blackfoot ritual year rests upon the presence, in summer, and absence, in winter, of Thunder. The Okan is in a sense an intrusion, indicated by its strong similarity to the Sun Dances of other Plains nations (probably derived from Siouan-speaking groups). Its July observance is a practical matter, July being the best time for travel and for obtaining enough well-fed bison to provision a large camp. The thunderbird's nest on the top of the Okan lodge centre pole brings this most potent manifestation of the Almighty into the Okan.

For the Amsskaapipikani living against the Front Range of the Rockies, terrible thunderstorms driving out of the mountains are familiar in summer. It does often seem that the great dark clouds stream from Chief Mountain, roiling around this high butte standing before the serried ranks of peaks. One summer day recently, a storm came suddenly from that direction onto the Reservation. A friend and I, breakfasting at our campsite, frantically pushed our sleeping bags into the car and cleared the table as thunder boomed, lightning

flashed, hail and then sharp rain pelted us. It passed over in less than an hour, bright sunshine following. Later, a Piegan friend told me that during the night, she had been weeping and praying desperately for her son critically injured in an accident. Falling asleep exhausted, she awoke to the booms of Thunder and its flashing lightning. "I laughed with joy," she said, feeling the Almighty was telling her It acknowledged her prayers and, indeed, her son lived.

Thunderbirds are imaged among most American First Nations and also in northern Siberia; Holmberg states among Tungus (Evenk), Chukchi, Samoyed (Nenets), and Ostiak (Khanty) (Holmberg [Harva] 1964: 439-40). All these Siberian nations were nomadic reindeer herders and hunters. Agricultural peoples to the south imaged thunder in the Chinese mode as a winged dragon (Holmberg [Harva] 1964 [1927]: 440-1). This difference between agricultural and nomadic peoples does not hold for North America. Agricultural nations such as the Pueblos, Caddoans, Iroquoians, and Muskogeans have seasonally-fixed, i.e., calendrical, community ceremonies as well as healing rituals for afflicted individuals. Blackfoot emphasis on medicine bundles, such that even the Okan is thought of as performance of the Nataos bundle, reflects their ethos of respect for personal autonomy, extending to framing bundle ceremonies as responses to individuals' vows to sponsor them in gratitude or petition for beneficence to that person. Against that ethos, the *obligation* to offer Thunder his pipe when he returns in spring contrasts with vowed ceremonies. Responding to its demand overrides personal autonomy. In this way, Blackfoot people acknowledge the omnipotence of the Almighty. Significantly, colonial authorities' ban on indigenous religious rituals failed to stop pipe-bundle ceremonies, even when the Okan was forced into abeyance.

Although Blackfoot are nominally egalitarian, and individuals were free to change bands if dissatisfied with a leader, there was and is an aristocracy of leading families who train their children to be leaders, and bundle owners are likely to be of this class. An exception was Tom Kyaiyo (spelled "Kiyo" by Wissler, and meaning "Bear"), Duvall's principal informant, a Beaver bundle owner and spiritual leader for the Heart Butte community of the Montana Blackfeet. Kyaiyo's English name was Tom Sanderville, originally Sandoval; the family descended from a "Mexican" fur trader who married a Piegan woman. Tom Sanderville's brother Richard was

ethnographer John Ewers' interpreter and friend, and usually official interpreter for the tribe. In spite of Tom, Richard, and their siblings being third generation Piegan, Blackfoot aristocrats considered them marginal, as was the half-Piegan Duvall. Ironically, their marginal status allying them with Whites such as Clark Wissler is the reason we have the incomparable detail on Blackfoot ritual published by Wissler. Apparently it did not bother Kyaiyo to reenact powerful ritual so that Duvall could record it exactly. People on the reservation today say that Duvall's suicide, in 1911 at the age of thirty-one, probably resulted from his exposure to so much power, improperly conveyed to him without his receiving requisite training. Duvall shot himself on the final day of that year's Okan.

Ki ánetòyi imitáiks – "And the dogs have separated," as Uhlenbeck's informants conventionally ended their tales.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Notes

1 *Siksikaitsitapi* is the Blackfoot name for their people. The English translation, "Blackfoot", remains common usage.

2 The term "calendar" is conventionally used for Plains Indian documents recording historical events year by year. The documents were originally hides, especially bison hides, on which pictographic symbols were painted; in the late nineteenth century, paper was also used. A designated keeper maintained and added to their history for each band, selecting for each year a memorable event. The documents are also called winter counts, the Lakota term.

3 Wissler generally did not specify the individuals from whom Duvall obtained particular data.

4 Head of a harlequin duck, not commonly found on Montana Blackfeet Reservation, is attached to Last Star medicine pipe (Scriver 1990: 281).

References

Eggermont-Molenaar, Mary, ed. (2005). *Montana 1911: A Professor and His Wife Among the* Blackfeet. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.

Ewers, John C. (1958). *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Grinnell, George Bird (1892). *Blackfoot Lodge Tales*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Holmberg [Harva], Uno (1964 [1927]). *Finno-Ugric, Siberian*. Volume IV in *The Mythology of All Races*, edited by Canon John Arnott MacCulloch (Boston). New York: Cooper Square Publishers.

McClintock, Walter (1910). *The Old North Trail: Life, Legends and Religion of the Blackfeet Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968 facsimile edition.

Scriver, Bob (1990). *The Blackfeet: Artists of the Northern Plains*. Kansas City MO: Lowell Press.

Uhlenbeck, C. C. (1912). *A New Series of Blackfoot Texts*, Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeeling Letterkunde n. r. 13 (1). Amsterdam: Johannes Muller.

Wissler, Clark (1911-12). The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians. *Anthropological Papers* VII, Pt. 1, pp. 1-64. Ceremonial Bundles of the Blackfoot Indians, VII, Pt. 2, pp. 65-289. New York: American Museum of Natural History.

Wissler, Clark, and D. C. Duvall (1908). Mythology of the Blackfoot Indian. *Anthropological Papers* II, Pt. 1, pp. 1-163. New York: American Museum of Natural History. [Facsimile reprint with introduction by Alice Beck Kehoe, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1995.]

TABLE 1
BLACKFOOT CALENDAR

Wissler 1911: 45	**McClintock 1910: 486-7**
WINTER MOONS	
New Year, begins with dark of moon in October – the beginning of winter	
Beginning winter moon [October]	After the Leaves Fall Off / When the Geese Fly South
Wind moon [November]	After the First Snowfall
Cold moon [December]	
Two-big-Sunday moon [December-January, Christmas + New Year's Day]	Time of the First Chinook
Changeable moon [January]	When Buffalo Calves are Black / When the Heavy Snows Come / When the Jackrabbit Whistles at Night
Uncertain moon [February]	The Home Days are Coming
Geese moon [March]	Time for Sore Eyes (Snow-blindness)
SUMMER MOONS	
Beginning summer's moon [April]	When the Ice Breaks Up in the Rivers
Thunder pipe bundles opened upon hearing first thunder in spring ("return of Thunder")	
Frog moon [May]	When the Geese Come / When the Leaves are Budding / When the Buffalo Plant is in Flower / When the Buffalo Calves are Yellow / When the Grass Becomes Green

Beaver Bundle opened for Tobacco Planting

Thunder moon [June]	Time of High Water
Big-Sunday moon [July]	Moon of Flowers
[July 4 = Big Sunday]	
Berry moon [August]	Home Days
Chokecherry moon [September]	When the Leaves are Yellow

Beaver Bundle opened for Tobacco Harvesting

In theory, there are fourteen moons (months), equally divided between Winter and Summer; in practice, this seems to derive from Beaver Bundle owners using counts of seven in enumerating their rituals.

There are supposed to be 26 days in a moon, each moon beginning with the dark of the moon; "some assert that thirty days were counted" to a moon, this being 26 + 4 dark-of-moon days (Wissler 1912: 171).

One calendar-keeper "had a set of 179 sticks" for tallying a calendar; another had "a bag with two parts, one [part] faced with red and the other with blue. Fourteen pebbles were used to mark moons; each time the moon became invisible he moved a pebble to the other [part of the bag]." (Wissler 1911: 45)

TABLE 2
HOW THE ANCIENT PEIGANS LIVED

A Peigan Band's Annual Round, Mid-Nineteenth Century Told by Káinaikoan ("Blood," a Peigan), 1911, to C. C. Uhlenbeck; John Tatsey, interpreter (Uhlenbeck 1912: 1-15; addenda from Ewers 1958).

Spring
Stayed on Marias River – until bison shed their hair.

Late Spring
Upstream to get lodge-pins;
Overtook bison in Sweetgrass or Cypress Hills;
After processing kill ("when slices of meat are dry"), moved down to Milk River "where are the better buffalo" (Uhlenbeck 1912: 3). [Ewers:] bitterroot, dug and boiled.

Summer
Young man reported berries are ripe, camp moved to Many-berries.
Women picked berries and also prepared hides for lodge covers.
Moved to Buffalo-head for the chokecherries and other berries.
Moved to Seven-persons for elk hunting.
Moved to Cypress Hills to cut lodge poles.
Moved to Long-lakes.
Moved to Where-Women-Society-Left-Their-Lodgepole.
Moved "back to prairie" to Green lake to hunt bison for parfleches & ropes.
Moved to Writing-on-Stone, for chokecherries and other berries to dry.
Moved up Milk River to Woman's-point.
Moved away from river to hunt bison and antelope and to get wolf, badger, skunk pelts "to buy tobacco with" (Uhlenbeck1912:7); might move to six places before they found a herd to hunt (Uhlenbeck 1912: 14-15).
Went to trading post to sell bison robes (20 to 40) for powder, cartridges, tobacco, blankets, gunflints and gun springs (Uhlenbeck 1912: 14).

June-July
[Ewers] turnips – eaten raw, roasted, boiled, and dried for winter; camas ("near the mountains"), roasted in earth baking ovens.
Midsummer
[Ewers] sarvis berries, eaten raw, cooked, and dried.

Fall
Moved to Cut Bank River to cut lodge poles. Hunted deer, elk, moose near the mountains.

September-October
[Ewers] chokecherries, especially in stream valleys of foothills: dried.

Late September-October (after first frost)
[Ewers] buffalo-berries, eaten fresh or dried.

Late Fall
Moved down from the mountains to where bison would come, and decided where they would camp for the winter, along the river; prepared robes for bedding.

Mid-Winter
Moved onto the prairie away from river to hunt bison. "When the places where they camped a long time about became to be bad [dirty], then they moved notwithstanding [the cold]" (Uhlenbeck 1912: 12-13) .

Spring
Men and their younger wives would go on hunt, but senior wives stayed in main camp.

TOTAL: 17-23 moves of main camp.

Holy Cows:
Natural Precursors to a Ritual Year?

DAVID TREVARTHEN

This paper arises from my research into Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age megalithic monuments. I am examining, in part, how the architecture and siting in the landscape of these structures relates to seasonal cycles, specifically the movement of the sun through the course of the year.

An initial study of the site of Balnuaran of Clava, Inverness-shire (Trevarthen 2000) showed a clear structural marking of not only the Solstices (21st June and December) and Equinoxes (21st March and September) but also the "Celtic" Quarter Days of Bride (1st February), Beltane (1st May), Lughnasadh (1st August) and Samhainn (1st November). As the site dates to between 2200 and 1800 BC (Bradley 2000) the presence of the Quarter Days obviously predates their "Celtic" Iron Age and later use as ritual divisions of the year. As a technical aside I should point out that what I am interested in is not a high precision indication of specific single days of the year but rather a marking of significant periods. The movement of the sun back and forth between its extremes at the two Solstices means that the eight divisions result in only five sets of sunrise and sunset positions. The Winter Quarter (Bride and Samhainn), Summer Quarter (Beltane and Lughnasadh) and Equinox periods all share positions in their pairs (Fig. 1).

Having found these seasonal points indicated in the structure of the monuments I wanted to find some rationale behind their selection and use. I am unconvinced that a population of subsistence farmers would have had the luxury of deciding to "celebrate now" for purely civic or imposed cosmological reasons without taking into consideration the practicalities of producing food for survival. One obvious approach was to look at how these points in the year relate to agricultural and pastoral activities as has been done by others (e.g. Green 1998 and McNeil 1956 for Celtic use; Burl 1987 for the Neolithic). Several lengthy conversations with Fraser Johnstone the farmer at Balnuaran and Lindsay Girvan at Corrimony suggested that

Cosmos 18 (2002), 35-41.

cattle rearing would produce a good model. The basic scheme I derived from them, assuming a prehistoric economy with no access to bought feed and a need for self-reliance, runs as follows:

- Calves are born around mid-March (Spring Equinox). With a gestation period of just over nine months this places mating in mid-June around the Summer Solstice. Movement to and from the high pastures would take place in early May and August corresponding with the Summer Quarter Days. In late October, early November surplus livestock would be slaughtered, both to provide stores of meat for the winter and to reduce the herd to a size that could be sustained on the limited winter fodder. As Fraser Johnstone memorably put it, "If you're not sorted for winter by November you'll probably not see spring."

This includes all the solar points apart from the Winter Solstice. I would suggest that this may gain significance from its alarming nature as least sunlight, most darkness at the time of year when thought will be focused on simply surviving the next few months. Both Bride and the Autumn Equinox are not specifically included but as mentioned above any marking of a Winter Quarter Day or Equinox will mark the other in its pair by default.

Comparable data was needed to ensure that I was not merely seeing a culturally imposed pattern of cattle management and I found this in a recent anthropological study of the life of herding people in the village of Melechi in Nepal (Bishop 1998) who herd the *zomo*, a female cross of yak and cow, as dairy cattle. Their cycle of herding activity is very similar:

- Mating takes place in June to August when the cattle are in high pasture with good grazing. This is in part also because the yak bulls are not able to live comfortably at lower altitudes. Calving takes place between March and May. As these herders are dairy farmers and Buddhist vegetarians the purpose of breeding is only to keep cows in milk and not to produce calves, with the consequence that few of these are allowed to live long. *Zomo* are never fed on fodder so preparation for over-wintering is of less importance.

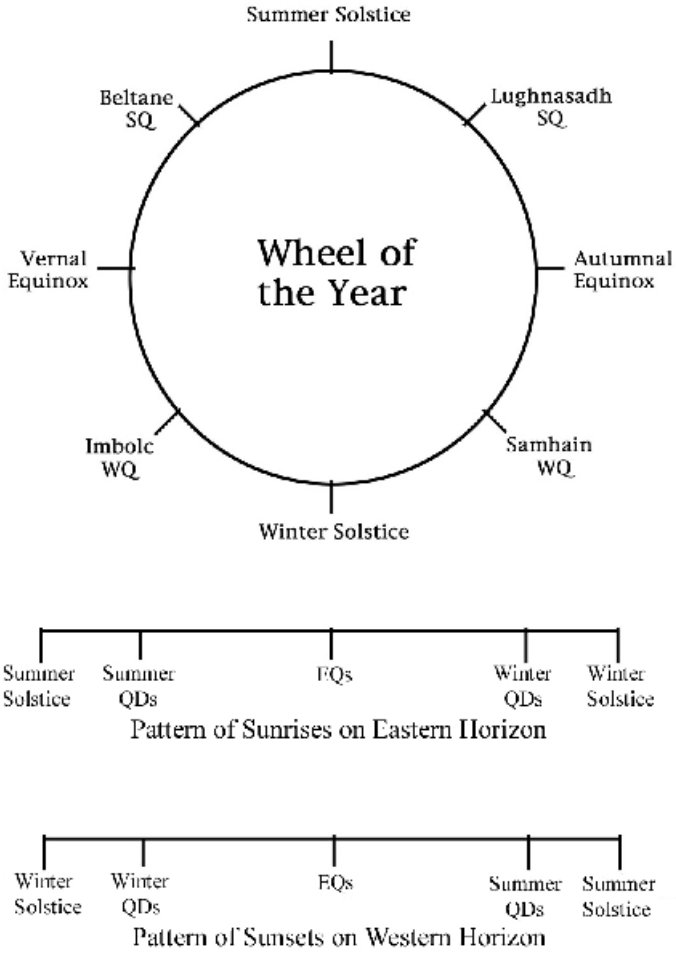
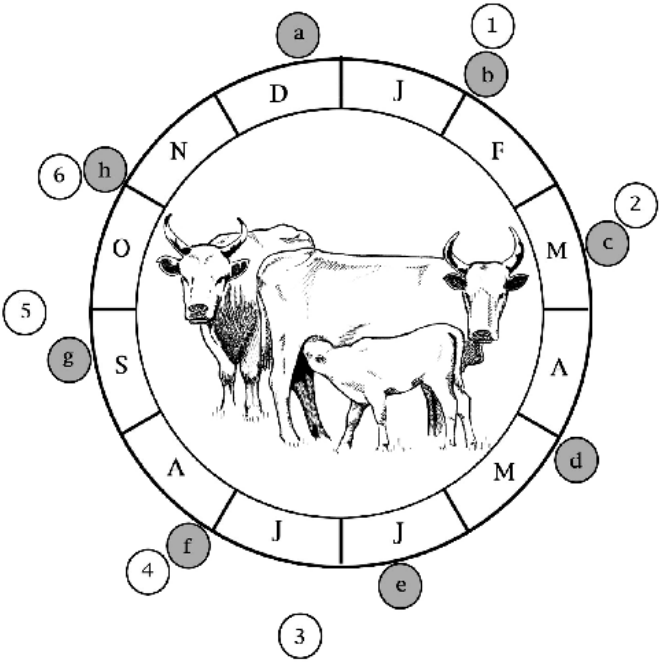


Figure 1. Divisions of the year with schematic diagrams showing the relative positions of sunrise and sunset.



Seasonal Points and 'Celtic' Festivals
a – *Winter Solstice* b – *Bride* c – *Vernal Equinox* d – *Beltane*
e = *Summer Solstice* f = *Lughnasadh* g = *Autumnal Equinox*
h = *Samhainn*

Nepalese Festivals
1 = *Losar* 2 = *Dabla Pangdi* 3 = *Nara*
4 = *Tupa Tsezhu* 5 = *Dassai* 6 = *Nyunge*

Figure 2. The cycle of the year (with month names indicated by initials) and the times of the "Celtic" and Nepalese festivals. The illustration of the cows is redrawn by D. Trevarthen from a photograph that appears with Tankerville n.d.

Their ritual year also shows a high degree of correspondence with the eight seasonal divisions given above. *Losar* (New Year) is celebrated in late January, early February. *Dabla Pangdi*, a celebration of spring and hope for prosperity that includes the burning of a straw effigy of the hail demon, is held in March. *Nara*, marking mid-summer and held in honour of the founders of the village temple, happens in early to mid-July. A festival of blessing, *Tupa Tsezhu*, falls in early August. Late September, early October sees the borrowed Hindu festival of *Dassai* celebrating Durga's triumph over demons. *Nyunge*, a festival of atonement, takes place later in October (Fig. 2).

While the environment and climate of the high Himalayas and the highlands of Scotland may not be too dissimilar Nepal's position closer to the Equator means that the movement of the sun is less pronounced through the year. Assuming a flat horizon, at the latitude of Nepal (27.5º) there is a difference of 54.5º between the Winter and Summer Solstice extremes. In the Scottish Highlands (latitude 57.5º) the difference is 98.5º. This makes it more likely that the similarity in festival timings derives from terrestrial rather than celestial cues. Any direct cultural contact between Celtic and Nepalese peoples is, of course, extremely unlikely. It might be permissible to speculate on a remote shared Indo-European origin though this in turn begs the question of the origin of Indo-European ritual divisions of the year.

In order to further develop this idea I decided to examine the behaviour of wild cattle to see if the same pattern was demonstrated. Conveniently, at Chillingham in Northumberland there is a herd of "wild" white cattle. Technically these are feral cattle not wild but they have lived as a free running herd for several hundred years. The first record of the herd dates from 1646 (Hall and Hall 1988) but the area was first enclosed 700 years ago and the herd could be as old as this (Tankerville, no date).

To get information closest to the source I telephoned the wardens of the cattle at Chillingham to ask them what the herd's habits were. Unfortunately for my theory they told me that the cattle can, and do, breed at any time of year. For a proper discussion of this they said that I should really talk to Professor Stephen Hall at the University of Lincoln. Professor Hall is an expert on cattle and their domestication and has studied the Chillingham cattle in some detail. Over the course of a lengthy telephone conversation he passed on some very interesting information.

Although it is true that cattle in the wild will breed all year round, there is an optimum timing that is best for the health of both the herd and the individual animals. Three scenarios of the effect of different timings of calving make this very obvious.[1] A bad scenario is to have the calves born in winter, with mating having taken place in early spring. The shortage of grazing in the winter makes it likely that the cow will not suckle the calf, leading to its death. The mother will probably survive but there has been no increase of the herd. The worst-case scenario is for calves to be born in the autumn following a winter mating. As there is still plenty of grazing the cow will suckle the calf; this leads to imprinting which means that suckling continues into the depths of winter when there is little food for the mother. The most likely outcome of this situation is the death of both mother and offspring. The best-case scenario is to have calves born in the spring following a summer mating, precisely the model suggested by the Scottish farmers and seen among the Nepalese herders. In the wild situation this means that the calf is born at a time when there is plenty of grazing and enough time for it to become independent of its mother before the onset of winter. Cows are ready to mate again after a little over two months so once an animal has calved at the optimum time it should tend to continue to do so.

This suggests that, rather than a pre-pastoral purely natural cycle dictating the arrangement of the year, we are seeing an economic best scenario being adopted and enshrined as a cosmological order. As the natural tendency already exists it would take very little effort to ensure that a herd conformed to this schedule, reinforcing it both for the cattle and the humans relying on them. Of course I am not suggesting that the management of beef cattle is the sole root of the ritual year; it is probably only one of many such natural cues. The annual, cyclic behaviour of other livestock and wild animals, and the seasonal availability of domestic and wild plant resources will also have had an effect. My suggestion is that the practical considerations of community survival be considered when looking at the origins of group ritual behaviour.

University of Edinburgh

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Stephen Hall for his insight and willingness to talk to a complete stranger who telephoned without prior warning, Fraser Johnstone and Lindsay Girvan for their interest and many discussions and Emily Lyle and Aude Le Borgne for asking me to present this paper.

Note

1 Professor Hall's studies have shown that there is a very low incidence of severe problems in calving, only 1.5% of births fail due to the death of the mother (Hall and Hall 1988). Unlike some of their domesticated cousins these "primitive" cattle need little assistance and in most cases both mother and calf surviving the birth process would be certain.

References

Bishop, N. H. (1998). *Himalayan Herders.* London: Harcourt Brace.

Bradley, R. (2000). *The Good Stones: a New Investigation of the Clava Cairns.* Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph 17. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Burl, A. (1987). *The Stonehenge People.* London: J. M. Dent and Sons.

Green, M. J. (1998). The Time Lords: Ritual Calendars, Druids and the Sacred Year. In *Prehistoric Ritual and Religion*, ed. A. Gibson and D. Simpson, pp. 190-202. Guildford: Sutton Publishing.

Hall, S. J. G. and J. G. Hall (1988). Inbreeding and Population Dynamics of the Chillingham Cattle *(Bos taurus)*. *Journal of Zoology* 216, 479-93.

McNeill, F. M., (1989 [1956]). *The Silver Bough.* Vol. 1. Edinburgh: Canongate Classics.

Tankerville, Dowager Countess (n.d.). *The Wild White Cattle of Chillingham*. http://www.whitepark.org.uk/chillingham.htm

Trevarthen, D. A. (2000). Illuminating the Monuments: Observation and Speculation on the Structure and Function of the Cairns at Balnuaran of Clava. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10, pp. 295-315.

The Spring Prayer Feasts in the Udmurt Village of Varklet-Bodya in Tatarstan

AADO LINTROP

This paper is based on observations made over several years in the Udmurt village of Varklet-Bodya which is situated in the Agryz district of Tatarstan. Udmurts are Finno-Ugric people of the Permean language group (Ural-Altaic Family > Uralic languages > Finno-Ugric branch > Permean group). In 2002 they numbered 636,935, most of them living in the Udmurt Republic of the Russian Federation which is located about 1000 km east of Moscow, but with small groups settled in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the Kirov Region (Lallukka 1990). I shall be discussing a group that settled in the Tatarstan Republic, which is another part of the Russian Federation (the southern neighbour of the Udmurt Republic), and I shall begin by defining some of the concepts used in the paper.

Prayer, to pray.

From the Udmurt root *vös'*- derive nouns *vös'* – "prayer, sacrifice, religion, faith", *vös'as'kon* – "prayer, sacrifice", *vös'as'* – "priest", and verbs *vös'any* – "to pray, to sacrifice, to hallow", *vös'as'kyny* – "to pray, to beg", *vös'atyny* – "to sacrifice". You can notice that there is no difference between praying and sacrificing in the Udmurt language and its dialects. Baptised Udmurts eliminated the part connected with sacrifice from the semantic field of these words, but in the tradition of unbaptised Udmurts praying and sacrificing are very close actions up to the present.

Large prayer house – *byd'z'ym kuala* (large/great cabin/hut).

This is a special building for worship dedicated to the guardian spirit of the kin, whose worship comprises the ideas of *genius generis* and *genius loci.* Both of them were connected in the Udmurt notion *vorshud* (*vordyny* – "to hold, to contain" + *shud* – "happiness, luck").

Cosmos 18 (2002), 43-55

Little prayer house – *pichi/pokchi kuala* (little cabin/hut).

A building that was in the yard of each family of the religious group maintaining the large prayer house cult. Its everyday use was as the summer kitchen, but during the folk calendar holidays the family prayers were held in it.

Sacrificial grove – *lud* (field).

Sacrificial place of the other main religious group – *lud vyzhy* "lud branch" – was dedicated to the spirit named *keremet* or *lud kuz'o* (field's master). Sacrifices in the grove were performed in the night-time.

Priest – *vös'as'* (one who prays/sacrifices).

A local religious authority elected from among certain male members of the group for organising and performing prayers and sacrifices, who has two or three elected assistants. He has to be married and healthy both mentally and physically. Till the beginning of the twentieth century some of the priests were appointed to the post by sages (*tuno*).

THE VILLAGE

According to village inhabitants, the village of Varklet-Bodya is more than three hundred years old. It was settled by the people coming from the village of Malaya Bodya, located in the vicinity of Pichi Porga (currently Malaya Purga), who, escaping from baptising and lack of land, founded a hamlet amongst the Tartars and Bashkirians, at the Varklet river, a branch of the Izh, approximately forty kilometres to the south of their former village (Vladykin 1994: 243). The peculiarity of the village is indeed connected with its location. On the one hand, the closest nearby Udmurt villages – Shadrasak Kibya, Lyali, Varzi-Jachi, Yumyashur – were only a couple of hours' walk away and, on the other hand, the Bashkirians and the Tartars were still close neighbours. The fact that the worship, maintained in Varklet-Bodya even until today, was not at all an exceptional phenomenon, is evidenced by the worship sites located in the

neighbourhood – the Shudya and Zumya kins' prayer houses and a sacrificial grove (*lud*) are known from the vicinity of Lyali, situated merely ten kilometres away (Shutova 2001: 72). Near Varzi-Jachi (c. 12 km) there was a sacrificial place, *bulda*, and a large prayer house; in the area of Yumyashur (16 km) there were two *luds* and a large prayer house; near Kuzebayevo (c. 20 km) there were a big prayer house, a *lud*, and a sacrificial place *bulda*. There is confirmed data that the Varklet-Bodya people went to *bulda*-worship meetings near Varzi-Jachi even in the years 1921 and 1924 (Shutova 2001: 75-6). However, only the Varklet-Bodya and Kuzebayevo places of worship have survived until today.

THE UDMURT RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In a traditional Southern Udmurt village, there were two or three viable religious communities, at least until the middle of the twentieth century. Initially these groups were also endogamous (Vladykin 1994: 272). Such division was first drawn attention to in the 1930s by A. Pint, who found that the inhabitants belonging in the Poska kin of the Malaya Purga region, Ulyn Juri (Nizhnie Yuri) village, fall into two distinctly separate groups – the branch of the sacrificial grove, *lud*, and that of the prayer house. Later, it was ascertained that the branch of the large prayer house actually comprised seven *bölyaks* (groups of relatives), and that the priest of the prayer house and his assistants were elected from among these people. The grove priest and his assistants were elected from among the *lud* branch, which consisted of four *bölyaks* (Vladykin 1994: 271-2). According to some, there is or was even a third branch in the Southern Udmurt villages – the people of *bulda* (Shutova 2001: 57). I was also told about such divisions in 1980 and 1992 in the village of Kuzebayevo and, in addition, it turned out that the members of the group praying on the *lud* did not have prayer houses at home while the members of the large prayer house group had little prayer houses (*pichi kuala*) in their barn yards. The Varklet-Bodya community also split into two branches – the people of the large prayer house and those of the sacrificial grove (*lud*). The grove priest could not be a blood relative of the sacrifice priest of the large prayer house, and vice versa. This is

probably one of the reasons why both cults in Varklet-Bodya faded away. In altered social conditions, mixed marriages between the two groups became more frequent and finally, there were no eligible candidates left in the relatively small village (in the 1970s, approximately 300-350 inhabitants) for the position as sacrifice priests, whereas in Kuzebayevo, a settlement with a couple of thousand inhabitants, both cults have survived.

THE SACRIFICIAL PLACES OF VARKLET-BODYA

The large prayer house, *byd'd'z'ym kuala*, is located in the eastern part of the village, in the middle of a grove surrounded with a fence. Up until the year 1975, prayers were held there during Shrove Tuesday, Easter and St Nicholas Day, which is the 19th of December in the Orthodox calendar (Lebedeva 1995: 258). The sacrificial grove, *lud*, where the last prayer took place more than thirty years ago, is located on the northern bank of the river Varklet. Opposite the *lud*, on the southern bank of the river, is an open plain surrounded by trees, *kun'an ken'er* "calf's enclosure" or *kun'an kotyrtem inty* "the place where the calf has to go around", where the majority of the vernal and summer *gershyd* worships are held. Upstream from this, there is a small wood, *jyrpyd s'oton*, with animal heads and legs sacrificed for the dead elders hung on trees. In the vicinity, people come to commemorate the deceased during vernal *gershyd* prayers. Down the stream along the river, there is another site for commemorating the dead, denoted by a single spruce growing on an open plain. At this site, porridge is cooked in memory of those who have not been buried in the graveyard of the home village. The only worship place in the southern part of the Varklet-Bodya is located near the spruce wood at the road departing southward from the village and is called *akashka busy* (*akashka* field). The girls' prayer, *nylyoslen kuris'konzy* is held during the vernal festivity *akashka* (today, on Easter Sunday but in earlier times on Easter Monday).

THE SPRING PRAYERS

The main holidays of the folk calendar, when prayers are organised in the village, comprise the *akashka*, denoting the coming of spring and the beginning of work in the fields, and the *gershyd*, designating the end of the spring sowing. Interestingly, the name of both festivities comes from the ritual meal connected with springtime agricultural work – *aka yashka* meant plough soup in the Volga Bulgar language and *gershyd* denotes the same in the Udmurt language. Under the name *akayashka* or *akashka*, the Udmurts living in different regions understand the holiday celebrated mainly in March/April and which, in some regions, is even today associated with the festivities regarding the commencement of springtime agricultural work, *guzhdor* and *gyryny poton*. (*Guzhdor* is the holiday dedicated to the first areas of field or meadow that appear in spring when the snow is melting; the word *guzhdor* means an area of that kind, and also grass. *Gyryny poton* means "going out to plough".) At the present time, *akashka* coincides with the Orthodox Easter even in Varklet-Bodya, but the local celebration has a specific emphasis – on the one hand, this is connected with the acceptance of young people as full and equal community members and, on the other hand, with the exorcism of evil spirits from the village, primarily the exorcism of *shaitan* (the devil). The most important parts of *akashka* in Varklet-Bodya are the prayers by the boys and girls reaching full maturity. The boys' prayer (*eru karon* or *urai vös'*) is also a test of knowing the tradition in one way; the participants, boys aged between 16 and 18, have to do all the preparation and cook the ritual porridge by themselves (see Figures 1 and 2). After two days the boys have to perform all the cooking for the girls' prayer.

THE *GERSHYD*

The most relevant prayers in Varklet-Bodya, maintained until today, take place during the holidays celebrated in the first half of June, with a joint name *gershyd*. Although in translation, this means the same as the Bulgar-origin *akayashka*, *gershyd* has evolved into

Figure 1. Gathering the food before the boys' prayer in 1993: participants in the prayer are going from house to house (frame from author's video).

Figure 2. Gathering the food before the boys' prayer in 1993: a housewife is giving them some eggs, cereals and meat (frame from author's video).

festivities generally celebrated after the end of spring agrarian work, which is known in some places also under the names *ju vös'* "crop prayer" or *busy vös'* "field prayer" and is today linked with the Orthodox Pentecost. Perhaps in order to slightly alleviate the fluctuation over time caused by the fact that Pentecost is a movable feast, the *gershyd*-cycle together with ritual visit-paying has been extended to nearly a fortnight in Varklet-Bodya (see Table 1). Since the Udmurts were in the same collective farm as Tartars, the beginning of the festivities was also influenced by the time of celebrating *sabantui* ("marriage of the plough" in Tartar) which evolved into a *kolkhoz* ("collective farm") holiday, as people wanted to start with *gershyd*-prayers only subsequent to this.

The time of the holidays with regard to weekdays was determined by the requirement not to start prayers on the sacrificial place, *kun'an ken'er*, on Wednesday, which, in the Udmurt folk calendar, is called *vir nunal* "the day of blood" and is not considered to be a favourable time for commencing any undertaking. However, as there was an attempt to have the most important prayer on a day off, it was customary for the ritual visit-paying *vös' n'erge* to take place on the Friday prior to the festivities (earlier, when the only day off was Sunday, probably on Saturday); the crop prayer, *ju vös'*, on Monday and the commemoration of the dead *kuyas'kon* on Tuesday.

Wednesday was left aside and on Thursday, sacrificial priests, together with their families, conducted an introductory prayer, i.e. the one asking for permission (*kun'an ken'ere pyron* "the entering to the calf enclosure" or *kun'an kotyrtem intyly kuris'kysa vös'as'kon* "the prayer asking permission for the place where the calf has to go around"). On Friday, this was followed by the foal's prayer, *chun'y vös'an,* and on Saturday, by the earth spirit prayer, *mu-kylchin*. On Sunday *gershyd* culminated with the prayer dedicated to the God of heaven Inmar – *jybyrtton* "bowing/worshipping" or *chun'yn sermet vös'an* "asking for the bridles with a foal". On Monday, this was succeeded by *aktash* ("white stone" in most Turkic languages) or *töd'y iz vös'as'kon* (Udm. "the prayer of the white stone"), which was the last prayer on the place *kun'an ken'er* and dedicated to a mythological creature named *Aktash*. The whole *gershyd*-cycle was ended by the commemoration of the dead, *kuyas'kon*, taking place on the following day, when, in addition to ritual porridge-eating, people

again regaled each other with moonshine spirit (during the prayers between the two *kuyas'kons*, the consumption of alcohol was strictly prohibited).

Friday	ritual visiting	*vös' n'erge*
Saturday	–	
Sunday	–	
Monday	crop or field prayer	*ju vös'*
Tuesday	commemoration of the dead	*kuyas'kon*
Wednesday	–	
Thursday	asking permission to enter the enclosure	*kun'an ken'ere pyron, kun'an kotyrtem intyly kuris'kysa vös'as'kon*
Friday	prayer with the foal	*chun'y vös'an*
Saturday	prayer to the earth spirit	*mu-kylchin*
Sunday	prayer to Inmar	*jybyrtton* "bowing / worshipping" or *chun'yn sermet vös'an*
Monday	prayer to Aktash	*aktash* (in most Turkic languages *aq* "white", *tash* "stone"; *aktash* is also an evil spirit in Udmurt mythology) or *töd'y iz vös'as'kon* (Udm. "the white stone's prayer").
Tuesday	commemoration of the dead	*kuyas'kon*

Table 1

PRAYING

Every prayer day is conducted by a different priest together with his assistants (see Figures 3 and 4). All priests and assistants are elected from among healthy and married village men. The priest prays with his head covered, while all other men are bareheaded during prayer (see Figure 5). As a rule, all people stand while praying: men are placed behind the priest; women stand apart at some distance. The final prayers of the *jybyrtton* and all prayers of the *aktash* are prayed kneeling and bowing to the ground (see Figure 6). At the present time the long prayer texts are not improvised any more and therefore a few of the prie sts say some phrases aloud. Yet most of the participants know more or less the content of prayer and elderly people are capable of reciting pretty long parts of it. In June 2002 I recorded prayer words of the following kind: "Let the children we bear live well and happy, let our cattle-beasts be healthy, let Inmar itself protect us from stormy wind. … Let czar live in agreement with czar, let war not happen." The most important thing they pray for is rain, because mild June rain is necessary for a good crop. Every inhabitant of the village, even a child, is convinced that properly performed prayers and sacrifices are preconditions for inducing the desired result.

SACRIFICING

From the names of the prayers and from the information given by the villagers we know that, during the *gershyd* feasts, foals (or horses), cows (or oxen) and sheep were sacrificed in the past. Today the only sacrificial animals are sheep. The sheep dedicated to the God of heaven, Inmar. has to be white or of a light colour; the one sacrificed to the earth spirit is black. Whether the sacrificial animal pleases the gods is tested in the following way. The priest pours some water on the b ack of the animal through birch branches and, if the animal reacts in some way, it is considered to be a good sign. At the prayer *jybyrtton* or *chun'yn sermet vös'an* "asking for the bridles with a foal" in addition to a sheep a goose is sacrificed. Grigorii Potanin

Figure 3. Some priests of Varklet-Bodya in 2002 (author's photograph).

Figure 4. Praying at the *jybyrtton* prayer in 2002 (frame from author's video).

Figure 5. The final prayer of the *jybyrtton* in 2002 (frame from author's video).

Figure 6. Sacrificing into the fire at the *jybyrtton* prayer in 2002 (frame from author's video).

wrote in 1884: "Udmurts told me that every prayer would be finished with the sacrifice of a goose. They say that the goose gives a bridle for a sacrificed horse." (Potanin 1884: 209). The sacrificed horse (or soul of the horse) needs a bridle to find the way to the God of heaven, Inmar, and it is the soul of the sacrificed goose that guides the soul of the sacrificed horse. At all prayers except the earth spirit's one, the so-called giving up (Udm. *vyle mychon*) is performed; sacrificial food is laid on tree branches or a tree stump during the prayer. It stays there till the last prayers of the day and is then sacrificed into the fire. Putting into the fire (Udm. *tylas'kon*) is the main mode of sacrifice up to the present (see Figure 6). In addition to the bread and meat from the "giving up" dishes, some amount (3, 5, 7, 9 pieces or spoonfuls) of all kinds of ritual food is sacrificed into the fire. Some blood of the sacrificial sheep or goose is sacrificed there too. The only exception is the earth spirit prayer, when all kinds of sacrificial food are put into a special hole dug for the occasion, the *mu-kylchin gu*.

CHANGING TRADITION

Varklet-Bodya prayers have altered considerably during the course of time. The main factors altering the prayers are the following: abandoning of the large prayer house and the sacred grove, *lud*, and related shifts among the religious authorities of the village community; the rise of the new generation of sacrificial priests with its inevitable differences in understanding and imagination; and matching the knowledge of tradition with various practical needs of real life. A strong tradition has to be capable of adaptation and, vice versa, only a tradition with sufficient adaptability can withstand the passage of time. The traditions of the Varklet-Bodya large prayer house and the sacrificial grove involved weak links; the main one of these was probably the inflexibility of selecting the sacrificial priests. During the course of years, the number of eligible candidates became ever smaller and as the selection criteria either could not have been changed or there was no such an attempt, finally a day dawned when the traditions stopped with the death of the last priests. The tradition of *gershyd*-holidays has persisted and will persist in the future, thanks to flexibility expressed in the following:

a Electability of sacrificial priests from among all the male, adult, healthy and married members of the village community;
b The absence of a complicated verbal component which would demand extensive knowledge;
c The simplicity of ritual proceedings and the learning of the latter by all potential candidates for sacrificial priests at an early age (at the boys' prayer).

Estonian Folklore Archive of the Estonian Literary Museum,Tartu

References

Lallukka, Seppo (1990). *The East Finnic Minorities in the Soviet Union*. Helsinki.

Lebedeva, Serafima (1995). Spring and summer series of prayers of *gershyd* in the village of Varklet-Bodya. In *Folk Belief Today*, ed. M. Kyiva and K. Vassilieva, pp. 257-62. Tartu: Estonian Academy of Sciences, Institute of the Estonian Language and Estonian Literary Museum.

Potanin, Grigorii (1884). *U votiakov Elabuzhskogo uezda. Izvestia Obshestva arheologii, istorii i etnografii pri Imp. Kazanskom universitete*, v. 3, pp. 189-255. Kazan.

Shutova, Nadezhda (2001). *Dohristianskie kul'tovye pamiatniki v udmurtskoi religioznoi tradicii: opyt kompleksnogo issledovania*. Izhevsk: Udmurtskii institut istorii, iazyka i literatury.

Vladykin, Vladimir (1994). *Religiozno-mifologicheskaia kartina mira udmurtov*. Izhevsk: Udmurtia.

Imbolc: A New Interpretation

PHILLIP A. BERNHARDT-HOUSE

The Irish[1] quarter day Imbolc is, in a sense, the most mysterious of the four great festivals celebrated at the turning-points of the year. It does not have the abundant narrative supernatural associations of Samain, the specific mythic and ritual associations grounded in narrative of Lugnasad, nor the semi-transparent etymology of Beltaine. Most of our knowledge of it comes from the Christian period, and its absorption into the saint's day of Brigit, one of the three principal saints of Ireland, as well as festivals into which it was incorporated, including Candlemas, and other traditions which seem to derive from it, like the American secular observance of Groundhog Day. Regarding the specifically Irish dimensions of this subject, the studies of Séamas Ó Catháin are both thorough and useful (Ó Catháin 1995 and 1999). While it is certain that there were a number of figures called Brigit in pre-Christian Irish tradition, and it is agreed that vestiges of paganism seem to underlie the Christian saint herself, it is quite difficult to imagine that the full import of the festival of Imbolc and its associated presiding deity or deities can be sufficiently reconstructed on the sole basis of these pieces of tradition.

As a starting-point for the current investigation, it will be useful to see what etymologies have been proposed for "Imbolc" – not only those offered in an academic context, but also those employed by modern pagans in their use of this holiday. Since this holiday has been adopted by many neo-pagans, and not simply by those who adhere to a neo-Celtic tradition, it is worthwhile to examine what meanings they ascribe to its name, no matter how artificial or incorrect these might seem from a linguistic viewpoint – for these "folk etymologies" show a tradition still in operation, based on the traditions of the past but adapted and made relevant in modern circumstances. Alexei Kondratiev gives three possible etymologies for Imbolc: Imbolc as *i mbolg*, "in the belly", meaning the Winter being pregnant with the coming Summer (Kondratiev 1998: 135); Imbolc as *imb-fholc*, "washing oneself", thus giving a purification focus to the occasion (139); and the long-standing *oímelc*, or "ewe's milk", thus marking the approach of Spring and fertility by the subtle

Cosmos 18 (2002), 57-76.

sign of the beginning of lactation in part of the livestock (135).[2] The latter two meanings originate in past tradition, and indeed will have their parts to play in the subsequent discussion. We should note, though, that only one of these etymologies is actually viable from a linguistic standpoint, that of *imb-fholc*.

The etymology that has been accepted by the consensus of Celticists was given by Eric Hamp, showing the close connection between verbs for milking and cleansing, and thus a "folk double-entendre" involved in the understanding of the festival and some odd occurrences in Irish narrative, such as Suibhne's drinking of milk out of a manure pile (Hamp 1979/1980: 111-12). The meaning "ewe's milk" is already found in *Sanas Cormaic*: *Óimelc .i. ōi-meilg .i. isi aimser andsin tic ass cāirach: Melg .i. ass arinni mblegar* (Meyer 1994: 86 §1000), " 'ewe milk,' i.e. that is the time that sheep's milk comes … 'milk' because it is milked" (O'Donovan 1868: 127); while the other, purificatory meaning can be inferred from a poem on the four quarter days found in three manuscripts[3] which indicates that the washing of the hand, foot and head is appropriate to the day (Stokes 1887: xxx; Meyer 1894: 48-9; Olmsted 1994: 125).

> *Fromad cach bíd iar n-urd,*
> *issed dlegair i n-Imbulc,*
> *díunnach laime is coissi is cinn,*
> *is amlaid sin atberim.*
>
> Tasting every food in order,
> This is what behoves at Imbolc,
> Washing of hand and foot and head,
> It is thus I say.[4]

Tochmarc Emire §55 contains both the meanings "milking" and "washing" as well as a note on this season as a time for the general destruction of, or plague upon, sheep, dogs, horses and humans (Van Hamel 1933: 43). Brigit's association with milk and purification begins with her birth and subsequent baptism in milk (Stokes 1995: 184; Lucas 1989: 6) and extends to various instances detailed in her vitae (Ó hAodha 1978: 2, 16, 21, 32; Stokes 1995: 185-7, 189, 191-2, 197). What I will be proposing here does not negate or even cast doubt on either of these possibilities, but should rather be seen as

supplementing them, and adding a further dimension to our understanding of this particular holiday.

In the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (1983), the basic meaning of *imb* in Old Irish is "butter".[5] This specific product is obviously derived from milk, and thus the relation between the two foodstuffs is unquestionable, especially in a culture that produced butter from milk on a frequent basis; however, it is worth mentioning a few examples from Irish sources which demonstrate this close, necessary connection. *Sanas Cormaic* states that the word *imb* is from the Latin *imber* (liquid, rain water, dew) "like the liquid upon the flowers surpasses honey, even butter" (*Imb ab imbre, quasi imber super flores praestat mel et butirum*; Meyer 1994: 65 §772), thus linking the creation of butter from cream to the appearance of dew or rainwater on flowers. The terms for dairy-workers in Old Irish legal texts refer to them as *bé loinedo*, "women of the churn-dash", and the churn-dash itself (*loinid*) is called *crosan in asa*, the "cross-stick of the milk" (Kelly 2000: 325). A Modern Irish spell to steal a neighbour's butter via the smoke of their chimney (associated with Beltaine) runs *Im an deataigh sin ar mo chuid bainne-se*, "The butter of that smoke upon my milk" (Danaher 1972: 111).[6] Butter-making and consumption was a traditional part of St Brigit's Day observances (Danaher 1972: 15; Ó Catháin 1995: 12, 14; Mahon 1998: 124) and butter left out as an offering for the saint became special and had curative properties ascribed to it (Danaher 1972: 15; Hutton 1996: 135). Brigit herself is associated with a miracle of an abundance of butter in several versions of her vita (Connolly and Picard 1987: 13-14; Stokes 1995: 186-7; Ó Catháin 1995: 120-1; Carey 2000: 167-8), and there is also at least one butter-churning charm/prayer associated with her (Carmichael 1992: 352). As milk was fundamental to the Irish dairying economy, and the very society of ancient Ireland was entirely dependent on cattle (Lucas 1989: 3-5; McCormick 1995: 35), this understanding of the inherent value of milk and milk-products makes logical sense, and would remain within the widest semantic range of the etymology suggested by Hamp.[7] However, the second part of this compound – *olc* – must still be analysed. While the general understanding of *olc* in Irish has tended to focus on its negative sense, since it usually means "evil, bad, wrong" in both Old and Modern Irish, a study by Kim McCone derived this negative meaning from the word as a reflex of an Indo-European root meaning "wolf" (McCone 1985). Thus, if we understand a possible meaning

of Imbolc as the "butter-wolf", then we might shed some light on further images in Irish sources, as well as connecting this to a further complex within Indo-European ritual.

In the seventeenth-century version of the tale *Cath Ruis na Rígh*, there is a poem which speaks of the months of Spring, with the line *buaile foel Faphra*, "February is an enclosure of wolves" (Sadowska 1997: 12). Another Irish name for the month of February is Faoillidh, "the month that kills sheep," which also means "bad weather" (Dineen 1927) and also Na Faoilligh, "the leavings," as in the dwindling supply of milk at this time of year (Ó Catháin 1995: 4), both of which could have the influence of the word *fáel* (Modern Irish *faol*), "wolf", in them (Black 1985: 4-6; Ó Catháin 1995: 19, n. 22).[8] Indeed, the name Faoilleach for the season roughly corresponding to February exists in a number of Scots Gaelic proverbs as well (Nicolson 1951: 51, 55, 116, 183, 349, 363, 411-12). A few of these are quite illustrative: "*Feadag, Feadag, màthair Faoillich fhuair* – Plover, Plover, mother of cold Month of Storms" (181).[9] There are also two short poems which speak to the relevance of the weather in Faoilleach as predictive of the season to come:

> *Faoilleach, Faoilleach, làmh 'an crios,*
> *Faoilte mhór bu chòir 'bhi ris;*
> *Crodh 'us caoraich 'ruith air theas,*
> *Gal 'us caoin bu chòir 'bhi ris*.
>
> February, cold and keen,
> Welcome hath it ever been;
> Sheep and cattle running hot,
> Sorrow that will bring, I wot. (178)
>
> *Mìos Faoillich; seachdain Feadaig;*
> *Ceithir-la-diag Gearrain; seachdain Caillich;*
> *Trì là Sguabaig – suas e 'n t'Earrach!*
>
> A month of the Stormy; a week of the Plover;
> A fortnight of the Gelding; a week of the Old Woman;
> Three days of the Brushlet – up with Spring!" (316)

Vestiges remain in certain aspects of Brigit's Day which suggest further lupine associations. In parts of France and Belgium, folk

sayings suggest that seeing a wolf on Candlemas has significance for foretelling the end of winter (Van Gennep 1934: 68; O'Neill and Davis 1999: 43).[10] More generally in Ireland, a number of saints' miracles involve a wolf in relation to a cow as a surrogate calf,[11] often after the wolf has eaten the calf, so that the cow will continue to give milk (Esposito 1910: 215; Plummer 1997: I.77-8, 238-9; Plummer 1997: II.93-4, 110, 148; Heist 1965: 237; Lucas 1989: 46-7).[12] And, of course, there are stories of heroes being suckled by she-wolves, including Amairgen the father of Saint Finnbarr of Cork (Plummer 1997: 65), Saint Ailbe of Emly (46), and more famously Cormac mac Airt (Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 121, 125-6), all of which are quite similar in certain respects to the well-known episode in the lives of Romulus and Remus, a story which also exists in a Middle Irish version (Freeman 1991). This type of story is a widespread international folktale, and she-wolves are often the animals which fulfil the role of nurturer for the heroic child (Dunn 1960: 94-105), but in certain cases this story type is much more than a mere entertaining folktale archetype.[13] This motif plays an important role in the Celtic expressions of the Indo-European institution of the youthful warrior-band, which has specific canine and lupine imagery and connections (Lincoln 1981: 125-7), as has been extensively detailed by Kim McCone (McCone 1984, 1986, and 1987; McCone 1990: 203-23). We shall now move the discussion from the Insular Celtic realm to the Classical Continental world, and specifically to the Romulus and Remus story just mentioned.

The relationship of Imbolc to the Lupercalia, which took place on February 15, has long been acknowledged by scholars who have dealt with the subject of the Irish holiday, but it has always been discussed primarily along the lines of the holiday's connections with a ritual purification or lustration (Vendryes 1924: 243-4; Hamp 1979/1980: 111). It will be useful to briefly review what took place on this occasion:[14] the Luperci, who were all youthful priests, would make a sacrifice of a dog and a goat in the Lupercal, the cave on the Palatine Hill where Romulus and Remus were purportedly suckled by the *lupa*; a mixture of the blood from these sacrifices was then placed on the foreheads of the youngest Luperci, and was then wiped away with a piece of wool saturated with milk, followed by ritual laughter; and finally, wearing only the skins of the goats just sacrificed, the Luperci would have a race around the boundaries of Rome, striking people – but especially women – with goat-skin thongs as they raced, which

was thought to be lucky and to promote fertility (Dumézil 1970: 1.346-9; Scullard 1981: 76-8). Dumézil found a number of these ritual actions mysterious, "unexplained, doubtless for lack of parallels among other peoples" (Dumézil 1970: 1.56), but there might be some answers to these questions which I will suggest later. We see in this ritual a sodality of youthful priests who, as discussed below, no doubt represent an earlier youthful warrior-band, of which Romulus and Remus themselves were the Roman mythic archetypes. We are well within the wider realm of what might be called "werewolf" rituals at this stage, in which youths are identified with wolves and live a wolf-like existence (the Irish reflex of this being the *fían*-bands), and indeed are claimed in some accounts to actually transform into wolves for a period of time in certain circumstances. We have plentiful examples of metamorphosis into wolves in classical sources, from Herodotus, Plato, Vergil, Ovid, Petronius Arbiter, Pliny the Elder, Pausanias, and even Saint Augustine of Hippo (Summers 1973: 133-56; Burkert 1983: 83-134; Buxton 1987: 67-74; Veenstra 2002: 135-46). Werewolves were especially associated with ancient Arcadia,[15] widely held to be the home of the oldest human race in mythographies, and Arcadian werewolf-rituals seemed to involve certain individuals singled out, who would strip naked and swim across a lake, emerging as wolves and spending a number of years in that shape, returning to cross the lake, clothing themselves and resuming their place in human society so long as they never ate human flesh while in wolf form. It is possible that the incident in Giraldus Cambrensis involving the priest's meeting with a werewolf, discussed recently by several scholars, is an extremely late remnant of this sort of lycanthropic phase (Bynum 2001: 77-111; Carey 2002: 48-64; Veenstra 2002: 148-50). A late source in the works of Pseudo-Plutarch shows the Arcadian ancestor/hero Parrhasios having a twin brother Lykastos, both of whom are engendered by Ares, and are abandoned and raised by a she-wolf;[16] other sources state that Apollo, who in his epithet as Lykeios was amply associated with dogs and wolves,[17] may have been born to Leto when the latter was in the form of a she-wolf (Gershenson 1991: 14), and his own son Miletos was suckled by wolves (Gershenson 1991: 12). The second-century physician Marcellus Sidetes reports that lycanthropy – the species of melancholy often associated with anti-social werewolf-like behaviour – as of especially high occurrence in the month of February[18] (Summers 1973: 38-41; Buxton 1987: 68). The nudity in these

instances is echoed in Trimalchio's story from Petronius' *Satyricon*, in later medieval werewolf stories (Veenstra 2002: 150), and in the behaviour of Celtic youthful warriors as attested in various classical and insular sources (McCone 1990: 205, 213), and indeed in the ritual actions of the Luperci (McCone 1990: 215). In terms of the flagellation aspect of the Lupercalia ritual, several comparanda from Pausanias come to mind, in which women are flagellated in a Dionysian ritual, or in which the Spartan ephebes were flagellated in rituals dedicated to Artemis Orthia (Otto 1965: 104); and indeed, Artemis as a virgin goddess whose cult is associated with bears further connects her to the virginal Brigit and their possible ancestries with bear-goddesses (Ó Catháin 1995: x-xi, 30).[19] I would also note that Cú Chulainn is flagellated by women in *Serglige Con Culainn* (Dillon 1953: 3 ll. 71-8), but on the occasion of Samain rather than Imbolc.

At this stage, we would do well to return to the specifically Celtic situation. There seems to be a hint at some sort of warrior-ritual present in the *Confessio* of St Patrick, in which he meets up with a group of Irish warriors, but for the sake of God refuses to suck their breasts (Hood 1978: 26, 44). This incident has been discussed by Bernhard Maier, connecting the report to various rituals attested in other cultures for coming under the protection of another party, and he also mentions the Gaulish deity Mars Cicollos (Maier 1999: 154-5), whose name seems to mean "Great-Breasts." In Roman Britain, Mars occurs at Barkway and South Shields under the name Mars Alator (De la Bédoyère 2002: 262), which might mean "Mars the Nourisher" (Ross 1967: 174; MacKillop 1998: 12; Irby-Massie 1999: 309).[20] In these Celtic reflexes of Mars, might we be seeing an indication of the *lupa* who suckled Romulus and Remus, a wolf as the symbol of the god Mars sent by the very god to nourish his sons, and thus these Gaulish and British instances reflecting Mars as, in effect, the "mother" of warriors and the warbands?[21] And therefore, in the ritual suggested by the lines from Patrick, perhaps the warband initiation involved being "nourished" by the breasts of the senior warriors of the *fían* concerned. Perhaps some sort of initiation ritual like this occurred at certain times of the year, and perhaps even at Imbolc.

In relation to the other great holidays of the Irish year, Samain and Imbolc are quite literally the bookends to the darkest quarter of the year, during which Winter Solstice occurs, and it seems that the

particular length of time involved in this was a time connected with warriors and warlike activities. There are several stone circles in southwestern Ireland which are unusually-aligned to the sunrises on the occasions of November to February, including the ones at Mill Little, Maughanaclea, and Derrynafinchin (Roberts 1996: 25, 27). This specific period of time is reported as such in the *Acallam na Senórach* as a time of exceptional hospitality (O'Grady 1892: 140; Dooley and Roe 1999: 65), but occurs especially in relation to Cú Chulainn, both in *Tochmarc Emire* (Van Hamel 1933: 31-32, 43) and in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*[22] (O'Rahilly 1967: 65, 184; O'Rahilly 1968: 59, 69, 75, 198, 208-9, 214) as a time during which Cú Chulainn stays awake on a martial vigil.[23] Lug and Cú Chulainn, though father and son, are in many respects portrayed as quite opposite to one another, god and mortal, king and warrior (Gray 1989/1990); and from what we have observed, Lugnasad and Imbolc are also quite opposite: Lugnasad, with its harvest fairs and legal activities, is in a sense the epitome of settled, civil life, the beginning of harvest and the end of summer, while Imbolc contrastingly takes place in the most barren time of year, and is the province of the youthful warrior outlaws and outcasts,[24] a liminal time befitting a liminal social class. As the dark quarter of the year is also a time associated with werewolf activity throughout Europe – especially the days near Winter Solstice, including the Twelve Days of Christmas (Kershaw 2000: 28, 122-4) – and in Scots Gaelic tradition with the activity of actual lupine depredations (Nicolson 1951: 411), it is also quite likely the time of greatest threat by the youthful warbands, and with the approach of Spring heralded by Imbolc, this period would come to an end. In this regard, it is interesting that St Brigit is associated in one story with removing the so-called *signa diabolica* from warriors, the signs they wore (whatever these might have consisted of, most likely some sort of sign on the head or perhaps a hairstyle[25]) which signified to others that they were engaged in warrior activities or *díbergach* (Sharpe 1979: 84; Ó Briain 1991: 101-2; Carey 2000: 174-5). If some form of Brigid was one of the presiding deities of Imbolc,[26] Brigit who was a bear-mother in origin but could easily have been a wolf-mother in Ireland (Ó Catháin 1995: 30), might have been the deity who removed these warrior-signs and reincorporated the youthful *fian*-warriors into regular society,[27] perhaps by the means of the purifying medium of milk, or, given the etymology I have suggested with *imb-*, perhaps even butter.[28] I would also note at this stage the quatrain on

Imbolc in the poem on the quarter days, which says that the washing of the head, hands and feet occurs on the festival, with the head being the likely location of the *signa*, and the hands perhaps associated with performing certain wolf-like actions of violence and thus needing to be cleansed. And thus, we might see in this particular constellation of motifs a possible answer to what the ritual circumstances and significances of Imbolc might have been. But further, this might at long last give us the meaning of the strange Lupercalia ritual, which in part was a commemoration of the suckling of the she-wolf. The blood of a dog and a goat – with the dog as an ambivalent guardian of flocks as well as a stand-in for the wolfish predator, and the goat as representative of the prey – marking the foreheads of the youthful Luperci and then being wiped off with milk might be a distant echo of the removal of the *signa diabolica*.[29]

To conclude, we might ask a few questions. To what extent is this account of Brigit's activities in removing the *signa diabolica* a specifically Christian invention, especially given the Irish Christian ambivalence about warriorhood and *díbergach* generally (Sharpe 1979; McCone 1990: 218-20), rather than perhaps a Christianisation of something that Brigit's pagan counterpart might have performed?[30] It is impossible to say for certain; however, the connection between her festival and the Lupercalia, close in date and most likely similar in significance, and the certain ritual detail of the Roman observance seems extremely coincidental at the very least, and possibly legitimately parallel and reflective of a wider Indo-European seasonal ritual connected with the warrior cult at best. The close relationship between predator and prey, between wolves and sheep (or goats),[31] is a feature which is preserved in the Lupercalia ritual, as well as in the presiding deity of the festival, most likely some form of Faunus or Pan (Wiseman 1995a) and in the fuller picture of the werewolf culture of Arcadia (Burkert 1983: 92-3), and thus the possibility arises that "butter-wolf"[32] and "milk of ewes" are not as different as they might at first seem. Admittedly, the new etymology of Imbolc that I have proposed here may not stand up to closer scrutiny; however, the first element in it does seem to have ample associations with the holiday itself, whether in the form of butter or the milk from which butter originates. However, this etymology might merely have functioned as a pseudo-Isidorean heuristic which has served to re-focus our attentions on certain smaller aspects of the holiday, especially the under-appreciated lupine aspects, which I believe are

now beyond doubt as having been important to the holiday as it would have been observed in pre-Christian times.[33]

University College Cork

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this paper to the memory of my stepfather, Frederick Andrew House (1947-2004), a warrior who went to his rest on January 21, 2004, just a short time before Imbolc. I would also like to thank John Carey, as ever, for his extremely helpful advice, suggestions, and support on this paper, as well as Máire Herbert, Kevin Murray, Emily Lyle, David Kraetzer, Sharon Paice MacLeod, David and Geo Trevarthen, and Aude Le Borgne.

Notes

1 While the tendency has been to represent Imbolc as part of the "Celtic ritual year," this specific name for the festival only occurs in the Goidelic context, and thus I do not think it is prudent or intellectually-sound to simply assume *a priori* that it has the wider Celtic applicability as well.

2 Ronald Hutton, who writes from the neo-pagan perspective, makes this the primary sense of the etymology (though he does present Hamp's finding that this etymology is incorrect, to be discussed presently) by referring to the passage in *Tochmarc Emire*, which explains the day as the day on which the ewes are milked (Hutton 1996: 134).

3 BL Rawlinson B 512, 97 b 2 line 24ff, BL Harleian 5280, 35 b 2, and RIA 23 N 10, 55.

4 Meyer 1894: 48-9. I have altered the translation to give "Imbolc" where Meyer has "Candlemas".

5 *DIL* gives a further figurative sense, "property" or "valuables", but this originates from the literal storing of butter as a preserved food which could be kept for times of emergency (Kelly 2000: 326).

6 The St Gall incantation to remove a thorn, which invokes Goibniu, is to be "laid in butter" (Stokes and Strachan 1975: 248); butter was the object of many superstitions in Ireland (Ó Sé 1949: 63).

7 In the Indo-European daughter-culture of India, butter is seen as the "essence" of milk (O'Flaherty 1980: 24-5); there are roots for libations in Indo-Iranian which suggests that both "milk" and "butter" go back to a common root **gau*, "milk products" (Lincoln 1981: 64 n. 88).

8 *DIL* takes *faílech*, "the end of winter", as a corruption of *fuidlech*, "the end of winter", from "remainder/remnant": but as the former is attested as early as *Cath Cairnd Chonaill* in *Lebor na hUidre* (Best and Bergin 1953: 292), and the -d- in the latter would have been lenited by the Middle Irish period so as to be a homophone with the former, it is most likely that the two words fell together in meaning increasingly in consequence.

9 There seems to be a connection with wind and wolves in many contexts (Ridley 1976: 327), including Rome and Greece, and in Byzantion the name of the month corresponding to February is *Lykeios* (Gershenson 1991: 36-7 and *passim*). In Welsh, one of the words meaning "sea" is *gweilgi*, which is an exact cognate of the Irish word *fáelchú*, "wolf".

10 Much more regularly, the animal of the day is the bear, but in certain locales it is a wolf instead. Aude Le Borgne has informed me that, according to Bobbé (2000), there is a contest in the Pyrenees and, if the bear is seen before the wolf, Spring will come.

11 These miracles could be classed as a subtype of the miracles listed as "Saint Feeds Wolf" in the list of motifs in Irish hagiographies by Dorothy Ann Bray (Bray 1992: 90).

12 There are also a few instances in which wolves intervene to bring about the prophecies of Brigit in particular (Carey 2000: 173-4, 177).

13 Bruce Lincoln suggests that the prototype of these myths was a primordial cow who nourished the first humans, but that in the case of Rome it became a more warlike animal, the she-wolf, so that the children would be more like the she-wolf (Lincoln 1981: 86-7).

14 The studies of T. P. Wiseman on the subject of the Romulus and Remus myth (Wiseman 1995b) and on the identity of the god to whom the festival of the Lupercalia was dedicated (Wiseman 1995a) are both excellent and useful, both as important studies in themselves, and as

thorough treatments and reviews of the original sources for the myths and the record of the ritual which we have.

15 Although some stories of bear-connected figures also exist in this region, including those of Kallisto and Arkas, the latter of whom gives his name to the region (Burkert 1983: 77, 87), the connection between bears, wolves, and werewolf-warriors is attested throughout Europe (Kershaw 2000: 42-5).

16 While this is not the place to elaborate upon this particular story, I would not simply dismiss it as a mere "calque" (Bremmer and Horsfall 1987: 31), but rather as a particularly ingenious use of various traditions by the mythographer which, though they might not be presenting ancient traditions, nonetheless provide meaningful further dimensions to an already-established set of myths involving youthful werewolves. The myth of Lykaon may also be another such mythography, purporting to tell the origin of the Arcadian werewolf-cult through a doublet of the Tantalos/Pelops myth (Kirk 1974: 239-41).

17 G. S. Kirk believes that this epithet of Apollo has to do with a cult origin in Lycia, Asia Minor (Kirk 1974: 257-8).

18 It seems to be recognised that February, then as now, was a dark and cold month, and thus perhaps this form of melancholia might be connected to some form of what is now known as seasonal affective disorder; however, as I am not a physician or psychiatrist I can not state this with confidence.

19 There is a late prayer asking Brigit's protection for livestock, and naming fox, bear, and wolf as three animals from which to be protected (Carmichael 1992: 134).

20 There are some philological difficulties with this name, as *-ator* is a Latin agent suffix, rather than a Celtic one (although the proper Latin reflex for this would be *Alitor*); but, nonetheless, the basic root meaning "to nourish" does exist in Celtic.

21 In the Barabaig society of Tanzania, the leader of the hunting-party of fame-seeking warriors was called the *kamatalogot*, or "mother of the hunt" (Aposporos 2004: 82).

22 In the Dindshenchas account of Áth Luain, the battle of the two great bulls from the *Táin* is detailed, and in one verse, it says that the undefeated bull emerged after Imbolc (Gwynn 1913: 370-1).

23 It has been suggested that Cú Chulainn represents the dark youthful warrior figure in contrast to Lug as the light youthful warrior, whose great holiday is at the opposite end of the year to Imbolc, and that Imbolc might have been a day specifically associated with the Ulster hero (Olmsted 1994: 116-26). In some of the proverbs given by Nicolson, Faoilleach and Iuchar, February and July/August/the "dog-days", are connected (Nicolson 1951: 183, 163), and the time of Lugnasad is close to the dog-days, and indeed the Scottish season's name may have a connection with a character called Iuchar in the story of Lug and the Children of Tuireann, who in that story did turn into a dog on one occasion (MacNeill 1962: 5, 15-6).

24 See the discussion which follows, as well as note 26 below (Patterson 1994: 132). The infertility of this time of year is implied in the passage from *Tochmarc Emire* §55 (Van Hamel 1933: 43); the liminality of warriors is a widespread characteristic, and the youthful warrior-class as specifically non-reproductive also seems to be a feature of the social structure involved (Lyle 1997: 63-4).

25 Many Northern European pre-Christian warrior societies seem to have had such a hairstyle (Kershaw 2000: 48-50).

26 The Pseudo-Historical Prologue to the *Senchas Már* contains a reference to Bríg Ambue (Carey 2000: 144), which might be "Brigid of the Cowless Warrior" (McCone 1990: 162-3), i.e. the youthful and liminal warriors without property, and it appears that raiding by these warriors often took place in this season (Patterson 1994: 132). A Scottish hunting blessing asked for the intercession of many saints, notably Brigit, "Bride of the milk and kine", invoked three times (Carmichael 1992: 116-17).

27 Note the opposition created in the spell from the Codex Sancti Pauli, between, on the one hand, wolves and deer (wild), and, on the other hand, corn and milk (domestic) (Stokes and Strachan 1975: 293; McCone 1990: 207). A further parallel might be a situation involving a youthful warrior initiation in East Africa amongst the Nuer and Dinka, in which the youthful initiates are given cuts on their foreheads, which they are expected to endure heroically and without flinching or crying (Lincoln 1981: 25-6). The ritual laughter, in a liminal and possibly initiatory situation in which death is involved, might be a sign of life and a ritual of incorporation into the community for the youths involved (Bremmer 1983: 86-7).

28 Roman women used wolves' fat to anoint the doorposts of their husbands' houses (Ó Catháin 1995: 28); the Modern Irish word *imbealuighim*, "I grease" (containing the word for "butter"), can carry the meaning of "I anoint". The Scottish hunter's blessing that invokes Bride was performed with an anointing with oil on the young hunter's forehead (Carmichael 1992: 601). A further comparandum might be found amongst the Barabaig of Tanzania, who anoint the heads of *ghadyirochand* or "heroes" who have demonstrated their skill in slaying dangerous animals (mostly lions and elephants), with butter, signifying a blessing by the spirits (Aposporos 2004: 86).

29 Romulus and Remus, as well as Cormac mac Airt, were all "royal" figures who had youths spent in warbands and were suckled by she-wolves. Julius Caesar seemed to reinstitute the Lupercalia with a view to creating "a rough draft of the imperial cult" (Dumézil 1970: 1.349-50). Butter was specifically a food fit for the upper classes in Old Irish legal writings (Kelly 2000: 326), and *im ur*, "fresh butter", was added to the porridge of foster children who were the sons of chieftains and was a superior grade of butter (Ó Sé 1949: 64). Is it therefore further possible that this ritual of the "butter-wolf", the suckling she-wolf/goddess who both nourishes and eventually cleanses the youthful warriors, some of whom will go on to be kings, a specifically royal ritual?

30 It might be possible, since Candlemas is a festival in which Jesus was presented in the temple and of Mary's purification (Hutton 1996: 139), that this festival is connected with the Christian celebration for the slim reason of an infant child's involvement and a "purification," parallel to the wolf-suckled infants and the lustration; however, I do not wish to insist on this slight parallel.

31 The protection spell invoking Brigit against wolves, bears and foxes does so on behalf of sheep and goats, as well as other domestic animals (Carmichael 1992: 134).

32 It might be the case that at the Indo-European level, the animal was a *milk-wolf, given the specific circumstances in the Lupercalia ritual, which was then a "butter-wolf" in the Irish case.

33 The connection between wolves and agriculture is something that has been dealt with elsewhere, especially in terms of the luck associated with the "corn-wolf" appearing at harvest or being a protector of flocks (Frazer 1922: 519-22, 728-9; Ridley 1976: 327-9; Gershenson 1991:

118-22); it would be useful to fit what has been suggested here into that larger picture at some stage.

References

Aposporos, Demetra (2004). Hunting for Glory with the Barabaig of Tanzania. *National Geographic* 206 No. 1 (July), 76-93.

Best, Richard Irvine and Osborn Bergin (1953). *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Black, Ronald I. (1985). The Gaelic Calendar Months: Some Meanings and Derivations. *Shadow* 2, 3-13.

Bobbé, Sophie (2002). *L'ours et le loup: Essai d'anthropologie symbolique*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Bray, Dorothy Ann (1992). *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Bremmer, Jan (1983). *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bremmer, Jan N. and N. M. Horsfall (1987). *Roman Myth and Mythography, Bulletin Supplement 52*. London: University of London Institute of Classical Studies.

Burkert, Walter, tr. Peter Bing (1983). *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Buxton, Richard (1987). Wolves and Werewolves in Greek Thought. In *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. Jan Bremmer, pp. 60-79. London and Sydney: Croom Helm.

Bynum, Caroline Walker (2001). *Metamorphosis and Identity*. New York: Zone Books.

Carey, John (2000). *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

---- (2002). Werewolves in Medieval Ireland. *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 44, 37-72.

Carmichael, Alexander (1992). *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations Collected in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland in the Last Century*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.

Connolly, Sean, and J.-M. Picard (1987). Cogitosus: *Life of Saint Brigit*. *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117, 11-27.

Danaher, Kevin (1972). *The Year in Ireland: Irish Calendar Customs*. Cork: Mercier Press.

De la Bédoyère, Guy (2002). *Gods with Thunderbolts: Religion in Roman Britain*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing.

Dictionary of the Irish Language, Compact Edition (1983). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy. [= *DIL*]

Dillon, Myles (1953). *Serglige Con Culainn.* Medieval and Modern Irish Series, Vol. 14. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Dineen, Patrick S. (1927). *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla: An Irish-English Dictionary*. Dublin: Irish Texts Society.

Doniger O'Flaherty, Wendy (1980). *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dooley, Ann and Harry Roe (1999). *Tales of the Elders of Ireland: A New Translation of Acallam na Senórach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dumézil, Georges, tr. Philip Krapp (1970). *Archaic Roman Religion.* 2 vols. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Dunn, Charles W. (1960). *The Foundling and the Werewolf: A Literary-Historical Study of Guillame de Palerne*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Esposito, Mario (1910). *Conchubrani Vita Sanctae Monennae*. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 28C, 202-51.

Frazer, James George (1922). *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (Abridged Edition)*. New York: Macmillan.

Freeman, Philip M. (1991). A Middle-Irish Version of the Romulus and Remus Story. *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 11, 1-13.

Gershenson, Daniel E. (1991). *Apollo the Wolf-God. Journal of Indo-European Studies* Monograph 8. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man.

Gray, Elizabeth A. (1989/1990). Lug and Cú Chulainn: King and Warrior, God and Man. *Studia Celtica* 24/25, 38-52.

Gwynn, Edward (1913). *The Metrical Dindshenchas III.* Todd Lecture Series, Volume 10. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

Hamp, Eric (1979/1980). imbolc, óimelc. *Studia Celtica* 14/15, 106-13.

Heist, W. W. (1965). *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae ex Codice Olim Salmanticensi nunc Bruxellensi*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes.

Hood, A. B. E. (1978). *St. Patrick: His Writings and Muirchu's Life*. London and Chichester: Phillimore and Co.

Hutton, Ronald (1996). *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Irby-Massie, Georgia L. (1999). *Military Religion in Roman Britain*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Kelly, Fergus (2000). *Early Irish Farming*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Kershaw, Kris (2000). *The One-Eyed God: Odin and the (Indo-)Germanic Männerbünde. Journal of Indo-European Studies* Monograph 36. Washington, D. C.: Institute for the Study of Man.

Kirk, G. S. (1974). *The Nature of Greek Myths*. London: Penguin Books.

Kondratiev, Alexei (1998). *The Apple Branch: A Path to Celtic Ritual*. Cork: The Collins Press.

Lincoln, Bruce (1981). *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lucas, A. T. (1989). *Cattle in Ancient Ireland*. Kilkenny: Boethius Press.

Lyle, Emily (1997). Age Grades, Age Classes and Alternate Succession: A Restatement of the Basis at the Societal Level of Indo-European Symbolic Partition. *Emania* 16, 63-71.

MacKillop, James (1998). *Oxford Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MacNeill, Máire (1962). *The Festival of Lughnasa: A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of Harvest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mahon, Bríd (1998). *Land of Milk and Honey: The Story of Traditional Irish Food and Drink*. Cork: Mercier Press.

Maier, Bernhard (1999). *Sugere mammellas*: A Pagan Irish Custom and its Affinities. In *Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Celtic Studies, Volume One: Language, Literature, History,*

Culture, ed. Ronald Black, William Gillies, and Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, 152-61. East Linton: Tuckwell Press.

McCone, Kim (1984). *Aided Cheltchair Maic Uthechair*: Hounds, Heroes and Hospitallers in Early Irish Myth and Story. *Ériu* 35, 1-30.

---- (1985). Varia II, 2. OIr. *Olc*, *Luch-* and IE **wĺkʷos*, **lúkʷos* "wolf." *Ériu* 36, 171-6.

---- (1986). Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga* and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland. *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12, 1-22.

---- (1987). Hund, Wolf und Krieger bei den Indogermanen. In *Studien zum indogermanischen Wortschatz*, ed. Wolfgang Meid, 101-54. Innsbruck: IBS.

---- (1990). *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. Maynooth: An Sagart.

McCormick, Finbar (1995). Cows, Ringforts and the Origins of Early Christian Ireland. *Emania* 13, 33-7.

Meyer, Kuno (1894). *Hibernica Minora: being a Fragment of an Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

---- (1994). *Sanas Cormaic (Cormac's Glossary), compiled by Cormac Úa Cuilennáin, King-Bishop of Cashel in the Tenth Century, edited from the copy in the Yellow Book of Lecan*. Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers.

Nicolson, Alexander (1951). *Gaelic Proverbs*, reprinted by Malcolm MacInnes. Glasgow: Caledonian Press.

Ó Briain, Máirtín (1991). The Horse-Eared Kings of Irish Tradition and St. Brigit. In *Crossed Paths: Methodological Approaches to the Celtic Aspect of the European Middle Ages*, ed. Benjamin T. Hudson and Vickie Ziegler, pp. 83-113. Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America.

Ó Catháin, Séamas (1995). *The Festival of Brigit: Celtic Goddess & Holy Woman*. Dublin: DBA Publications.

---- (1999). The Festival of Brigit the Holy Woman. *Celtica* 23, 231-60.

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás (1977). *The Heroic Biography of Cormac mac Airt*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

O'Donovan, John (1868). *Cormac's Glossary*, ed. Whitley Stokes. Calcutta: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society.

O'Grady, Standish Hayes (1892). *Silva Gadelica: A Collection of Tales in Irish, Irish Text*. London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate.

Ó hAodha, Donncha (1978). *Bethu Brigte*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Olmsted, Garrett S. (1994). *The Gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans*. Innsbruck: Archaeolingua.

O'Neill, Dennis and Courtney Davis (1999). *Celtic Beasts: Animal Motifs and Zoomorphic Design in Celtic Art*. London: Blandford/Cassell.

O'Rahilly, Cecile (1967). *Táin Bó Cúailnge, Recension I*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

---- (1968). *Táin Bó Cúalnge, from the Book of Leinster*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Ó Sé, Mícheál (1949). Old Irish Buttermaking. *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 54 part 2, 61-7.

Otto, Walter F., tr. Robert B. Palmer (1965). *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Patterson, Nerys Thomas (1994). *Cattle-Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Early Ireland*. 2nd edn. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press.

Plummer, Charles (1997). *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae, Volumes I and II*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Ridley, Richard A. (1976). Wolf and Werewolf in Baltic and Slavic Tradition. Journal of Indo-European Studies 4, 321-31.

Roberts, Jack (1996). *The Stone Circles of Cork & Kerry: An Astronomical Guide*. Dublin: Bandia Ireland.

Ross, Anne (1967). *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Sadowska, Ewa (1997). "Horses Led by a Mare": Martial Aspects of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. *Emania* 17, 5-48.

Scullard, H. H. (1981). *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Sharpe, Richard (1979). Hiberno-Latin *Laicus*, Irish *Láech* and the Devil's Men. *Ériu* 30, 75-92.

Stokes, Whitley (1887). *The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with other documents relating to that saint, Part I*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Stokes, Whitley (1995). *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore: A Facsimile Reprint from Anecdota Oxoniensia*. Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers.

Stokes, Whitley and John Strachan (1975). *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus: A Collection of Old Irish Glosses, Scholia, Prose and Verse, Volume II: Non-Biblical Glosses and Scholia, Old Irish Prose, Names of Persons and Places, Inscriptions, Verse, Indexes*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Summers, Montague (1973). *The Werewolf*. Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press.

Van Gennep, Arnold (1934). *Le Folklore de la Bourgogne (Côte-d'Or), avec une Discussion Théorique sur le Prétendu Culte des Sources*. Paris: Librarie Orientale et Américaine.

Van Hamel, A. G. (1933). *Compert Con Culainn and Other Stories, Medieval and Modern Irish Series Volume III*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Veenstra, Jan. R. (2002). The Ever-Changing Nature of the Beast: Cultural Change, Lycanthropy and the Question of Substantial Transformation (from Petronius to Del Rio). In *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan. N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, pp. 133-66. Leuven and Paris: Peeters.

Vendryes, J. (1924). Imbolc. *Revue Celtique* 41, 241-4.

Wiseman, T. P. (1995a). The God of the Lupercal. *Journal of Roman Studies* 85, 1-22.

---- (1995b). *Remus: A Roman Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Imbolc, Candlemas, and The Feast of St Brigit

THOMAS TORMA

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to explore and better understand the relationship between the holidays of Imbolc, Candlemas and The Feast of St Brigit. Bealtaine, Samhain, and Lughnasa all survived to a lesser or greater degree in Ireland well into the modern period, without the support and benefit of a saint's day and official church support. Only Imbolc, of all the quarter holidays, was replaced by a Christian holiday. The Feast of St Brigit, like the pagan holiday of Imbolc, falls on 1 February. While it seems inevitable that the sharing of the calendar date would have benefitted the cult of St Brigit, it seems more likely that February 1st was more of an attempt to associate Brigit with the Virgin Mary, through Candlemas, a Christian festival which falls on 2 February, than it was an attempt to associate her with a previously pagan holiday. As we shall see, there were numerous attempts to associate Mary and Brigit elsewhere within the Brigidine tradition and by placing St Brigit's feast day on the day preceding Candlemas, the connections between the two figures were strengthened.

HISTORY OF CANDLEMAS

We can be fairly certain that Candlemas itself was imported into Ireland during the Old Irish period.[1] The festival is also called "Purification of the Blessed Virgin" or "Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple". In accordance with Mosaic Law, Mary was required to spend forty days in seclusion after the birth of her son:

> On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. (Lev. 12; 3-4, New International Version)

Cosmos 18 (2002), 77-85.

Conveniently, the Bible confirms that Mary did wait this period, and that the Christ Child was taken to the temple in Jerusalem where Mary sought to present him to the lord and make the appropriate sacrifices as prescribed in the law (Luke 2:22 f., New International Version). This gives us a rare case of solid relative chronology – forty days after his birth Mary was purified and Christ was presented at the temple.

We can be certain that this event was celebrated no later than the early fourth century when it was attested by Egeria:

> Note that the Fortieth Day after Epiphany is observed here with special magnificence. On this day they assemble in the Anastasis. Everyone gathers, and things are done with the same solemnity as at the feast of Easter. All the Presbyters preach first, then the bishop, and they interpret the passage from the Gospel about Joseph and Mary taking the Lord to the Temple, and about Simeon and the prophetess Anna, daughter of Phanuel, seeing the Lord, and what they said to him, and about the sacrifice offered by his parents. When all the rest has been done in the proper way, they celebrate the sacrament and have their dismissal. (Egeria, tr. Wilkinson 1981: §26; cf. Fraser, ed., 1994: §XXVI)

This description pre-dates the arrival of Patrick in Ireland by approximately one century. It indicates that in the East the Feast of the Epiphany (6 January) was celebrated as the time of Christ's birth. In the West, the Feast of the Nativity was separated from the Feast of the Epiphany at some time in the early to middle fourth century (Ferguson 1998: 251), and the first evidence of December 25 as the date of Christmas dates from the early fourth century. In accordance with this date for Christ's birth, Candlemas would have been celebrated on February 2, forty days after the 25th of December.

IMBOLC AND PURITY

If a connection could be made out between the pagan festival and the idea of purity, the emphasis on the purification of Mary would give this holiday a natural association with Imbolc. This association can be seen in a verse from a poem on the quarter holidays:

Fromad cach bíd iar n-urd,
issed dlegair i n-Imbulc,
díunnach laime is coissi is cinn,
is amlaid sin atberim.

Tasting each food after the other,
This is what is necessary at Imbolc.
Washing of hand and foot and head
It is thus that I say to you. (Meyer, ed., 1894: 49) [2]

According to Eric Hamp, this link can also be seen in the etymology of the word Imbolc, which, he argues, derives from Indo-European *uts-molgo, which he translates as purification. This eventually changed to *ommolg meaning milking (Hamp 1979/80: 109-11). Bishop Cormac defines Óimelc, which is phonetically similar to *ommolg and another term for Imbolc, as "the time the sheep's milk comes. milking i.e. the milk that is milked" (Cormac, tr. O'Donovan, ed. Stokes, 1868: 127). Ó Catháin and Hamp argue that Cormac may have arrived at this explanation from "oí", meaning "sheep", and "melg", meaning "milk". Ultimately, they reject Cormac's explanation solely on the grounds that the beginning of February is too early for sheep to lamb. (Ó Catháin 1995: 7; Hamp 1979/80: 106-7). However, 11 days were removed from the calendar in 1752; thus, Imbolc, and Saint Brigit's day, would have been celebrated in what is now mid-February, approximately the time when sheep begin to lamb (Ryder 1983: 679-80). While this does not completely undermine Ó Catháin and Hamp's etymology, it does eliminate their reason for rejecting Cormac's explanation, and thus the etymological link between purity and Imbolc also needs to be called into question. Ó Catháin is correct in pointing out that, if lambing was associated with Imbolc, we do not know what the role of the lactating sheep might have been (Ó Catháin 1995: 8). We have no warrant to assume that sheep, or sheep's milk, were ever associated with purity during pagan times, and we cannot be sure of a pagan association with purity at this time of the year. However, given a lack of other evidence, it is just as possible that the emphasis on purity, if there truly was such an emphasis regarding Imbolc, comes from Christianity's Candlemas – a holiday clearly associated with purity before its arrival in Ireland.

RECONSIDERING THE CASE

The occurrence of Imbolc and Candlemas on adjacent days in the calendar appears to be little more than coincidence. Certainly, Imbolc was replaced by the Christian holidays of the Feast of Brigit and Candlemas. Of all the words for the Celtic quarter holidays, Samhain, Lughnasa, Bealtaine and Imbolc, it is only Imbolc which has faded from the Irish language. Indeed, this seems to have happened at an early point. In the Book of Leinster version of the *Táin Bó Culaigne*, which seems to date from the twelfth century (O'Rahilly, ed., 1967: xlvi), we find: "*on lúan re samain sáinriuth cossin cetáin iar n-imbulc*" (from Monday after Samhain specifically until the Wednesday after Imbolc) (O'Rahilly, ed., 1967: 59, ll. 2158-9) while in the Stowe version, a fourteenth- century modernisation of the same text, this is changed to "*ier bfel Brigde*"(after St Brigit's festival). (O'Rahilly, ed., 1961: 79, l. 2199). We also find that "*o lúan taite s?amna co tate imbuilg*" (from the Monday following Samhain until after Imbolc) in the Book of Leinster (O'Rahilly, ed., 1967: 69, l. 2517) becomes "*go taitte n-earraigh*" (until after Spring) in the Stowe version (O'Rahilly, ed., 1961: 88, l. 2757).

This transition is typically explained as syncretism of the pagan holiday with the Christian one, which, to a certain extent, almost certainly happened.[3] Most recently this subject has been treated by Daniel McCarthy, who has drawn attention to the following passage at the end of Cogitosus's c. seventh-century *Vita Secunda Sanctae Brigitae*:

> And who can count the different crowds and numberless people flocking from all the provinces – some for the abundant feasting, others for the healing of their afflictions, others to watch the pageant of the crowds, others with great gifts and offerings to join in the solemn celebrations of the feast of Saint Brigit who, freed from care, cast off the burden of the flesh and followed the lamb of God into the heavenly mansions, having fallen asleep on the 1st day of the month of February. (Cogitosus, tr. Connolly and Picard, 1987: §31.10)

McCarthy argues, on the basis of this passage, that Kildare was a pagan cultic centre which allowed its celebrations to be absorbed into

the Christian faith (2000: 279). In particular he notes the "great gifts and offerings", which would provide ample motive for a monastery to wish to absorb an already existing festival. Of course, a medieval saint's cult needed no pagan holiday as an excuse to promote their saint's feast day. It seems more likely that this passage simply proves that Kildare had an effective system of advertising to pilgrims and devotees.

The work of Cogitosus himself seems to support that point. The main thrust of the work is to promote Kildare. McCarthy argues that the placement of the descriptions of Kildare, and specifically the dating of her feast date as 1 February, at the end of the text indicates that it was little more than an afterthought. However, approximately one fifth of the body of the *Vita Secunda* is concerned with advertising Kildare, in addition to which a large preface to the text is also concerned with promoting Kildare. The bias towards Kildare is so strong that the text sometimes reads as little more than propaganda. The fact that Cogitosus, in this carefully crafted text, placed his descriptions of Kildare at the beginning and end of the text indicates that he was aware that these are the strongest points of any literary text. The placement of the feast date at the very end of the text indicates that this is the central to the message that Cogitosus is attempting to deliver, not a mere afterthought. Indeed, if we are going to question Cogitosus, it seems that it would be better to question him on the size and scale of the celebrations, which are not mentioned elsewhere in any text of which I am aware.

BRIGIT AND MARY

It is possible that Brigit's feast day was situated on the first of February due to the fact that the early Brigidine devotees were eager to associate Brigit with the Blessed Virgin Mary. In *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigite*, which, it should be noted, is roughly contemporary with Cogitosus' work, and *Bethu Brigte*, which dates from the ninth century, Brigit is asked by a nun to go with her to a synod in Mag Lifi (Liffey Plain) (Connolly, tr., 1989: §15; Ó hAodha, ed., 1978: §11). As she approaches, a bishop, identified as Ibor in the *Bethu Brigte*, but not specifically named in the Latin texts, is telling the congregation of a dream in which he saw Mary coming to dwell

amongst the Irish. As Brigit enters, the bishop recognises her as this Mary:

> *"Haec est Maria quae inter vos habitet." Is and do-luid in challech 7 Brigit don dail. "Haec est Maria quae a me in somnis vissia est."*
>
> "Here is the Mary who will live amongst you." It is then that the nun and Brigit came to the assembly. "This is Mary who was seen by me in sleep." (Ó hAodha, ed., 1978: §11)

The *Vita I* adds for good measure "*Tunc omnes glorificauerunt eam quasi in typo Mariae*." (Then they all glorified her as if she were a kind of Mary.) (Connolly, ed., 1970: 6 ll. 17-18; cf. Connolly, tr., 1989: §15) The *Bethu Brigte* makes a bolder claim, adding that this synod was held in the place that was to become Kildare, and that Ibor predicted that the site would become the richest in all of Ireland (Ó hAodha, ed., 1978: §11).

Bray has pointed out that while Brigit is compared to Mary, other Irish female saints are often compared to Brigit (Bray 1989: 28). We have seen that Brigit is referred to in §11 of the *Bethu Brigte* in the following manner "*Haec est Maria quae inter vos habitet*" ("Here is the Mary who will live amongst you [the Irish]"), and is called a kind of Mary in §15 of the *Vita I*. Furthermore, in *Ultán's Hymn*, Brigit is referred to as "*in máthir Ísu*" (the mother of Jesus) (Stokes and Strachan, ed., 1903: 325, li.20). Margaret MacCurtain has pointed out that, although Mary was always a popular figure, it is only in the last hundred and fifty years that Mary began to become the important and central figure that typifies the Irish church today (1980: 541). However, this does not mean that Mary was not a figure in early Irish devotion. The figure of Mary appears in numerous early Irish texts, as well as on St Cuthbert's coffin made in Lindisfarne, St Martin's Cross on Iona and in illustrations within the Book of Kells, and is mentioned in several early poems (O'Carroll 2000: 181; O'Dwyer 1988:46-75).[4] Bray points out that the image of Mary served to maximise the Christian aspects of Brigit while clearly distancing her from the pagan past (1989: 32).

Given the shortage of evidence for ritual behaviour or mythological associations with Imbolc, the role of Candlemas in the establishment of St Brigit's Festival date on 1 February warrants

further consideration. Although Kildare and, more generally the cult of Brigit, almost certainly benefitted from the coincidence of dating with the pagan festival, it is impossible to say what that benefit was. As a result the assertion that that the Feast of Brigit is just a Christianised Imbolc, however likely, is still just a guess. On the other hand, we can be certain that the cult of Brigit benefitted by being associated with Mary. Her biographers were eager to make this association and placing her festival day on the day before Candlemas would have strengthened that purpose.

University of Ulster at Coleraine

Notes

1 The earliest attestation which I have been able to find is from the *Navigatio Brendani*, which dates from the late eighth to early ninth centuries (Dumville 1988: 102).

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations accompanying Irish or Latin passages are my own.

3 Catherine McKenna offers a comprehensive study of the relationship between the goddess and saint as seen by nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors (2001: 70-108; particular attention is paid to Imbolc at 104-5).

4 O'Dwyer (1988) offers a complete reading of the history of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ireland.

References

Bray, Dorothy Ann (1989). *Secunda Brigida*: Saint Ita of Killeedy and Brigidine Tradition. In *Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples: Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies.* ed. Cyril J. Byrne et al. pp. 27-39. Halifax: D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, Saint Mary's University.

Cogitosus, tr. S. Connolly and J. M. Picard (1987). *Life of St. Brigit.* In *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117, 11-27.

Connolly, Sean, ed. (1970). *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University College, Dublin.

----, tr. (1989). *Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae*: Background and Historical Value. In *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 119, 5-49.

Cormac, tr. John O'Donovan, Whitley Stokes, ed. (1862). *Sanas Chormaic, Cormac's Glossary*. Calcutta: Printed by O. T. Cutter for the Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society.

Dumville, David (1988). Two Approaches to the Dating of *Navigatio sancti Brendani*. *Studi Medievali*, 3rd ser., 29, 87-102; repr. in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature and History: An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. J. M. Wooding, pp. 120-32. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.

Egeria, tr. and ed. Michael Fraser (1994). Egeria and The Fourth Century Liturgy of Jerusalem. (Online). Durham, Department of Theology, University of Durham. Accessed 26th July, 2004. Available from http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mikef/durham/egetra.html

Egeria, tr. J. Wilkinson (1981). *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land.* Revised edn. Warminster: Aris and Phillips.

Ferguson, E. (1998). *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*. 2nd edn. New York and London: Garland Publishing.

Hamp, Eric (1979/80). "Imbolc/Oimelc". *Studia Celtica* 14-15, 106-13.

MacCurtain, Margaret (1980). Towards an Appraisal of the Religious Image of Women. In *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies*, vol. 4, no 1, pp. 539-43. Dublin: Blackwater Press.

McCarthy, Daniel (2000). The Chronology of Saint Brigit of Kildare. *Peritia* 14, 255-81.

McKenna, Catherine (2001). Apotheosis and Evanescence: The Fortunes of Saint Brigit in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. In *The Individual in Celtic Literatures, CSANA Yearbook 1* ed. Joseph Falaky Nagy, pp. 74-108. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Meyer, Kuno (1894). *Hibernica Minora: being a Fragment of an Old-Irish Treatise on the* Psalter. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

O'Carroll, Michael (1999). Our Lady in Early Medieval Ireland. In *Seanchas* ed. Alfred P. Smyth, pp. 178-181. Dublin: Four Courts Press

Ó Catháin, Séamas (1995). *The Festival of Brigit*. Dublin: DBA Publications.

O'Dwyer, Peter (1988). *Mary: A History of Devotion in Ireland*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Ó hAodha, Donncha, ed. (1978). *Bethu Brigte*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

O'Rahilly, Cecile, ed. (1961). *The Stowe version of Tain bo Cuailnge*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

----, ed. (1967). *Táin Bó Cúailnge: Book of Leinster Recension*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Ryder, Michael (1983). *Sheep and Man*. London: Duckworth.

Stokes, Whitley and John Strachan, ed. (1901-3). *Ultán's Hymn*. In *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* vol. II. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Sacrifice at Samain: The Figure of Cromm Cruaich

MARCOS A. BALÉ

In a certain number of medieval Irish texts an idol called Cenn Cruaich or *Cromm* Cruaich is described. We are told that this idol was worshipped by the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland. Some of the sources tell us that it was worshipped at Samain. The importance of these accounts should not be underestimated. They purport to describe a ritual which was performed during a festive day of major importance for the pre-Christian inhabitants of Ireland. This kind of account is not common in the medieval literature, as the bulk of evidence for rituals in Ireland is of a much later date.

Mícheal Ó Duigeannáin divides the material in relation to Cromm Cruaich into two groups: Patrician sources and literary sources (1940: 296). The Patrician sources include several passages from Latin and Irish lives of Patrick. The literary sources include evidence from the *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dinnsheanchas*. I prefer to call the literary sources secular from now on, as the assumption that hagiography is not literature seems questionable. These two bodies of evidence also differ in date as we will see, and we can therefore also refer to the Patrician group of texts as the early sources, and the secular group of texts as the later sources of the legend of Cromm Cruaich. A third group could be added to O'Duigeannáin's division, and this comes from the Annalistic records. This last group of sources, however, is so much based on the secular sources that its accounts will not be included in the discussion in this paper.

I shall begin by summarising the different accounts of the legend that we have in the primary sources.[1]

The Patrician sources comprise passages found in Colgan's *Vita Quarta* and *Vita Tertia*, and the *Vita Tripartita*. The dating of these sources is difficult: according to Ludwig Bieler, the *Vita Quarta* cannot be earlier than the first half of the eighth century or later than the eleventh century (Bieler 1971: 7). The *Vita Tertia* is dated between the year 800 and 1130 (Bieler 1971: 25-6). Following Jackson's study on the dating of *Vita Tripartita* (Jackson 1986: 15) it

Cosmos 18 (2002), 87-101.

is generally accepted that the bulk of the text is late Old Irish, but was revised in the tenth century. Given the extensive overlap of these estimates, it is difficult to arrange the texts in a definitive sequence; all that we can say with any confidence is that the earliest possible date for the *Vita Quarta* is the first half of the eighth century, and that the other Patrician sources belong to a period which concludes in the first half of the twelfth century.

In Colgan's *Vita Quarta* (Bieler 1971: 99), we are told of an idol covered in gold and silver in Mag Slécht, flanked by two rows of "gods" covered in copper. King Láegaire, – who reigned at the time of Patrick – and all his people worshipped this idol "because a demon lived inside it and gave answers to the people". Patrick approached and threatened the idol with his crozier, causing the stone to turn to the side. A mark was left on its side as if the crozier had hit the stone, even though it did not touch it. Also, the earth swallowed the twelve other images only leaving the heads at ground level. Finally, Patrick sent the demon into the abyss, thus obtaining the thanks of the people of Ireland and inspiring their conversion to Christianity. No name is given to the idol in this source. It is only in Colgan's *Vita Tertia* (Bieler 1971: 151) that we are told that the idol is called Ceneroth (i.e. Cenn Cróich). But the account provides almost no extra detail besides this name, and an alternative ending: here, the image is broken up by the power of Patrick's prayer. The *Vita Tripartita*[2] gives a more detailed account of Patrick's conflict with the idol, expanding on the story told in the *Vita Quarta*. The idol here is called Cend Cruaích, and is referred to as the "chief idol of Ireland". Several details are given about the way in which the stone turned to its side, apparently giving a clear picture of the state of the site at the time of writing. Finally, we are told that Patrick founded a church called Domnach Maige Slécht there, and also that a well was created in the proximity, where many were baptised.

The later sources offer a further perspective on the story of the idol. All of the texts pertaining to this group belong to the Middle Irish period thus we can date the corpus as a whole to between the tenth and twelfth centuries.

The *Lebor Gabála* (MacAlister, ed.: 1938), the earliest recension of which dates to the eleventh century, introduces the figure of Tigernmas[3] son of Fallach, king of Ireland, as worshipper of the idol, which is here called Crom Cróich. We are told that the king died

while adoring Cromm, and together with him three fourths of the men of Ireland. A spurious etymology for Mag Slécht is given here, connecting the name to the prostrations (*sléchtanaib*) performed by its worshippers. We are also told that the disaster occurred on the night of Samain. There is no mention of the encounter between Patrick and the idol in this source.

The *Dinnsheanchas*, in its metrical (Gwynn 1991) and prose (Stokes 1894: §§ 85, 149) forms comprises the other group of texts belonging to the later sources. In the poem devoted to Mag Slécht we have a detailed account of the events more briefly described in the *Lebor Gabála*. The most remarkable addition to the legend is the mention of the sacrifice of the firstborn made to Cromm Cruaich in exchange for milk and corn. This is followed by a vivid and exaggerated description of the prostrations and violent adoration to the pagan god. All the details in the *Lebor Gabála* passage are also present in this account, with some differences: according to this source the Saint destroyed the image with a hammer, not with his crozier. We are also told here that the worship of stones was established in Ireland from the days of Éremón until the time of Patrick.[4] The *Dinnsheanchas* poem on Bréfne tells us that Mag Slécht was formerly known as Mag Senaig. This poem seems to draw its information from a different tradition than the rest. Instead of three-quarters of the men of Ireland, here we are told that 3100 men died; and it also implies that the date of this event was not in the time of Tigernmas, but considerably earlier, during the reign of the Fir Bolg. It is interesting to note that the prose entry for Bréfne adjusts the information so as to harmonise with the Mag Slécht poem. Finally, the prose *Dinnsheanchas* entry for Mag Slécht adds the detail that the sacrifice consisted not only of the first born of every family but also of the first born of every stock.

The description of the sacrifice and tribute offered to Cromm Cruaich is something rarely found in Irish texts. The only close comparandum appears in *Lebor Gabála*. Here, we are told that the descendants of the ancient settler Nemed had to pay a tribute to the Fomoire, consisting of two thirds of their progeny, and of the wheat and the milk of the people of Ireland. They had to deliver this tribute each Samain, in Mag Cetne.[5] Already in 1884 Arbois de Jubainville (1903: 60) suggested a connection between this episode and the legend of Cromm Cruaich.

The evidence shows in both accounts that a tribute had to be presented consisting of a certain number of the progeny of the Gaels. In Cromm Cruaich's case it is not clear if it is only the first-born or one third of all the progeny that had to be sacrificed since both statements are given next to each other in the poem on Mag Slécht. In the case of the Fomoire, it is two thirds of the offspring that have to be given in tribute, together with two thirds of the milk and corn. The fact that both tributes should be given on Samain is noteworthy.

There is not much evidence in Irish sources of other kinds of sacrificial ritual being performed during Samain, though in some legal texts we are told that around this date the excess of cattle which could not be kept in winter quarters was slaughtered (Kelly 1997). The sacrifice of animals at Samain can be said, then, to have a basis in an actual practice for which we have independent evidence. The reference to the sacrifice of the first-born constitutes material of a different kind altogether.

There is little evidence, literary or otherwise, for human sacrifice in Ireland. Archaeologists have found some Iron Age bog bodies, but the nature of their deaths remains uncertain. If we look at the possible sources of comparative evidence, we can refer to the Classical accounts of Strabo, Lucan, Diodorus Siculus and Julius Caesar about the practices of the Continental Celts. Such comparisons have in fact already been made more than a century ago by such scholars as Arbois de Jubainville (1884), Alfred Nutt (1895) and Eoin MacNeill (1911), in their studies of Cromm Cruaich, but the evidence for human sacrifices in Ireland itself is quite scattered, and there is no evidence of child sacrifice whatever apart from our two literary accounts.

It is not the intention of this paper to attempt to prove or disprove the actual performance of human sacrifice in Ireland, but rather to analyse the importance of the legend of Cromm Cruaich as testimony for such a custom. Given that the evidence is so sparse, it is important to try to determine whether or not the similar accounts in *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dinnsheanchas* are independent of one another.

According to both sources the death of king Tigernmas together with three-quarters of his people occurred at Samain while worshipping Cromm. Alfred Nutt saw here a manifestation of a ritual sacrifice of the king (Nutt and Meyer 1895: 166). It might be good to refer here to other Irish narratives where kings die on Samain, as in

the cases of Muircertach Mac Erca (Stokes 1902) or Diarmait Mac Cerbaill (Stokes 1903). The death-tales of kings have been thoroughly studied in relation to the motif of the three-fold death in Celtic literature. Some views on this subject see these deaths as evidence of the ritual killing of the king in the vein of what is detailed in Frazer's *Golden Bough*. It has been argued by Joan Radner (1983) that the three-fold deaths may be viewed as puzzle tales, some of which have a didactic Christian meaning, telling how a ruler who had broken the Church laws is finally punished. There are however other stories about king's deaths on Samain, such as the story of Tigernmas, where the element of the three-fold death is not present. Another example is the story *Aided Crimthann Mac Fidaig* (Stokes 1903). Here, a king dies at Samain in a situation with explicit ritual overtones, but no Christian moralising is present. Looking back to Cromm Cruaich, then, we find that the references to his worship at Samain only occur in the later sources and only in relation to Tigernmas, even though in the early sources we are told that king Láegaire used to worship him as well. This fact, together with the detail that three-quarters of the men of Ireland perished along with Tigernmas rather than his dying alone, seem to us to render unlikely the theory that the ritual death of the king was part of the sacrifice to the idol. The relationship between deaths of kings and Samain is an elusive one, but it certainly exists in a variety of forms in different stories.

One detail relating to Cromm Cruaich makes Samain an unlikely date for his worship. This is a point made first by Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt (1895: 213), and later by John P. Dalton (1922: 49), Máire MacNeill (l962: 28) and Dáithí Ó hÓgáin (1990: 128), namely the possible identification of Cromm Cruaich with Crom Dubh (Black Crom), a figure much discussed by Irish folklorists. Such identification seems plausible since the figure of Crom Dubh is of considerable importance in the area associated with Cromm Cruaich; indeed it plays an important part in the customs of the inhabitants of that region, who still celebrated certain festivities associated with the figure of Crom Dubh up to the beginnings of the twentieth century. The crucial point to be made is that up until recently Domnach Chruim Dhuibh was a day of ritual and devotion in Ireland that was celebrated on the last Sunday of July, with elements connecting it to a different major festival, i.e. Lughnasa. This story therefore can be seen as a composite one, where the element of Samain was intro-

duced together with the death of king Tigernmas into a legend relating to an idol worshipped closer to the festival of Lughnasa.

There are other elements in these accounts that seem likely to reflect authentic tradition. As we saw, the slaughter of animals at Samain was a custom practised in the Middle Ages. It could therefore well have been the case that a sacrifice of cattle happened during this festival at an earlier date. This points in the direction of an agricultural sacrifice practised at Samain, and there is more that can be said about this topic in relation to our stories. In the *Lebor Gabála* we read that two thirds of the corn and milk had to be given to the Fomoire together with two thirds of the progeny. The tribute given to the Fomoire in this case is not a sacrificial one, or at least this is not stated. The implication is rather that the children are taken as slaves by the Fomoire. In the *Dinnsheanchas* poem on Mag Slécht, we are told first that the sacrifice to Cromm Cruaich was one in return for milk and corn. The aim of this sacrifice seems therefore to have been agricultural abundance. The prose *Dinnsheanchas* entry for Mag Slécht states more specifically that it was customary to offer the first-born of every family and the first-born of every stock and this would appear to be consistent with the slaughter of the cattle mentioned before. The fact that it is not a sacrifice of progeny that is given to the Fomoire but a tribute is in my opinion noteworthy. Moreover, as we will see when we look at the non-native influences on the legend, there are many details in the accounts of sacrifices to Cromm Cruaich that seem to reflect Biblical influence.

The fact that in the case of the Fomoire, the two-thirds of corn and milk are given to them instead of being requested from them, as is the case with Cromm Cruaich, might be due to the nature of the Fomoire in this particular account. These enigmatic figures have been much studied by Celticists; whatever their ultimate origins, there can be no doubt that they came to be partly equated in Middle Irish literature with the Vikings who carried out pillage and robbery and to whom tribute was given.[6] This seems to be the shape they take in the account from *Lebor Gabála*. Undoubtedly, the Fomoire were present in the imagination of the early Irish from an earlier date than that of the Viking raids, and the fact that some stories give them attributes comparable with those of the Tuatha Dé Danann points towards great antiquity.

An interesting example of this that relates to our topic is found at the end of the tale *Caith Maigh Tuired* (Stokes 1891). Here the Fomoire leader, Bres, asking for his life to be spared, successively offers constant provision of milk, and then a harvest of corn every quarter of the year for the men of Erin. Finally he is spared only after teaching them how to plough, how to sow and how to reap. Power over agricultural abundance is attributed here to Bres. The story of the Battle of Maigh Tuired and in particular this section of it has been mainly analysed in a Dumézilian context interpreting it as a confrontation between the Tuatha Dé Danann, representing the first and second functions of Dumézil's Indo-European mythological scheme, and the Fomoire representing the third function. It is not my intention to discuss this interpretation here, merely to note that in other texts similar elements are in play but in a different way, proving that the relationship between the Fomoire and the Tuatha Dé Danann is more complicated than the one given to us in *Caith Maigh Tuired*. In this connection I would like to refer to the story called *De Gabail in t-Sída* ("The Taking of the Hollow Hill") (Koch and Carey 2003). Here we are told of a king of the Tuatha Dé Danann called Dagán (i.e. "the Dagda"), who had the power to blight the grain and milk of the men of Ireland. Here we can see how the power over agricultural abundance is attributed not to the Fomoire but to the Tuatha Dé Danann. The division line between these two races is in fact very unclear. Just to show to what extent these two races are sometimes equated and how ancient this equation is, I would like to cite a verse from an early elegy which may date to the seventh century: "A chief has entered the territories of the dead, the noble son of Sétnae. He cleared the meadows of the Fomaire under the worlds of men." (Corthals 1990: 118). We can see here how the identification between the Fomoire and the inhabitants of the underworld (normally the Tuatha Dé Danann) is manifested. Whatever the distinction is between these two races, we see here how they can be both linked to the fertility of the land. Going back to the figure of Cromm Cruaich, we can see the connection with these races. The tribute in exchange for milk and corn can be seen as a fertility rite.

It is interesting to note that the nature of the ritual in the early evidence seems to be quite different. The *Vita Quarta* (Bieler 1971: 99) tells us that inside the idol on Mag Slécht lived "a very bad demon who used to give answers to the people, wherefore they worshipped him as a god". As we can see here, the fertility element is

not mentioned, but there is an oracular dimension. The poem on Mag Slécht is the only source that mentions the request for milk and corn. It might be appropriate to point out here that one of the main causes of the Battle of Maigh Tuired was the tribute imposed by the Fomorians upon the Tuatha Dé Danann. It is interesting then to find both elements in a single story, the tribute asked by the Fomoire (a possible Viking reference) and the power over agricultural produce which Bres seems to have. The fertility element present in the exchange described in the legend of Cromm Cruaich seems to me to have probably been influenced by these traditions of exchanges and tributes performed by the pre-Christian and non-Christian (i.e. Viking) races that inhabited Ireland.

At this stage, I would like to address the second set of influences that can be distinguished in the legend of Cromm Cruaich. It is interesting to note that though some scholars such as Eoin MacNeill (1911) and Michael O'Duigeannáin (1940) have mentioned the influence of the Bible in the *Dinnsheanchas* of Mag Slécht, no one has spent much time or effort in examining this matter. Almost every aspect of the worship of Cromm Cruaich as described to us in the *Dinnsheanchas* can be said to have very close parallels in the accounts of pagan worship from the Old Testament. The cults of Maloch or Moloch and Baal have many details that look very similar to the descriptions in the *Dinnsheanchas*.

The main element in the sacrifice, the slaughter of the first-born, is a practice found constantly in relation to the figures of Baal, Moloch and other pagan deities worshipped by the Canaanites, the Ammonites, the sons of Israel themselves, and other tribes of Mesopotamia. Here we have two examples:

> When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed. Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land. (2 Kings 3:26-27)[7]

> Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind. (Jeremiah 19:4-5)

These examples serve to illustrate the references to this type of ritual in the Bible, and are by no means the only ones. Other details of the cults seem to overlap. Obelisks stood beside the altars and sacred poles of the Baalim. They were worshipped with animal sacrifices as well as human, and homage was done to them by bowing the knee and kissing their image. As we read from the Bible: "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." (1 Kings 19:18) Most of these details are quite general and can probably be said to describe many cults from a myriad of cultures around the world. Still, it is necessary to make these references in the light of some more specific coincidences that occur between the Biblical texts and the legend of Cromm Cruaich.

In the Cromm Cruaich legend, the site of the ritual is called Mag Slécht. As already stated, the explanation for the name "Plain of Prostrations" is based on a false etymology. A full explanation of this derivation is provided by O'Duigeannain (1940: 300):

> To the ancient scholars the meaning of that name was unknown. ut Slécht reminded them of the verb sléchtid (< Lat. flectit), and they decided that it must be the Gpl. of the verbal noun.[8]

It is interesting to see how the word "*sléchtid*" and the episode of the prostrations are incorporated into the legend of Cromm Cruaich at the same time as the incorporation of the sacrifice of the first-born. The word "sléchtid" is, as O'Duigeannain points out, a loan word coming from the Latin verb "flecto". This term is an ecclesiastical one and belongs therefore to the same cultural milieu as the other elements influenced by the Bible accounts, like the one of the sacrifice of the first-born.

It is important to note, following O'Duigeannain's point on the matter (1940: 300), that the real etymology of Mag Slécht remains a puzzle. One more remark can be made on this subject. In the Bréfne poem and the prose *Dinnsheanchas* we are told that Mag Slécht was formerly known as Mag Senaig (Gwynn 1991: 253). Unfortunately, no other record of this Mag Senaig is extant besides these references. It is easy to see how the name could also have arisen as a pure fabrication. Since a particular event allegedly gave rise to the name "Mag Slécht", this site needed to have a previous name that was replaced by the new one.

Another part of the account from the *Dinnsheanchas* where similarities with the Old Testament are discernible is the description of the violent adoration that caused the death of three-quarters of the men of Ireland. The *Metrical Dinnsheanchas* (Gwynn 1991: 20-1) tell us that:

> They stirred evil, they beat palms, they bruised bodies: wailing to the demon who had enslaved them they shed showers [of tears], prostrate their [tear-] pouring.

The *Prose Dinnsheanchas* account (Stokes 1894-95: 35-6) is even more violent:

> And they all bowed before him, until their foreheads, and the soft part of their noses, and the caps of their knees, and the points of their elbows, broke; so that three fourths of the Men of Ireland died at these bowings.

These descriptions find a Biblical parallel in the desperate attempts by the priests of Baal to raise the attention of their god when confronted with the Hebraic God by Elijah, the prophet:

> At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened. So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed." (1Kings 18:27-28)

As was mentioned before, the relevant *Dinnsheanchas* were probably composed *ad hoc* in order to give support to the fake etymology of Mag Slécht. We can see how the description of the worship of a pagan god in the Old Testament could have suited this purpose neatly.

That these associations are not purely speculative becomes clearer in light of the fact that the Irish were aware of the existence of an idol called Bel which they believed their ancestors to have worshipped. This is attested in *Sanas Cormaic* (Meyer 1994: § 153) under the entry for the festival of Beltaine:

> Bil from Bial, i.e. a false god (an idol), whence Beltine, i.e. the fire of Bil or Bial.[9]

Also, in the text *Tochmarc Emire* (Meyer 1888: 232), we are told that Beltaine's name came from:

> Bel, the name of an idol. At that time the young of every neat (*dine*) were placed in the possession of Bel.

Here we can see Irish paganism being imagined in terms of Semitic idolatry, in a manner very similar to what I have been proposing in the case of Cromm Cruaich. Besides all the resemblances between the figures of Baal and Cromm Cruaich, it is interesting to note that in an anecdote added to the *Book of Daniel*, we learn that Bel was an idol, worshipped by the Babylonians, plated in metal, which was believed to consume great quantities of food. At the end of the story many men, women and children are killed because of it.[10]

Throughout this paper we have seen different elements that contributed to the legend of Cromm Cruaich, and have distinguished the different sets of influences that could have been incorporated into the story. Native and Biblical influences can be distinguished. If we attempt to strip the legend of these possible influences, very little is left, and we might conclude, as O'Duigeannain did (1940: 306), that an origin legend accounting for the condition of a site was combined with one of the many stories about how Patrick fought against pagan idolatry in Ireland. The connections with Samain reflect the native themes that could have been incorporated into this story. Given the possible identification of Cromm Cruaich with Crom Dubh, as pointed out by scholars like Nutt (1895: 213), Dalton (1922: 49) and

Máire MacNeill (1962: 28), and the clear association of Crom Dubh with the festival of Lughnasa (MacNeill 1962), an original link between Samain and Cromm Cruaich seems unlikely. Moreover, the existence of stories portraying tributes delivered at Samain in the pre-christian period may account for the association with Samain here. The incorporation of Tigernmas in the story may simply be due to analogy with stories of other kings who died at Samain. This last possibility links with the second set of possible influences, coming this time from non-native sources. The false etymology of Mag Slécht, together with the descriptions of the cult of pagan gods from the Old Testament, form another set of motifs, from an ecclesiastical milieu. The lack of any persuasive evidence besides our story for child sacrifices being performed in Ireland, taken with the similarities in the description of Cromm Cruaich's cult and those in honour of Baal, Moloch and Bel, points toward a Biblical background for these features of the story.

I hope to have shown through this paper, how some of the ideas about customs associated with Samain should be carefully reconsidered.

University College Cork

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr John Carey for his great help, and also to Dr Kevin Murray and Philip Bernhardt-House for their comments and suggestions.

Notes

1 Throughout this paper I will be using the terms "the legend of Cromm Cruaich" and "the story of Cromm Cruaich" to refer to these sources taken collectively; but in doing so I do not seek to minimise the differences between the various accounts.

2 For the fragments of the *Vita Tripartita* in relation to Crom Cruaich I used O'Duigeannáin's article where a complete rendering of the passages is given.

3 Most of the information which we have about this character comes from the *Annals of the Four Masters* Vol. 1, entries for the years M3580.1 to M3656.2. The earliest reference to this character which I could find occurs in *Baile in Scáil*.

4 This statement could have been borrowed from *Fíacc's Hymn* where we read that before Patrick's arrival the people of Ireland worshipped the Sídh.

5 The earliest account of this tribute is that found in a poem attributed to Eochaid ua Flainn, who is generally held to be the poet also known as Eochaid ua Flannacáin who died in 1004.

6 For an interesting discussion about the possible parallels between the Fomoire and the Vikings see Chesnutt 2001 and Carey 1989-90.

7 All the Biblical quotations come from the New International Version. Even though I quote in English I have checked the Vulgate for alternative translations.

8 The *Dictionary of the Irish* Language does not add any information regarding the etymology of this world. The *Lexique Etymologique* defines *slecht* as to cut or slay, and refers to the fact that within the *Dinnsheanchas* this term is used to refer to the clearing of trees in a plain. The term *sléchtaid* in the *Lexique* refers to bow or prostrate and is said to come from the Latin *flectāre*. The verbal noun of this *sléchtaid* is provided as *slechtan* as opposed to *slécht*.

9 I would like to thank Dr Kevin Murray at University College Cork, for the translation of this passage.

10 We refer here to Chapter 14 of the Greek version of the Book of Daniel.

References

Arbois de Jubainville, Henri d'(1884). *Le Cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique.* Paris: Thorin. (Translated by Richard I. Best, 1903, *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*. Dublin: Hodges Figgis.)

Bieler, Ludwig ed. (1971). *Four Latin lives of St. Patrick. Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia and Quinta.* Dublin: DIAS.

Bonwick, John (1894). *Irish Druids and Old Irish Religions.* London: Griffith Farran.

Carey, John (1989-90). Myth and Mythography in Caith Maige Tuired. *Studia Celtica* 24-25, 53-69.

Chesnutt, Michael (2001). Cath Maige Tuired – A parable of the Battle of Clontarf. In *Northern Lights.* Dublin, 22-33.

Corthals, Johan (1990). Some observations on the versification of the rhymeless "Leinster Poems". *Celtica* 21, 113-25.

Dalton, John P. (1922). Cromm Cruaich of Magh Sleacht. *PRIA* Vol. 36, Section C (1921-1924), pp. 23-67. Dublin.

Davidson, H. R. Ellis (1988). *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe.* New York: Syracuse University Press.

Frazer, J. G. (1911). *The Golden Bough.* London: Macmillan.

Gwynn, Edward (1991). *The Metrical Dindseanchas*. Volume IV Dublin, School of Celtic Studies, pp. 18-23 and 252-55. First edition published between 1904-1925. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy as part of the Todd Lectures.

Jackson, Kenneth (1986). The Date of the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 41, 5-45

Kelly, Fergus (1997). *Early Irish Farming: a study based mainly on the law-texts of the 7th and 8th centuries AD.* Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Koch, J. and J. Carey (2003). *The Celtic Heroic Age*. Malden, Massachusetts: Celtic Studies Publications.

MacAlister, R. A. Stewart, ed. (1938). *Lebor Gabála Érenn.* Dublin: ITS Volumes 34, 35, 39, 41 and 44.

MacCulloch, J. A. (1911). *The Religion of the Ancient Celts*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.

MacNeill, Eoin (1911). *Celtic Religion.* Catholic Truth Society Lectures on the history of religions. London: Catholic Truth Society.

MacNeill, Máire (1962). *The Festival of Lughnasa.* Dublin: Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann.

Meyer, Kuno tr. (1888) "The Wooing of Emer". *Archaeological Review* 1, 68-75; 150-5; 231-5; 298-307.

----, ed. (1901). *Baile in Scáil*. *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 3, 457-66.

----, ed. (1994) *Sanas Cormaic*, §153. Felinfach: Llanerch Press. Facsimile reprint of the 1913 edition.

Meyer, Kuno and Alfred Nutt (1895). *The voyage of Bran, son of Febal to the land of the living. An Old Irish saga*, Volume II. London: David Nutt.

O'Donovan, John., ed. (1856). *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland: from the earliest times to the year 1616. The Four Masters with an introduction by Kenneth Nicholls.* Dublin: Hodges and Smith.

Ó Duigeannáin, Michael (1940). On the Medieval Sources for the Legend of Cenn (Crom) Croich of Magh Slecht. In *Essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*, ed. John Ryan, pp 296-306. Dublin: Three Candles Press.

Ó hÓgáin, Dáithí (1990). *Myth, Legend and Romance: An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition.* London: Ryan Publishing.

Radner, Joan N. (1983). The Significance of the Three-Fold Death in Celtic Tradition. In *Celtic Folklore and Christianity: Studies in memory of William W. Heist*, ed. Patrick K. Ford, pp. 180-99. Santa Barbara: Mcnally and Loftin.

Rhys, Sir John (1888). *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by CelticHheathendom*. Herbert Lectures. London: Williams and Norgate.

Squire, Charles (1905). *The Mythology of the British Isles: and introduction to Celtic myth, legend, poetry and romance*. London: Blackie.

Stokes, Whitley, ed. and tr. (1891). 'The Second Battle of Moytura'. *Revue Celtique* 12, 52-130, 306-8.

----, ed. and tr. (1894-95) The prose tales in the Rennes dindséanchas. *Revue Celtique* 15, 272-336; 418-84; and 16, 31-83; 135-67; 296-312.

----, ed. and tr. (1903). The Death of Crimthann, and the Adventures of Eochaid Muigmedóin. *Revue Celtique* 24, 172-207.

----, ed. and tr. (1902). The Death of Muirchertach mac Erca. *Revue Celtique* 23, 395-438.

Éisce, Gáeth ocus Muir: Three Notes on Archaic Celtic Cosmology

SHARON PAICE MACLEOD

Éisce, gáeth ocus muir, "moon, wind and sea" – these constitute three highly significant elements in many early cosmological systems. Keeping in mind the difficulties involved in identifying and properly interpreting patterns or beliefs based on isolated examples and evidence from different regions and time periods, this paper will attempt to explore aspects of these three strands of early Celtic mythological inheritance and discuss their connection with divisions of sacred time and space, focusing in particular on their association with the ritual year.

ÉISCE (MOON)

Evidence from a variety of Indo-European cultures suggests that during an early period the ritual year consisted of three seasons: Spring, Summer and Winter (Davidson 1988: 38-9; Rees and Rees 1961: 158, 163, 166; Lyle 1990: 4, 23, 75-8). That a three-fold division may have existed prior to the more recent four-fold ritual year of the Celts and other societies should come as no surprise in light of the widespread evidence for tripartite symbolism in Indo-European contexts. These divisions appear in a variety of early sources where societies are described as being divided into three classes or "functions": (1) Priests and Rulers; (2) Warriors and Protectors; and (3) Herders and Cultivators. These tripartite distinctions were also applied to the religious and mythological elements of society (Mallory 1989: 131-2; Lincoln 1986: 141-53; Puhvel 1987: 45, 96, 112-14, 158, 167, 191).

In terms of emphasis or status, however, the tripartite division may not have reflected an equal partitioning between the three parts. Certainly herders and cultivators would have far outnumbered warriors, who in turn would have been more numerous than priests

Cosmos 18 (2002), 103-119.

and rulers. (Lincoln 1986: 154; Lyle 1990: 24) Indeed, in certain aspects of mythological or sociological ideology the ratio may have reflected a 1:2:3 ratio. This type of partition may reflect a sacred division of the human body into three unequal parts: the head, the upper body (from neck to waist) and the lower body (below the waist) (Lincoln 1986: 3, 56, 108, 141-3, 161-3, 211 n. 30; Lyle 1990: 24, 58, 75-81). When this ratio is applied to the ritual year, the temporal cycle is divided into three unequal seasons of two, four and six months duration (Lyle 1990: 58).

Prior to the start of the Celtic year was a sacred liminal period of darkness which was associated with the symbolism of both death and creation. A similar phenomenon takes place within the lunar cycle. Just as the year begins at the point of darkness and rebirth, so the lunar cycle begins with the appearance of the new moon after a period of darkness (the void or dark moon). The new moon was the point of the lunar (and solar) cycle at which assemblies or major rituals would have taken place (Gwynn 1924: 4.415; MacNeill 1962: 16, 384-5, 419; Piggott 1968: 116; Lehmacher 1949-50: 144-7).

Evidence from early Irish literary sources, as well as the Gaulish Coligny calendar, demonstrate that at least some of the Celts utilised a lunar-based calendar (Brunaux 1987: 45-6; MacNeill 1962: 1-16). If the aforementioned 1:2:3 ratio is applied to the lunar cycle, the dividing points occur at the 1st, 6th and 15th days of the month (Lyle 1990: 57-9). The divisions which occurred at the first and fifteenth days clearly correspond to the new moon and the full moon. We also have evidence pertaining to the intermediate point. Referring to a Gaulish ceremony in which druids gathered to ritually harvest mistletoe from an oak tree, Pliny mentions that this rite took place on the sixth day of the moon:

> *Est autem id rarum admodum inventu, et repertum magna religione petitur, et ante omnia sexta luna, quae principia mensum annorumque his facit, et saeculi post tricesimum annum, quia iam virium abunde habeat nec sit sui dimidia.*
>
> When it [mistletoe] is found it is gathered with great reverence, above all on the sixth day of the moon (it is the moon that marks out for them the beginning of months and

> years and cycles of thirty years) because this day is already exercising great influence even though the moon is not half-way through its course. (Pliny, *Natural History* XVI, 249-51, in Ireland 1986: 188)

On occasion, Pliny's words have been interpreted as indicating that it was the sixth day of the moon which marked out the beginning of temporal cycles for the Gaulish Celts (Duval and Pinault 1986: 417; MacNeill 1926-28: 13-14). However, this is probably a misinterpretation of the passage. The word *principia* means "groundwork or foundation" as well as "origin or beginning." It is likely that the passage refers to the moon as the basis of temporal measurement, rather than the sixth day of the moon (which might have been more precisely indicated by the phrase "the day" or "that day" if this had been Pliny's intended meaning). The Coligny calendar itself supports such an interpretation. Here the moon is clearly the basis for time measurement, but the sixth day of the moon receives no special annotation (MacNeill 1926-28: 4, 11-13).

Pliny states that this date (the sixth day of the lunar cycle) was chosen for the ritual because the moon was exercising considerable influence even though it was not yet halfway through its course. If the sixth day of the moon was considered the starting point of the lunar cycle, it could not at the same time also be partway through its course. It might also be noted that in Celtic folk tradition, healing plants were often gathered during the increase of the moon (rather than at the new moon) in order to preserve their essence or medicinal powers. These energies or effects were believed to be increasing and at their highest potency during that time (McNeill 1977: 57-8; Carmichael 1992: 148-59).

Indeed, most translations of Pliny support the interpretation that the moon itself (inferring the new moon as origin point of lunar time measurement) was considered the beginning of the lunar cycle, rather than the sixth day of the moon (Ireland 1986: 188; Cunliffe 1997: 190; Rees and Rees 1961: 370 n. 12). Hindu calendars (both ancient and modern) also begin at the new moon; this is one of the places we would expect to see a calendrical correlation with Celtic systems (MacNeill 1926-28: 16). Indeed, there is a marked parallel between the beginning of the lunar cycle and the start of the yearly

or solar cycle in religious and cultural systems all around the world. These almost invariably reflect movement from darkness to light as symbolic of the creation and manifestation of sacred space and time (Eliade 1954: 51-4, 64-6, 86-8; Eliade 1957: 156-8, 180; Lehmacher 1949-50: 145). Caesar describes the Gaulish Celts as apparently subscribing to this mode of thought. He mentions that they defined the divisions of the seasons not by days but by nights, observing the start of months and years in such a way that darkness preceded light (Caesar, *De Gallico Bello*, VI, 18).

If we assume that it is the new moon which served as the starting point for temporal cycles, there would be a direct corr-espondence with the arrangement of sacred time within the ritual year itself. As the lunar cycle began with the new moon, so the yearly cycle began with Samain (in Irish tradition) or with the month *Samon-* in the Coligny calendar. (MacNeill 1926-28: 2; Rees and Rees 1961: 85) Both are points of creation and rebirth which directly follow a period of sacred darkness associated with death and decline. The three dividing points of the lunar cycle may have corresponded with the three festivals of the early Celtic year.

The affirmation of the new moon as the beginning of the Celtic lunar cycle (as well as the ritual year) also clarifies another aspect of time measurement in the Coligny Calendar. Throughout the calendar, the midpoint of the lunar cycle (the 15th day) is labelled by the word *atenux* or "returning night" (MacNeill 1926-28: 3; Rees and Rees 1961: 87; Piggott 1968: 116). This term reflects another important archaic cosmological conception. In this ideology, temporal movement from a starting point (the new moon) proceeds towards a mid-point or centre (the full moon) and then returns back towards the beginning point. Movement towards the mid-point is often considered positive, while movement which occurs after temporal travel around (*returning from*) the centre point is often considered negative (Lyle 1990: 87-91). Later folk tradition once again provides an interesting parallel. In Scottish folklore, the waxing and waning periods of the moon were associated respectively with growth and increase (as well as wetness or fertility) and lessening or decrease (and dryness or barrenness) (McNeill 1977: 57-8).

GÁETH (WIND)

In many early cultures, the sacred divisions of time and space were associated with specific attributes or symbols. These included animals, plants and colours, as well as spiritual or cultural attributes or characteristics such as abundance, wisdom, beauty, growth and strength (Eliade 1957: 46-7, 61-2, 73-4, 97; Eliade 1976: 36-7, 40-1, 160-3; Rees and Rees 1961: 131-2, 150-1). That such a system may have existed among the early Irish (or other Celtic peoples) is suggested by evidence preserved in a Middle Irish tale known as "The Settling of the Manor of Tara" (Best 1910: 121-72). In this text, a supernatural figure appears to an early king of Ireland and offers to help settle a dispute about the extent of the royal domain by providing information about "the four quarters" of the land. In the presence of sages who had been summoned from each of the four quarters, he elaborates upon a system of directional characteristics associated with the four provinces (as well as the sacred centre of the land). While a group of about fifteen or twenty characteristics is provided for each province or direction, it is made clear that each direction is associated with one primary attribute (Best 1910: 14-29; Rees and Rees 1961: 119-23). These are as follows:

West (*Connacht*): Learning
North (*Ulster*): Battle
East (*Leinster*): Prosperity
South (*Munster*): Music
Center (*Meath*): Kingship

It is likely that these attributes include traces or aspects of Indo-European ideology or conceptual organisation and reflect various Indo-European functions. Kingship and Learning were associated with the first function, Battle with the second function and Prosperity with the third function. In addition to the three functions previously mentioned, in a four-fold spatial division, serfs or some other social class or element may take up a position in the fourth cardinal direction (Lyle 1990: 8-11).

It may be that there are additional layers of intended symbolism within the system as well. Indo-European ritual movement appears

to have originated in the east and proceeded in a sunwise or clockwise direction (Mallory 1989: 140). Therefore, it is possible that the order of these directional attributes (as they would appear in a spatially oriented ritual setting) may also be significant. In this setting, the assignment of the attributes would be (in order): Prosperity, Music, Learning and Battle. A cycle of cultural development or concerns may be suggested by this ordering, progressing from:

Prosperity (sustenance, basic needs) to
Music (expression of culture; communication with Otherworld) to
Learning (wisdom traditions of the culture, knowledge of Otherworld) to
Battle (protection of the culture, warfare which results either in death or in the continuation and preservation of life)
Culminating in the affirmation or (re-)establishment of **Kingship**.

An archaic system of colour associations connected with sacred space and with social groupings appears to have existed in a number of Indo-European societies (Mallory 1989: 133; Puhvel 1987: 159-60, 191; Rees and Rees 1961: 376). While variations existed between cultures and religious systems, the primary colour associations were as follows:

First Function (Priests / Rulers): White
Second Function (Protection / Warriors): Red
Third Function (Fertility): Black/Blue or Blue/Green or Green/Yellow.

This set of colours may well have operated in both a three-fold and four-fold setting, as the fourth social group or element was frequently connected with one of the other colours associated with the third function. Hence in Hindu examples we encounter the colours white, red, yellow and black, while in Roman settings we find white, red, green and black/blue. Three of the colours (usually white, red and black or yellow/green) were associated respectively with priests, warriors and herders/farmers. The fourth position was often associated with a goddess figure who represented all three functions (Mallory 1989: 133; Puhvel 1987: 159-60; Lyle 1990: 8-11).

The emphasis on these particular colours is significant in terms of age and archaism. Berlin and Kay's study on colour terms showed that language associated with colour terminology followed a basic pattern in a number of linguistic and cultural settings. They found that although different languages encode different numbers of basic colour categories, an inventory of eleven (or fewer) categories exists in any given language. These categories are: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey. In addition, the chronological ordering associated with the lexical encoding of these basic colour categories follows a particular pattern. Stated simply, the order in which colours receive a word or name in the earliest stage of verbal or perceptual ordering follows a set pattern. The order begins with white and black (or "light" and "dark") followed by red. The next terms to receive a linguistic focus are green, blue and/or yellow (followed by brown, purple, pink and orange) (Berlin and Kay 1969: 1, 2, 4 10, 13, 22-3).

These colour groupings appear in various Celtic contexts. Old and Middle Irish texts appear to have had utilised what Berlin and Kay call a Stage IV colour system (black, white, red, green/blue and yellow). This system has been found to exist in a colour analysis of the saga *Táin Bó Cuailgne* (Lazar-Meyn 1994: 201-5). In addition, the early Irish text *Saltair na Rann* mentions certain "winds" which were connected with the points of the compass. There were twelve "winds" in all: four primary winds (North, South, East and West) with two additional winds between them (Carey 1986: 1-9). The colours associated with the directions reflect the archaic colour groupings mentioned above:

North: *dub* ("black, dark")
South: *gel* ("white, bright, shining")
East: *corcor* ("crimson or purple")
West: *odar* ("dun", a yellowish-brown)

If, for the sake of argument, we visualise an overlay of sacred time and space, we may be able to perceive a system which synthesises the patterns of both the yearly and lunar cycles with the attributes and colour associations outlined above as shown in Table 1.

North / Black
Samain
Battle (Death) / Creation (Rebirth)
Dark Moon / New Moon

West / Yellow
Lugnasad
Learning (Harvest)
Waning Moon

East / Red
Imbolc
Prosperity
Waxing Moon

South / White
Beltaine
Music
Full Moon

Table 1

Acknowledging that Indo-European ritual traditionally began in the east, I suggest that in this system the starting-point of the ritual year (Samain) may have be symbolically placed towards the North, as this holiday (like the new moon) was a point of death *and* the creation of new life energies, which might then fully manifest in the direction of East.

North and South / Black and White

An early division of the land of Ireland alluded to in *Lebor Gabála Érenn* demonstrates a primary spatial demarcation into North and South, the north (at least symbolically) being given precedence over the South. These divisions were associated with Kingship (North) and Music (South) (Carey 1994: 268-70; Rees and Rees 1961: 100-

1). Likewise, Samain (perhaps associated with the North) was considered the most sacred point of the year, followed by Beltaine (South). In addition, black and white are the two most basic and important colour terms in both a linguistic and symbolic sense.

Both Samain and the period of the dark/new moon involved symbolism associated with endings (death) and beginnings (rebirth). The colour black is a potent symbol of this liminal point in time, which contains the energies of death as well as creation. If this is the symbolic territory of battle, deities of war and destruction may have had some association with this time. Indeed, while Celtic war-gods and goddesses possessed marked attributes connected with battle and destruction, these must be understood in the wider context of protection and the maintenance and preservation of life.

The direction of South (Beltaine) is in one instance associated with music. The tribal-god known as the Dagda was said to reside at Uisneach, the site where the early Irish held a major Beltaine assembly. Among his many attributes, he was said to be a harper (Gantz 1981: 40; Patterson 1994: 139; Gray 1982: 71). In the North /South division of Ireland outlined in *Lebor Gabála*, a poet was associated with those who resided in the North and a harper with those in the South (MacAlister 5.46, 68, 94; Rees and Rees 1961: 101).

East / Red

The goddess *Bríg* or Brigid was connected with Leinster (in the eastern part of Ireland) and in her guise as a Christian saint she had a marked connection with abundance, prosperity and new life (perhaps reflected in the association with red, a life-promoting colour). Red is also the colour traditionally connected with the warrior class. While Imbolc is associated with birth and women's concerns, it also marked the peak of the springtime raiding season which took place from mid-January to mid-March. It was only during this time that local clients could be raised in a springtime tribal "hosting" (although this was secondary to the autumnal, and especially the summer, raiding seasons). The spring campaigns which took place around Imbolc served primarily to alleviate or

clear away any potential regional strife or difficulties which might affect broader alliances later in the year. Here we might also make note of one of St Brigid's secondary manifestations, *Bríg Ambue* ("Brigid of the Cowless Warrior"), a particularly desperate type of hired warrior (Patterson 1994: 132-4).

West / Yellow

The colour yellow (which may perhaps be extrapolated from the dun-coloured wind) is in other Indo-European traditions often associated with food producers and fertility (Puhvel 1987: 191-2; Lyle 1990: 8; Mallory 1989: 134). This would certainly be appropriate for the Feast of Lugnasad, which is primarily a harvest festival. In addition, a *Dindsenchas* account of a medieval Lugnasad assembly describes the ritualised recitation of native learning and lore which was said to have traditionally taken place at that time (an attribute of Lugnasad which is often overlooked) (Gwynn 1924: 3. 20-1):

> Tales of Find and the Fianna… sacks, forays, wooings, tablets, books of lore, satires, keen riddles: Proverbs, maxims of might, and truthful teachings of Fithal, dark lays of the Dindsenchas… teachings of Cairpre and Cormac;…the tale of the household of Tara…. the knowledge of every cantred in Erin, the chronicle of women, tales of armies, conflicts, hostels, tabus, captures…

While this presentation of evidence pertaining to a possible system of Celtic cosmological ordering is not intended as a complete or exhaustive survey, it is hoped that it will serve as impetus for further discussion and exploration of these patterns.

MUIR (SEA)

In a number of Indo-European cultures, each of the three seasons was associated with a male deity who represented one of the three

Dumézilian functions. In many cases a fourth "season" consisted of a special ritual period which preceded the winter season. This was frequently associated with a goddess whose attributes included all three functions. Thus in Roman tradition we encounter the gods Jupiter, Mars and Neptune (1st, 2nd and 3rd functions) with Flora as the goddess. In Greek tradition we find Zeus, Hephaistos and Poseidon (1st, 2nd and 3rd functions) with Athena as the female figure (Lyle 1990: 101-2).

If we apply this model to the early Irish evidence, we might connect the first function with the Dagda (a multi-aspected father-god and king who was associated with druidical magic) and Lug (a multi-skilled deity and battle-leader, perhaps second function). It is important, however, to stress that Celtic deities do not always easily fall into one category, as many are multi-skilled or multi-aspected. In addition, the attributes of Irish deities are known from later medieval literary sources, rather than early iconographic or ethnographic evidence. We are working here with models, rather than complete or perfectly preserved systems.

The female element, which was associated with Samain, may be reflected in the figure of The Mórrigan. While her battle aspect is most often discussed and emphasised, research into her names and epithets and her numerous attributes show that she is connected with all three functions (Paice MacLeod 1999). Dumézil saw the goddess figure as having a marked connection with the third function due to her association with the twin gods or horsemen such as the Asvins (Lyle 1990: 11). The Mórrigan was said to have a sister (or perhaps alter-ego) called Macha, a goddess with pronounced equine associations. In one well-known tale, she appears from the Otherworld and begins to cohabit with a widower, bringing him great abundance and becoming pregnant as a result. She is forced to race against the king's horses after which she gives birth to twins (Gwynn 1924: 4.124-31). These divine women may be Irish examples of the early tripartite goddess.

What of the third function male position originally associated with the winter portion of the year which followed Samain? I believe that the Greek and Roman examples provide us with a key to the enigma. In the introduction to his book on the *Mabinogi*, Patrick Ford discusses the various manifestations of the Celtic Goddess of

Sovereignty, a figure frequently associated with horse symbolism. He points out that many references to these divine women reflect symbolism associated with the Ocean. He makes a convincing case for asserting that these stories represent an earlier myth "wherein the sea-god mated with the horse-goddess" (Ford 1977: 5-12).

In the First Branch of the *Mabinogi*, Rhiannon appears as a horse-goddess, and chooses her own consort in true Sovereignty Goddess fashion. Later, in the Third Branch, she marries *Manawydan ap Llyr*, a figure whose name is cognate with that of the Irish sea-god *Manannán mac Lir*. As we have seen, the Irish deity Macha is another manifestation of this triune horse/land/sovereignty goddess archetype. In one text she said to be the descendant of *Sainreth mac Imbaith*, "Nature or Characteristic of the Sea"; in another she is summoned "from the ocean waves" (Ford 1977: 7; Gwynn 1924: 4.124-7).

The widely venerated Continental and British deity Epona ("Divine Horse Goddess") was so popular that she was given a feast day in the Roman Calendar (December 18th). The Romans appear to have understood her attributes quite well, for her sacred day was placed between a fertility festival and the Consualia, a holiday associated with Poseidon Hippios (Ford 1977: 5). And, most interestingly, in the seventeenth century Martin Martin recorded a Scottish folk custom in which offerings were made to a sea god at Samain to ensure the fertility of land and sea (Martin 1999: 29).

The Irish god Manannán owned a horse which was said to be able to travel over sea and land, and he was reputed to have a son called *Echdonn* "Dark Horse" (Wagner 1981: 19). Poseidon's name may derive from a term meaning "Lord or Husband of the Earth", and his epithets included *Hippios* "Horse-like One" and *Melanippos* "Black Horse" (Wagner 1981: 10-11, 13, 18). These allude to the sea deity's equine symbolism as well as his connection with the colour black, which was associated with the third function. One of the traditional offerings made to Poseidon was the pig. In the Irish text *Altram Tige Dá Medar* a pig belonging to Manannán mac Lir provides magical sustenance for the Tuatha Dé Danann (Wagner 1981: 11-12). Here we might recall that the pig or boar was associated with the Feast of Samain, the sacred hunt (which took place around Samain), noble burials, and the Otherworld Feast

(Patterson 1994: 124-6; Green 1992: 116-18, 170-1; Ross 1996: 394-5).

The connection between the Sea God and the Horse Goddess is also described in a Greek legend from Arcadia in which Poseidon and Demeter meet in the shape of a stallion and a mare. Their union results in the birth of twins, a magical horse and a girl. In this story we can see a parallel with the tale of the Irish goddess Macha who also gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl (Wagner 1981: 18). Cú Chulainn possessed two great horses, the "Black of Saingliu" and the "Grey of Macha" and in *Tochmarc Emire* we encounter the phrase *úan dá ech nEmna*, "the foam of the two horses of Emain" (Green 1992: 190; Wagner 1981: 19). It is also interesting to note the appearance of the term *Emain* in the place-names *Emain Macha* (associated with the goddess Macha) and *Emain Ablach* (which refers to Mannanán's Otherworld realm) (Wagner 1981: 19).

I suggest that an early model of the Irish ritual year included three male deities associated with the three Indo-European functions: the Dagda (1st function), Lug (2nd function emphasis) and Mannanán mac Lir (3rd function), possibly venerated at Beltaine, Lugnasad and the winter period after Samain. Mannanán, who would have presided over the dark half of the year, is portrayed in the Irish material as separate from the other gods. Generally described in positive terms, he is a powerful king of the Otherworld. However, as god of the Sea and the underworld realm of water, his domain is separate from that of his fellow Tuatha Dé Danann (who live in *síd*-mounds under the earth). At Samain, the sacred ritual period which preceded the winter season, veneration was offered to the Goddess of Sovereignty, who may have taken the Sea-God as her consort at (or near) this time. In addition to her equine symbolism, the transfunctional goddess possessed aquatic symbolism due to her connection with the dark half of the year, which may, in earliest times, have been associated with the God of the Sea.

It will be evident to the reader that at some point certain modifications took place in the Irish calendar, resulting in variations which differ from the archaic scenario outlined above. One might wonder, for example, why Imbolc was associated with the colour red (warrior caste) if Lug (second function) was associated with

Lugnasad? In another Irish myth, The Second Battle of Mag Tuired, Brigid has a husband called Bres who is depicted as an ungenerous, disloyal and unworthy king. After much conflict and contention, he is finally dethroned. Lug spares his life in exchange for information pertaining to agriculture (Gray 1982: 67-9). He specifically provides information about ploughing and sowing (which take place after Imbolc) and reaping (which takes place after Lugnasad). Without proposing precisely how and when such ideological shifts may have taken place, these mythological artifacts may provide some evidence for a connection between Lug's military defeat of Bres and the season of Imbolc (colour red / warrior caste). As we have seen, Bridget herself displays some connection with protection and warlike activities.

It should also be noted that the Festival of Lugnasad was instituted by Lug to honour his foster-mother Tailtiu who cleared great tracts of land (presumably in preparation for agriculture). It is not, therefore, a festival which necessarily honours the god himself (Gwynn 1924: 4.146-51). Indeed, a number of female figures are associated with Lugnasad, including Tailtiu, Carmun, two of Lug's wives, and perhaps also the goddess Macha (Gwynn 1924: 3.2-25, 48-53; 4.125-31, 146-63). These women are connected with the preservation or destruction of fertility, and appear to have been honoured at this time of year. In addition, later folk traditions pertaining to the Cailleach Bhéarra refer to her special knowledge of sowing and harvesting methods, as well as her prowess in reaping grain (surpassing a succession of male reapers who meet their death in a reaping contest with her) (Ó'Crualaoich 1988: 172-3). While an in-depth discussion of the female symbolism connected with Lugnasad is outside the scope of this paper, it is interesting to note the appearance of divine women during the harvest season preceding Samain (a sacred time associated with the Goddess of Sovereignty). However the mythological transformation took place, it is Bres' wife Brigid who came to preside over Imbolc, a holiday which maintained some associations with raiding and warfare, but which, over time, became more and more associated with birth and prosperity.

The Irish four-fold seasonal calendar reflects a cycle of agricultural and pastoral practices appropriate to that region and

climate (Danaher 1982: 222-4). While this arrangement could reflect practices stemming from the pre-Celtic advent of agriculture in that area, it is also possible that elements of earlier seasonal calendar traditions originating in Celtic homelands to the east and south may have travelled westwards and northwards over time. Some combination of remembered myth and custom from ancestral groups or regions, adaptation of indigenous practices encountered by the Celts as they travelled, and innovative practical, cultural and mythological adaptations by various Celtic population groups may be woven into the tapestry of shared symbolic elements and variants which form the body of extant evidence we might collectively refer to as "Celtic Cosmology."

Amherst, Massachusetts

References

Berlin, Brent and Paul Kay (1969). *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Best, R. I. (1910). The Settling of the Manor of Tara. *Ériu* 4, 121-72.

Brunaux, Jean Louis (1987). *The Celtic Gauls: Gods, Rites and Sanctuaries*. London: Seaby.

Caesar's *De Bello Gallico.* Classic Interlinear Translations (1959). New York: David McKay Company.

Carey, John (1986). A Tract on the Creation. *Éigse* 21, 1-9.

---- (1994). Lebor Gabála Érenn. In *Celtic Heroic Age* ed. John T. Koch, pp. 226-71. Oakville, Connecticut and Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications.

Carmichael, Alexander (1992 [1900]). *Carmina Gadelica*. Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne.

Cunliffe, Barry (1997). *The Ancient Celts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Danaher, Kevin (1982). Irish Folk Traditions and The Celtic Calendar. In *The Celtic Consciousness*, ed. Robert O'Driscoll, pp. 217-42. New York: George Braziller.

Davidson, Hilda Ellis (1988). *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Duval, Paul-Marie and Georges Pinault (1986). XLVième supplément á *Gallia, Recueil des inscriptions gauloises*, vol. III *Les Calendriers (Coligny, Villards d'Héria*). Paris.

Eliade, Mircea (1954). *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

---- (1957). *The Sacred and The Profane*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.

---- (1976). *Myths, Rites, Symbols*. Vol. 1. New York: Harper and Row.

Ford, Patrick K. (1977). *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gantz, Jeffrey (1982). *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. New York: Penguin.

Gray, Elizabeth, ed. (1982). *Cath Maige Tuired*. Naas: Irish Texts Society.

Green, Miranda (1992). *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*. New York: Routledge.

Gwynn, Edward (1924). *The Metrical Dindsenchas* (Volume 4). Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

Ireland, Stanley (1986). *Roman Britain: A Sourcebook*. London: Croom Helm.

Lazar-Meyn, Heidi Ann (1994). Colour Terms in Táin Bó Cuailgne. *Ulidia: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales*, pp. 201-5. Belfast: December Publications.

Lehmacher, Gustav (1949-50). The Ancient Celtic Year. *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 1, 144-7.

Lincoln, Bruce (1986). *Myth, Cosmos and Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lyle, Emily (1990). *Archaic Cosmos: Polarity, Space and Time*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

MacAlister, R.A.S. (1938-1956). *Lebor Gábala Érenn*. London: Irish Texts Society.

MacNeill, Eóin (1926-28). On the Notation and Chronography of the Calendar of Coligny. *Ériu* 10, 1-43.

McNeill, F. Marian (1977). *The Silver Bough*. Glasgow: William MacLellan.

MacNeill, Máire (1962). *The Festival of Lughnasa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mallory, J. P. (1989). *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Martin, Martin (1999 [1695]). *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland – Circa 1695*. Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Mattingly, H., tr., and S. A. Handford, tr., revised (1970). *Tacitus – The Agricola and The Germania*: London: Penguin.

Ó'Crualaoich, Gearóid (1988). Continuity and Adaptation in Legends of Cailleach Bhéarra. Béaloideas 56, 153-78.

Paice MacLeod, Sharon (1999). Mater Deorum Hibernensium: Identity and Cross-Correlation in Early Irish Myth. *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 19.

Patterson, Nerys (1994). *Cattle Lords and Clansmen*. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press.

Piggott, Stuart (1968). *The Druids*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Puhvel, Jaan (1987). *Comparative Mythology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley (1961). *Celtic Heritage*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Ross, Anne (1996). *Pagan Celtic Britain*. Chicago: Academy Publishers.

Wagner, H. (1981). Origins of Pagan Irish Religion. *Zeitschrift fur Celtische Philologie* 38, 1-27.

The Neo-Pagan Ritual Year

JENNY BUTLER

This paper examines the structure of the Neo-Pagan ritual year and the activities that take place in celebration of the progression of the seasonal cycle. This analysis draws from ethnographic research into the beliefs and ritual practices of contemporary individuals and groups who follow the Neo-Pagan spiritual traditions of Wicca, Witchcraft and Druidry. The term Pagan is used to denote nature-based spiritual traditions. The prefix "neo-" is used in reference to contemporary followers of nature-based spirituality and to distinguish between present-day Paganism and ancient pre-Christian Paganism. The ritual year holds considerable importance for Neo-Pagans and my paper addresses both the significance of the festivals in Neo-Pagan worldview and some of the ritual practices associated with each festival. The methodology employed in researching the Neo-Pagan ritual year was attendance at seasonal celebrations as a participant observer and discussion of the topic of the annual festivals with informants during tape-recorded interviews. Due to the diversity of the Neo-Pagan community, it is difficult to make generalisations about the beliefs and practices of Neo-Pagans so my research deals only with the beliefs and practices of groups and individuals that I have encountered in the field.

STRUCTURE OF THE RITUAL YEAR

The structure of the Neo-Pagan ritual year is based on the solar cycle and seasonal transition and certain calendar dates are special times for various Neo-Pagan groups. Neo-Pagans celebrate eight annual festivals or "sabbats", as some Neo-Pagans have termed them. The annual cycle or "Wheel of the Year" passes through eight festivals: Samhain, Winter Solstice, Imbolc, Spring Equinox, Bealtaine, Summer Solstice, Lughnasadh and Autumn Equinox (see Figs. 1 and 2). The Neo-Pagan calendar year can be divided into four major fire festivals and the Equinoxes and Solstices. The fire festivals each mark the time when the season begins to change into the next:

Cosmos 18 (2002), 121-142.

Samhain on October 31st, Imbolc on February 1st, Bealtaine on May 1st and Lughnasadh on August 1st. Then there is the Spring Equinox on March 21st and Autumn Equinox on September 21st and the Winter Solstice on December 21st and Summer Solstice on June 21st. Some Neo-Pagans use the Irish-language names for the festivals but the names are most often found in anglicised form in Neo-Pagan literature.

The wheel of the year is presented as a circle that rotates and "turns" so that it passes through each festival once annually. The image of the sacred circle and cycles are prominent in Neo-Pagan culture – other examples are the cycle of birth-death-rebirth, the notion of the Goddess passing through the cycle of maiden-mother-crone and the solar and lunar cycles. There is also the mythological cycle of the Holly King overcoming the Oak King at midwinter and the Oak King being overcome by the Holly King at midsummer. The Holly King is the winter king representing darkness and the Oak King is the summer king representing light (Rabinovitch and Lewis 2002: 132).

Some Neo-Pagans distinguish between the Celtic quarter days and the other festival days, calling them the "Greater Sabbats", and calling the solstices and equinoxes together the "Lesser Sabbats" (Lewis 1999: 249). Some individuals and groups hold specific festivals to be of particular importance, whereas others celebrate each of the eight festivals in a similar way.

As we know, the changing seasons were of huge importance for early humans. As the weather changed, so did the availability of certain foods. Older societies who were dependent on agriculture for their survival had a strong awareness of the seasons and lived close to the land. People in our society today generally don't experience such a close relationship with the land they live on or with nature – our food, including that which is out of season, can be bought in a supermarket and we do not have to worry about freezing to death or starving as the wintertime approaches. However there are modern Pagans who choose to follow the natural progression of the year and mark each seasonal change. For many, this is a way of living closer to nature and of connecting with the natural world and its rhythms.

The Neo-Pagan celebration of the ritual year begins at Samhain. In Neo-Pagan cosmology, based on what is known of ancient Celtic cosmology, the New Year begins at Samhain when nature enters into

its "dark half". It is thought that all of the Celtic festivals began on the eve of the specific day of celebration (Wood 1998: 98) since the Celts measured their days from their dusks (Jestice 2000: 50). Many Neo-Pagans, in keeping with this belief, begin their celebrations on the eve before the festival date. Beverly J. Stoeltje says of festivals

> For all their diversity […] festivals display certain characteristic features. They occur at calendrically regulated intervals and are public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene and purpose. Festivals are collective phenomena and serve purposes rooted in group life. (1992: 261)

The festivals that form the Neo-Pagan ritual year can be seen to exhibit all the features that Stoeltje mentions. They occur at calendrically regulated intervals. Despite the fact that the exact calendar dates for the solstices and equinoxes can vary by a day either way due to astronomical reasons, the Neo-Pagan celebrations generally take place on the same fixed dates of 21st March for the spring equinox and the 21st of September for the autumn equinox. They are public in nature and participatory and also "multiple in voice, scene and purpose" since the seasonal celebrations often take place at well-known sacred sites where various groups and individuals will be in attendance, each with their own unique views and ways of practising ritual. Neo-Pagan festivals serve a purpose rooted in the collective life of the Neo-Pagan community since they mark the times when the seasons change. This recognition and celebration of annual changes in nature is of great significance to people who follow a nature-based religion and who consider their spiritual connection to the land to be of the utmost importance. In his study of New Age and Neo-Pagan personal narratives relating individual experiences of spirituality, self and belonging, Jon P. Bloch makes the point that: "however loosely structured these clusters of individuals are, and however diverse the beliefs from one individual to the next, they consider themselves to be a 'community' " (Bloch 1998: 2). In the Irish context, I have found that Irish Neo-Pagans often use the term "community" in a self-referential way. Although the exact practices and beliefs may vary across individual practitioners, there are collective meanings, common concerns and understandings that establish a shared sense of

identity. The festivals are the recurrent sequence of dates for community gatherings and sacred sites are usually the centres of celebratory activity.

Figure 1. "Wheel of the Year". Painting by Jane Brideson, copyright 2002 *Dark Moon Designs©*

Figure 2. The "Wheel of the Dagda" in the Temple of Isis belonging to the Fellowship of Isis Organisation in Clonegal Castle, Wexford, Ireland. The photograph shows a carved wooden circle enclosing a sun shape with a spiral of gold paint at its centre. Ivy leaves are wound around the circle. The wheel rests against the main altar in the temple, which holds a statue of the Goddess Isis. (Photograph taken by the author on 27/07/02.)

CELEBRATION OF THE FESTIVALS

The eight festivals pertain to both celebration and spiritual reflection and are what one informant described as "spiritual parties". Beginning with the festival of Samhain on October 31st, I will follow

the cycle and illustrate with examples from fieldwork what occurs at each time and what significance these activities have in Neo-Pagan worldview. It is important to note that the way in which the festivals are celebrated is variable and that the activities of individuals and groups are quite diverse since there is no uniform or standardised way of celebrating these festivals. Space does not allow for detailed description of rituals or the total activities surrounding any one festival, so what I present here is the general idea of what I have encountered at festival celebrations, with some illustrations of observances associated with each festival.

The Neo-Pagan celebration of the ritual year begins at Samhain, as this is the time that marks the New Year for the majority of Neo-Pagans. The word Samhain has been interpreted as "End of Summer" (*samh*, summer, *fuin*, end), marking the death of the old year and the birth of the next year (Jestice 2000: 312). Leila Dudley Edwards, in her examination of Halloween and contemporary Paganism, looked at how tradition and folklore were consciously employed to enhance or intensify ritual (Dudley Edwards 2000: 235). In the Irish context, I have found that many groups draw on vernacular tradition to add to the significance of their celebrations, including that of Samhain. In vernacular Irish tradition, it was believed that on the night of Samhain, the barrier between the human world and the Otherworld became thin. This was the time of the Celtic feast of the dead and, in later folk tradition, it was believed that deceased relatives could return on this night to the place where they had once lived (Danaher 1972: 207). In Neo-Paganism, this is a time of veneration of the dead and many Neo-Pagans will invite the spirits of the deceased or the ancestors into the sacred circle. An example of this is a Samhain ritual I took part in. On October 31st 2002, I joined an earth-based spirituality group in Cork to celebrate Samhain. We gathered around a large bonfire in a field. We all took off our shoes and socks so that our feet could be in direct contact with the earth and everyone stepped into the sacred space that had been marked on the ground around the bonfire. We then stood in a circle holding hands and called[1] the quarters by walking around *deiseal*[2] (clockwise) and calling on the spirits of each quarter (certain magical beings are associated with each compass direction of the circle). Each person then called on a dead ancestor to join us in the circle. A chalice filled with mead and loaves of home-baked bread were passed around the

circle and shared. Another example is the ritual of a Wiccan Coven in Dublin who write messages to dead relatives and loved ones and throw these into the ritual fire at Samhain as a way of sending a message to the spirit world and in remembrance of the deceased.

Because the "veil between worlds" is believed to be thin, this time is considered conducive to receiving occult knowledge through divination. Many groups practise divination at this time. Some groups invoke "Dark Goddesses" at Samhain and at other times during the dark half of the year. An example of what one Neo-Pagan group considers a "Dark Goddess" is Scáthach, a mythic female warrior who appears in Irish literature as Cú Chulainn's martial arts teacher (MacKillop 2004: 378) and whose name may be translated as "shadowy" (Cotterell 1999: 82).

Bonfires are an integral part of most Neo-Pagan festivities attached to the ritual year. The figurative "return" of the sun in the northern hemisphere is celebrated by the lighting of bonfires at the winter solstice. Some consider this a symbolic "rebirth" of the sun, since, after the shortest day of the year, the light appears to break through the wintertime blackness. One Druid group included in my research diverge from the general Neo-Pagan belief that the new year begins at Samhain since this is when the Celtic celebration of the new year was thought to have taken place, and instead celebrates the beginning of the new year on the winter solstice. As part of their celebration of Winter Solstice 2003, the group lit a giant candle (a half-barrel tub completely filled with wax with six wicks going through it). The candle was left to burn while a party commenced and smaller candles and a bonfire were also lit to mirror the "returning" sun. Instead of a Christmas tree, this group decorates a tree with magical symbols and places a pentacle on top.

Bonfires and the symbol of fire have a strong association with the Neo-Pagan celebration of the festival of Imbolc on February 1st also. Both the Pagan fire Goddess Brigit (or Bride) and the Christian Saint Brigit are venerated at this time. The word Imbolc comes from an older Irish word *Oimelc* meaning "Sheep's Milk" (Wood 1998: 98), as this is the time when lambs are born and ewes lactate. In Neo-Paganism it is a time to celebrate freshness and new beginnings. Some Neo-Pagans visit sites associated with Brigit on this day, such as Brigit's Well in Kildare and Brigit's Well at Uisneach. Some Neo-Pagans make St Brigit's crosses and these can be used as festival

decorations. One informant creates a cradle with a doll in it for her Imbolc celebration, which she calls Bríd's Bed:

> Imbolc is also known as Bríd's Day and [she is a] Goddess of the land of this country. So basically on that day there's an effigy made of Bríd, usually out of straw or grain […] that's cut the previous year. And she's wrapped in a kind of white cloth and laid in a basket surrounded by flowers or just […] kind of arranged nicely. And candles are left burning there all night. And it's basically about welcoming the Goddess back, ah, and, you know, a bit of encouragement and that (*laughs*).

Maria usually makes this effigy of Bríd out of straw that had been kept from the previous Lughnasagh, but sometimes uses other materials that are at hand:

> This year for instance I didn't use the grain at all. Somebody sent me, um, this little […] I think she was like, supposed to go on the top of a Christmas tree or something, but I mean it was a really nice little doll and really kind of natural. And she had kind of red hair and so I used that instead.

The important thing for Maria is to have something to represent Bríd so that the image can be used as a focus during the celebration:

> This year we just had the fire lighting in the living room and we put the Bríd's Bed out in front of the fire and we had the candles and we just, basically just had a little chat, you know, and kind of just talked about the fact that, you know, it's the darkest time of winter. […] There's a reflection as well, not just what's happening in nature but what's happening inside you as a person. And so it's kind of the time when you do feel kind of, you know, you don't feel like going out and you don't feel like doing anything. But you know it's a kind of promise that you're going to come back, you are going to start doing things again. (Interview with Maria 02/ 05/ 2002)

Figure 3. A Green Man wall plaque hung on a wooden beam in a cottage. The plaque was originally a mask created by a Neo-Pagan group for ritual use. (Photograph taken by the author on 21/12/03.)

The image of the vegetation God, the Green Man, represented as a foliate male head (see Figure 3), may also be seen at Neo-Pagan celebrations at this time. The Green Man symbolises irrepressible life (Anderson and Hicks 1990: 14) and the regeneration of plant-life after the bleak winter. His appearance in Neo-Pagan rites is in celebration of the renewal of vegetation and recognition of the new spring growth.

At Imbolc 2002, I joined in the celebrations of an Earth-based spirituality group in County Leitrim. I accompanied the group to the Shannon Pot, a place that the group visits every year at Imbolc. This is a deep pool of the River Shannon with underground springs that cause the surface of the water to bubble, giving the pool the appearance of a cauldron. The group considers this place and the Shannon River in its entirety to be sacred because of its association with the Goddess Sinann (MacKillop 2004: 387) At the Shannon Pot, each person took a turn of going to the water's edge and filling a chalice with water. The individual then drank some water and poured the remainder of the water in the chalice back into the pool while saying a blessing (see Figure 4). Later that day, the same group did another ritual, which took place at a stone circle on their land. A ritual

drama was enacted where a woman acted out the seasonal change. In the beginning of the ritual, she was dressed in a black shawl, to symbolise the darkness of winter. She stood stock still behind a leafless tree with her head bowed and her eyes closed to symbolise the bleakness of winter when there is little activity in nature. She stood in the Northern quadrant of the circle and in terms of magical correlations the North is the element of Earth and the place of darkness (Shallcrass 2000: 31). During the ritual she emerged from behind the tree and moved quickly and shed the black shawl to reveal a bright green dress that she was wearing underneath. This represented the stirrings of the new plants and the emergent spring growth. Many other Neo-Pagan groups have similar ritual dramas that reflect the seasonal changes.

At the spring (vernal) equinox, night and day are equal in length, so darkness is balanced with light. Consequently this is considered to be a time of balance and a time to be introspective and examine how equilibrium can be achieved in one's personal life. Many groups have a "path-working" (Neo-Pagan term for a guided meditation) on the theme of balance or light and dark at this time. The rationale behind much of this path-working is that each person is given space to reflect on the qualities of the particular time of year and also to consider personal growth and change as the Wheel of the Year turns. A Druidic group, the Owl Grove, does a meditation as part of the Spring Equinox ritual. For example, during one ritual, each member sat on a stone of the stone circle and meditated on a plant. The *Ard Draoi*[3] provided each person with a sprig of a different plant such as woodbine and elder from the garden. Each person was asked to contemplate the nature of the plant that he or she had been given. After meditating on the plants, the group discussed the new growth that occurs in nature in spring. The theme of the discussion was the way in which each distinctive plant grows in relation to its environment.

Plants are influenced by environmental conditions and they are dependent on different elements – the water in their roots, the wind that moves their leaves and makes them sway, their roots embedded in earth. The growth of the plant was then paralleled with the growth of a human being. This discussion was intended to show how a process of growth is also at work in the spiritual lives of human beings and how the magical elements affect personal growth and

change. Much of the Owl Grove training deals with the magical elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water – and how each individual can hone their spiritual growth in respect of the different magical elements. The Autumn Equinox is correspondingly a time of equilibrium and is mostly celebrated in a similar way.

May Day marks the beginning of summer. In vernacular Irish tradition, this is a time when the veil between worlds was again thin (as at Samhain) and, in traditional lore, the time to watch out for fairies and protect butter and livestock from supernatural interference. Kevin Danaher, discussing traditional folk observances surrounding the festival days, states (1982: 218):

> The unseen world was particularly active on May Eve. The Good People of the hills were at their revels and humans had to be careful not to disturb or offend them; by watchfulness, ceremony, prayer and charm, all care was taken to safeguard against their machinations… .

Rather than using charms and other protections against the fairies, Neo-Pagans instead invite communication with the fairies. In fact, the *Sidhe* (the fairy people) are often invoked during ritual, and one Druid group, the Owl Grove mentioned above, invoke the *Sidhe* during every one of their rituals. When calling the quarters, the individual at each quarter draws a circle in the air with his or her index finger. The circle that is visualised is meant as a symbolic portal for the *Sidhe* and other spirits to pass through, so that they can enter the circle with ease from other planes of existence. The *Sidhe* are then called upon and invited to enter the circle and take part in the ritual and contribute their energies to the working or to watch over and protect the sacred circle. In Neo-Pagan worldview, the *Sidhe* seem to be generally conceptualised as benevolent inhabitants of the spirit realm and the *genii loci* of the Irish landscape.

The old Irish word for the May festival is "Beltaine". The etymology of this word is obscure (Maier 1997: 35) but it has been thought to mean "Great Fire" (Wood 1998: 98). Celticists have also suggested that the name could have some association with the northern European deity Belenus (see Hutton 1996: 218). At Neo-Pagan gatherings, the bonfire is of central importance and people usually sit around it to tell stories, play music, drum, and to chant and sing songs. The hill of Uisneach in Co. Westmeath is associated with

the Beltaine festival and some Irish Neo-Pagans visit the hill on May Day, although the hill is visited on other festivals too. Whatever the origins of the name and whatever the ancient rites practiced at Beltaine, the Neo-Pagan festivities often include the lighting of fires and invoking of the "Old Gods".

The hill of Uisneach in Co. Westmeath is associated with the Bealtaine festival and some Irish Neo-Pagans visit the hill on May Day, although the hill is visited on other festivals too. The festival is associated with bonfires, "the fires of bel". The origins of the name "bel" are uncertain and different sources attribute different meanings to the festival name – some suggest it means "lucky fire" and certain medieval Irish manuscripts contain a reference to sacred fires at Bealtaine and the name of the festival has been interpreted as deriving from the God Bil, Bial or in some cases Bel, which may be a reference to Baal, a God of the Old Testament; Celticists have also suggested that the name could have some association with the northern European deity Belenus (see Hutton 1996: 218). Whatever the origins of the name and whatever the ancient rites practised at Bealtaine, the Neo-Pagan festivities often include the lighting of fires and the invoking of the "Old Gods".

At the summer solstice, the sun has reached its zenith, its highest point in the sky, making this the longest day of the year. Hereafter, the days will be shorter as sunlight recedes. In Neo-Pagan celebrations of this, Sun Gods are invoked and bright, solar imagery used and bonfires lit to mirror the blaze and light of the sun. A public ritual was carried out on the Hill of Tara for the Tara Summer Solstice Festival in 2003 and much bright clothing and jewellery were worn by the ritual participants; flaming torches were also carried in a procession up to the top of the mound.[4]

August 1st is the celebration of the first harvest (corn harvest), named after the Celtic Sun God Lugh. The symbolic death of the Corn King may be acted out in the form of a play. Folk customs are often incorporated into Neo-Pagan festivities and many have been assimilated and are now part of annual Neo-Pagan celebrations. For example, a Witch named Carmel makes Corn Dollies, a traditional craft of England and Ireland. In some cases the corn dolly may be an actual doll made out of straw, perhaps in imitation of the traditional harvest "corn maiden" or "dressed calliagh", which is a dressed-up figure made of the last sheaf of corn cut (Danaher 1972: 199).

Figure 4. A member of the Grove of Shinann Earth-based spirituality group stands by the edge of the Shannon Pot and pours some water from a chalice into the pool in honour of the Goddess Sinann. The Shannon Pot is a deep pool located a few miles north of the village of Dowra, Co. Cavan where the Shannon rises. (Photograph taken by the author on 02/02/02.)

Carmel once experienced a vision in which the Goddess appeared to her and handed her a sheaf of corn. She interpreted this to mean that she should do something with corn as part of her spiritual life. She researched the magical associations, myths and legends to do with corn and learned how make corn dollies. In Carmel's opinion, the beliefs and traditions surrounding corn are part of ancient Paganism and the creation of items out of corn in the present time, with the knowledge of the magical associations of the materials being used, can be seen as a Pagan craft. In Carmel's view of her craft, we can see some degree of reinterpretation of the Irish traditions of corn-dolly making. In her worldview, these crafts belong to ancient Paganism and she feels, as a contemporary Pagan, that she is carrying out a task set by the Goddess and in some small way reviving these ancient traditions. The following story, for instance, shows how she reclaims what is, in her opinion, an old Pagan sacred site:

> Crom Dubh was the old corn king in Ireland and on Croagh Patrick that's who Saint Patrick was actually fighting. So he was trying to suppress the old Pagan God, which was Crom Dubh. And so on the Garland Sunday, Peter and I actually climbed Croagh Patrick, shortly after I broke my ankle (*laughs*). And I made a very special corn dolly and I put it in Patrick's Bed[5] – I hope it has good dreams (*chuckles*) – and re-dedicated the mountain to Crom Dubh. And, well it's a small way of reclaiming our history but I felt that that was important because all these people were climbing this holy mountain and not realising that it was a Pagan holy mountain *long* before it was ever a Christian one.

Croagh Patrick, a 762 metre high mountain in County Mayo, is known as the "holiest mountain in Ireland" (Dames 1996: 169). It has strong associations with pre-Christian religion and the God Crom Dubh is one symbolic representation of ancient Paganism. In present-day Ireland, thousands of people climb barefoot up Croagh Patrick as part of Christian pilgrimage. However, this mountain has been considered a sacred site by different groups of people since pre-Christian times. The assembly at this mountain is a survival of the ancient Lughnasa festival, which was celebrated in Ireland by assemblies on hilltops (De Paor 1985: 40). Carmel's views of the

craft of corn-dolly making, and her explanations of the use she puts these items she makes to, are very much part of Neo-Pagan worldview. Part of her celebration of the festival was to reclaim what she considers a Pagan sacred site that has long been associated with the festival of Lughnasadh.

The Owl Grove invokes Lugh, the God to whom this festival is dedicated, during their Lughnasadh ritual. Following the ritual, the group usually visit a site that they consider to be sacred. After their Lughnasadh ritual in 2002, the group went to visit Lugna's well in Co. Offaly, both because of the association that the holy well's name has, for them, with the God Lug[6] and also because they feel good energies at this place. After the ritual, the group share a meal with some bread from the "Lughnasadh loaf". The group collectively made the bread prior to the ritual and each person took a turn of mixing and kneading the bread. Consuming the bread reflected a sharing of something that had been communally created. Traditionally bread would have been made from the newly cut corn and many Neo-Pagan groups make a meal with seasonal food. The archaeologist Brian Hayden defines the feast as "any sharing between two or more people of special foods (i.e., foods not generally served at daily meals) in a meal for a special purpose or occasion" (Hayden 2001: 28). Many Neo-Pagan groups partake of a feast after a ritual, usually the festival rituals, this being oftentimes a meal of seasonal foods accompanied by cider or mead, an alcoholic drink of fermented honey and water. Mead is also used as a ritual libation during ritual within the sacred circle. In Celtic mythology, mead is associated with immortality and is said to be the drink of the Gods in the Otherworld (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1996: 644). Feasts are an important group activity and food is often shared during ritual also. Another reason to have a feast following a ritual is that is believed to "ground" the participants and help to bring them back to the mundane world after they have been in contact with spiritual or magical energies raised in ritual.

In many cultures of ancient times, the harvest was a time of sacrifice, often blood sacrifice, to the Gods (Frazer 1993: 425-38). The ancient harvest rituals of Ireland were not recorded so one can only speculate as to what took place. In fact, there are no known existing detailed written accounts of human sacrifice in the Irish context. It can only be noted that, in Ireland, there was at least a

surviving idea of harvest sacrifice that continued in folk tradition as the symbolic killing of the Corn Spirit believed to reside in the last sheaf cut (Danaher 1972: 199). Mediterranean commentators on the ways of the Celts inform us that Druids were known to carry out sacrifices. Classical writers recorded that the Druids would stab or cut the throats of their victims and then examine the blood and entrails of the dead for divinatory purposes and another method of sacrifice was to burn the victim alive in huge wicker images of men (Green 1997: 183). These classical accounts of Druid practices allude to human sacrifice in areas of the Celtic world, but none relate directly to Irish Druids. Sacrifices are scarcely ever mentioned in medieval Irish literature (Maier 1997: 241) and it would be extremely difficult to know with certainty whether sacrificial practices took place in ancient Ireland.

Despite the fact that the wicker men of antiquity were not directly associated with Druids in Ireland, some Neo-Pagans make a connection between Paganism and wicker men and incorporate this into their own practices. Neo-Pagans sometimes have a symbolic sacrifice, as actual blood sacrifice is not acceptable in modern Pagan worldview. The classical accounts describe both humans and animals being burned alive inside wicker men in a ritual to mollify the Gods.[7] Adapting this idea of harvest sacrifice to modern circumstances, Neo-Pagans sometimes create an effigy to represent the Corn King or spirit of the harvest, which is then burned to imitate the death of the harvest God, who is then symbolically re-born from Mother Earth at the Winter Solstice. One informant describes the creation of a wicker man at Lughnasadh:

> What we do tend to do sometimes is we build a wicker man at that time of year. And we set him on fire. We send the fire back up to the sun. You know it's very symbolic.

She goes on to describe a Wicker Man she saw at another Lughnasadh celebration she attended:

> I've seen everything from a forty foot high one down to one who's only five foot tall. […] The best one I ever saw – they made an image of a man made of sticks and wood, covered him in straw so he looked a bit like a scarecrow and they stuffed all

> the first fruits of the harvest into it. There was apples and pears and everything else and he was just bulging with fruit and vegetables. So he looked like a cross between a straw man and a sort of vegetable man. And then they just set him on fire and you could hear all the fruit popping and all the nuts and things inside him popping away like mad. And everyone sort of danced around him and honoured him as the sort of divine sacrifice of the year. In other words, the first ripe fruits of the harvest – we give them back to the earth. (Interview with Alice 09/01/01)

Neo-Pagans in Ireland and elsewhere create wicker men, maintaining what they perceive as an old tradition but omitting the blood sacrifice!

Another custom in recognition of the harvest is to build a Harvest Queen:

> We actually make a giant Harvest Queen every year in the field. Peter spends a day making her. She's like a Harvest Maiden. She's like six or seven foot tall. And we completely deck her in corn dollies and flowers from the garden. And we kind of like to say "thank you" to her every year. (Interview with Carmel 09/12/03)

The ancient tradition of building wicker men cannot be correlated with the practices of ancient Irish Druids and, judging by classical accounts, it was not a specific harvest ritual. Despite this, some Neo-Pagans link up disparate stands of historical practices and allusions to ancient Druidic practice and reinterpret these in the creation of a modern harvest-time ritual. The building of modern-day wicker men and Harvest Queens is very much part of Neo-Pagan worldview and a way of expressing their understanding of the significance of harvest-time.

OTHER RITUAL GATHERINGS

For Pagans, other activities, such as gardening, are also bound up with the ritual year and with the seasonal cycle. The moon's phases

are believed to have influence over magical workings. One Pagan Witch only plants seeds when the moon is waxing and does the weeding and rids the garden of dead leaves and unwanted growth only when the moon is waning.

Some groups, Wiccan Gardnerian Covens[8] and groups of Witches in particular, may also meet on the night of each full moon (once a month) during the year (thirteen times a year in all) – these gatherings are referred to as Esbats. Much of the terminology and ideas about the eight festivals is derived from the work of the archaeologist Margaret Murray on the witch trials, which connected James Frazer's theory of an old rural fertility religion with contemporary folk customs of her time. Her books gained credence at the time but her methodology was later questioned and her work has been found to be inaccurate and selective (Hutton 2000: 12). Her writings have been largely discredited in academia but, as James Lewis points out, whether or not Margaret Murray's scholarship is correct, her terminology has been adopted by Neo-Pagan Witches (Lewis 1999: 92-3) and so it can be seen that, notwithstanding the fact that Murray's theory has by and large been criticised and found problematic in the academic world, it still holds sway in Neo-Pagan discourse. I have found that Irish individuals and groups of various Neo-Pagan traditions use similar terminology when discussing the ritual year. Druids, Witches and Wiccans alike frequently use the term "Sabbat" while the term "Esbat" is mostly used only by Witches and Wiccans.

CREATIVE REINTERPRETATIONS

The notion that these eight annual festivals were observed and celebrated in a certain way by ancient peoples forms part of what has been called the "foundation myth" (Lewis 1999: 300) of modern Paganism. This foundation myth forms the basis for beliefs about a pre-Christian Pagan religion with associated beliefs and practices that some try to parallel to the beliefs and practices of Pagans today. However this kind of matching up of presumed ancient Irish festival practices with contemporary Irish Neo-Pagan festival celebration is tenuous as relatively little historical evidence exists on the religious beliefs and practices of pre-Christian Druids in Ireland or of the

beliefs and practices of the early Irish generally. The celebration of the changing seasons in Irish folk tradition includes many customs believed by scholars to be ancient in origin but this is not to say that all aspects of traditional celebrations can be traced back to ancient times; many festival customs originated in pre-modern times or medieval times. Some Neo-Pagans feel that they are celebrating the changing seasons in a similar way to the ancient pre-Christian Pagans but nobody can determine with accuracy whether or not the practices of contemporary Pagans is comparable to that of ancient Pagans. Neo-Pagan festival celebrations amalgamate various customs and observances to create a novel form of annual festivities and this is illustrative of the dynamic nature of contemporary Pagan culture.

University College Cork

Acknowledgement

A Government of Ireland Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Sciences provided by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences funded this research.

Notes

1 To "call the quarters" is a Neo-pagan phrase that refers to the invocation or "calling on" the spirits or "elementals" associated with each cardinal direction. Each cardinal point also corresponds to the four magical elements, usually the element of Earth in the North, Air in the East, Fire in the South and Water in the West. Some practitioners call the quarters by verbal means with an incantation for each cardinal direction whereas other practitioners may acknowledge the elementals by non-verbal means.

2 *Deiseal:* Irish-language word for clockwise. *Deiseal* has the meaning of turning to the right but also has connotations of "positive", "exact", "pleasant". The word *Deosil* (sun wise) is part of Neo-pagan terminology and is most likely an anglicised form of the Irish word. *Tuathal* is the Irish-language word for anti-clockwise.

3 This particular Druidic group use the Irish-language term for Druid, *Draoi*. The role of the *Ard Draoi* or High Druid is to oversee the group rituals.

4 The first Summer Solstice Festival of Tara took place in 2003. The festival activities began at sunrise and ended at sunset on Saturday 21st June and included storytelling, poetry readings, harp playing and traditional Irish music and Neo-Pagan performances of Dowsing by a Druid, drumming, circle dancing and various rituals. The night concluded with a Neo-Pagan "Ceremony of Fire" atop the Hill of Tara. Photographs of this fire ceremony can be viewed at: http://irishdruids.org/tara-festival.html

5 To be found on Croagh Patrick Mountain is a cairn called a "bed", associated with the Goddess and with older fertility practices (Dames 1996: 167). There is also a monument lower down on the mountain known as Leacht Mionnáin (MacNeill 1962: 80). Some have interpreted the name Leacht Mionnáin or "Leacht Mo-Bhionnainn" as "the "boy of Patrick" or the newborn infant Patrick and the cairn at the summit is also known by the name of "St. Patrick's Bed" (Dames 1996: 167-8).

6 It should be noted that it is not known whether the site in question has any pre-Christian associations and it is more likely that the holy well was named for some other personage and is unrelated to the Celtic God Lugh. The God Lugh (or Lug) may originally have been a God of the sun or of light and he also appears as a champion of the Tuatha Dé Danann in the 11th century text, *Cath Maige Tuired* (MacKillop 2004: 309).

7 See Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, VI, 13-18, quoted in Matthews 1996: 16, and Strabo, *Works*, XV, 9, 4-8, quoted in Matthews 1996: 18.

8 Wicca is a Pagan mystery religion (Crowley 1989: 262). Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884-1964) founded Wicca and this "Gardnerian Witchcraft" began as a new religion in England in the late 1930s (Lewis 1999: xix). Wicca first emerged publicly in the late 1940s and the movement spread with the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1951 (Jordan 1996: 179). Gardnerians base their religion on the techniques taught by Gardner. Although there are many Wiccan paths, it is generally accepted that there are five principal ones: Gardnerian Wicca, Alexandrian Wicca (named for the practitioner Alex Sanders), Hereditary Craft, Traditional Craft and Feminist (or Dianic) Wicca

(Partridge 2004: 295) and there are also eclectic Wiccans who merge various beliefs and ritual techniques in devising their own personal magical practices.

References

Anderson, William and Clive Hicks (1990). *Green Man*: *The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth*. London and San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Bloch, Jon P. (1998). *New Spirituality, Self and Belonging*: *How New Agers and Neo-Pagans Talk about Themselves*. Religion in the Age of Transformation Series. Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger.

Butler, Jenny (2003). Ireland's Sacred Landscape: Neo-Pagan Worldview and the Ritual Utilisation of Sacred Sites. *Béascna: Journal of Folklore and Ethnology* 2, 29-45.

---- (2004). Neo-Pagan Ritual Practice as Visual Culture and Creative Expression of Identity. In *Communicating Cultures*, ed. Ullrich Kockel and Máiréad Nic Craith, pp. 108-28. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Chevalier, Jean and Alain Gheerbrant, tr. John Buchanan-Brown (1996). *A Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books.

Cotterell, Arthur (1999). *Celtic Mythology*: *The Myths and Legends of the Celtic World*. Oxford: Sebastian Kelly.

Crowley, Vivianne (1989). *Wicca*: *The Old Religion in the New Age*. London and California: Aquarian Press.

Dames, Michael (1996). *Mythic Ireland*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Danaher, Kevin (1972). *The Year in Ireland*: *Irish Calendar Customs*. Cork: Mercier Press.

---- (1982). Irish Folk Tradition and the Celtic Calendar. In *The Celtic Consciousness*, ed. Robert O' Driscoll, pp. 217-42. Portlaoise: Dolmen Press.

De Paor, Liam (1985). *Portrait of Ireland*: *Past and Present*. Co. Wicklow: Rainbow Publications.

Dudley Edwards, Leila (2000). Tradition and Ritual: Halloween and Contemporary Paganism. In *Pagan Pathways*: *A Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions*, ed. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey, pp. 224-41. London: Thorsons.

Hayden, Brian (2001). Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting. In *Feasts*: *Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, pp 23-64. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Hutton, Ronald (1996). *The Stations of the Sun*: *A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

---- (2000). The Roots of Modern Paganism. In *Pagan Pathways*: *A Guide to the Ancient Earth Traditions*, ed. Charlotte Hardman and Graham Harvey, pp. 3-15. London: Thorsons.

Jestice, Phyllis G. (2000). *Encyclopedia of Irish Spirituality*. California, Colorado and Oxford: ABC-CLIO.

Jordan, Michael (1996). *Witches: An Encyclopedia of Paganism and Magic*. London: Kyle Cathie.

Lewis, James R. (1999). *Witchcraft Today*: *An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions*. California, Colorado and Oxford: ABC-CLIO.

MacKillop, James (2004). *Oxford Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

MacNeill, Máire (1962). *The Festival of Lughnasa*: *A Study of the Survival of the Celtic Festival of the Beginning of Harvest*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maier, Bernhard (1997). *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*. Suffolk, England: Boydell Press.

Matthews, John, ed. (1996). *The Druid Source Book*. London: Blandford.

Partridge, Christopher (2004). Encyclopedia of New Religions. Oxford: Lion Publishing.

Rabinovitch, Shelley and James Lewis, ed. (2002). *The Encyclopedia of Modern Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism*. New York: Citadel Press.

Shallcrass, Philip (2000). *Druidry*. London: Piatkus.

Stoeltje, Beverly J. (1992). Festival. In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments*, ed. Richard Bauman, pp. 261-71. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tara Solstice Festival 2003 booklet. Navan: Excel Print.

Wood, Juliette (1998). *The Celts*: *Life, Myth and Art*. London: Duncan Baird Publishers.

Beginning Time: A New Look at the Early Jewish/Christian Ritual Time

NEIL DOUGLAS-KLOTZ

INTRODUCTION

The starting-point of this paper is a consideration of the relationship between the Greek-language Gospel of St John and the Coptic-language Gospel of St Thomas. It offers an interpretation of passages in the New Testament, John 1:1, John 3, John 14:2-4, which is based on the hypothesis that even early Christian writings written in Greek may have had an original audience that was bilingual and heard them "with Semitic ears". The paper attempts to reconstruct the "Semitic" reception of those particular passages by consulting the early versions of them in Syriac, a Semitic language. These early Semitic-language versions of the Bible (Peshitta, early 5th century and Old Syriac Sinaitic and Curetonian codexes, 2nd-4th centuries) yield valuable insights through their handling of time and their use of words cognate with Hebrew words occurring in related passages in the Old Testament, especially the opening of Genesis. These links in turn open up the passages in John to approaches along the lines of the Jewish modes of Scriptural exegesis, dealing with mystical cosmology and cosmogony dating back to the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and hence to a time not so far removed from the composition of the Gospels. Biblical studies scholars today refer to a "Bereshith mysticism" (based on the Hebrew word for "In the beginning" from Genesis 1:1), which was shared by early Christians and Jews in the first centuries of the Common Era.

New insights are gained into John's prologue to his Gospel and his account of Jesus' words on the necessity of being born again, on his own existence even "before Abraham", on the "many mansions" in his Father's house, and on his role as "the way, the truth, and the life". The approach adopted in the paper tends to bring the two Gospels more into harmony on the questions of creation, time and

Cosmos 18 (2002), 143-158.

Holy Wisdom, and concludes with some reflections on the less than sharp distinctions that existed between "Jew" and "Christian" for three centuries after Jesus and the common ground Islam was to share with them on these matters and on Jesus himself.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN: THE BIBLICAL STUDIES BACKGROUND

Bruce Chilton, in his recent study of ancient Jewish and Christian festal calendars (2002), has suggested that modern Western culture has lost the sense in which it formerly experienced time as both a rhythm and a constraint. People once experienced the rhythm of time in the recurrences and intervals making up the celebration of a ritual year. That experience fostered a longer historical view and offered a sense of shared community. This understanding of time has been increasingly labelled irrelevant in a culture that only values the "meaning" constructed by the present moment. This "collapse of history", Chilton argues (p. 22), increasingly affects our view of values:

> Values are either pressed out of overly full schedules or they are overwhelmed in the despair that time is an open chasm. So the sense of growing constraint and decreasing rhythm, the feeling that time crushes us more than it articulates and develops who we are, is more than anecdotal. The complaints that we are too busy, the complaints that we are too depressed, are too persistent to be discounted as random or unimportant.

Under such pressures, cultivating an understanding of the way that our ancestors experienced time in a rhythmic sense can be important. Early Jewish and Christian ritual time both attempted to confront the challenges of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 CE and came up with different solutions, Chilton maintains. Early Judaism sought to reaffirm the ritual rhythm of time through the remembrance of the sacrificial calendar (2002: 98): "The rhythm of the continuous remembrance of an enduring recurrence of festivity makes the Mishnah's eternity a perduring interval of light."

Early Greek Christianity, on the other hand, asserted a "time out of time", in which Jesus' actions achieved atonement once and for all times. This "time out of time" could override any disruption of ordinary time (such as the destruction of the Temple). If we look at the Gospels of John and Thomas, we see both of these views coming into play, influenced by nuances of Hebrew and Greek language epistemology and their varying ways of not only conceptualising but also experiencing time.

Biblical studies of the eschatology and protology in the Gospels rarely take into account the way that "endings" and "beginnings" were experienced in ancient Semitic-language notions of time. This paper elucidates these notions on the basis of a new understanding of the work of Boman (1970) and Lee (1988) in Douglas-Klotz (2000, 2003a). It demonstrates how a Semitic hermeneutical approach resolves some of the differences that biblical scholars have read into the framing of the prologue of the Gospel of John in relation to various passages in the Gospel of Thomas that also treat the beginning of the world. The following is a condensed version of the state of play in this area in current biblical studies scholarship.

According to some recent scholars of the "historical Jesus", the communities that produced both the Gospels of John and Thomas knew each other, but differed in the way they saw Jesus embody Holy Wisdom and live the creation story (for instance, see Pagels 1999; Davies 1992).

Both Gospels were probably written by Jewish Christian communities living in Syria towards the end of the first century of the common era. Most scholars now date the Gospel of Thomas around 70 CE and John slightly later (see Miller et al. 1992: 196-9 and 301-4). This view has replaced the one more common a generation ago which saw the Gospel of John as produced much later than that of Thomas and written by an early community of already "orthodox" Christians in order to distinguish themselves from their Jewish neighbours. Following the work of the Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin (1999, 2004) and others it has become increasingly difficult for biblical studies scholars to talk about "Christians" and "Jews" as distinct groups in the two to three hundred years following Jesus' crucifixion. In a similar vein, earlier designations of Thomas as a "gnostic" (as opposed to "orthodox") Gospel have given way to a more nuanced understanding of the diversity of belief in the early

Jesus movement, before Constantinian authority was able to define retrospectively what "orthodoxy" meant.

The origin of both the John and Thomas communities in Syria also makes it possible that both gospels were originally written in Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. Many scholars now believe that at least Thomas was first written in Syriac (see Miller et al. 1992: 302). While most scholars still see Greek as the original language of John, they acknowledge that, given its setting in a Jewish Christian community, those for whom it was intended understood both Greek and Aramaic (see Miller et al. 1992: 197-8).

The primary text of John survives in Greek. The primary text of Thomas survives in Coptic, the Hamito-Semitic, final descendent of Ancient Egyptian. John was accepted as a canonical Gospel at the Council of Nicaea in the 4th century, following the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thomas was not, and there are some clear differences between the two.

In Thomas, Jesus acts as an embodiment of Holy Wisdom and counsels his disciples toward experiences of knowing the self and experiencing creation as one's own story. For instance, in Thomas, Logion 18, the following dialogue occurs:

> The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us, how will our end come?" Jesus said, "Have you found the beginning, then, that you are looking for the end? You see, the end will be where the beginning is. Congratulations to the one who stands at the beginning: that one will know the end and will not taste death. (Patterson and Meyer, tr. in Miller et al. 1992)

The community of John also seems to regard Jesus as an embodiment of Holy Wisdom, present in the beginning, as stated in the well-known prologue to the book: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." In the late Hebrew book of Sirach, written just before the common era, for instance, Holy Wisdom is depicted as the "word" of God, sitting on a throne and participating in creation (24:3-6):

> "I came out of the mouth of the most High, and covered the earth as a cloud. I dwelt in high places, and my throne is in a cloudy pillar. I alone compassed the circuit of heaven, and walked in the bottom of the deep. In the waves of the sea and in

> all the earth, and in every people and nation, I got a possession."

In most translations of the Greek version of John, however, one finds much less emphasis on self-knowledge and more on faith in Jesus. Scholarly theories today see the John community as absorbing Greek-language thinking in the way the gospel reserves a special role for Jesus. For instance, they believe that John may recognise that mystical "ascent" to the divine seat at creation's beginning is possible, but that the only real ascent is through redemption by "Jesus-on-the-cross", rather than through experiencing creation oneself (see Kanagaraj 1998: 299-300). Everyone might not be able to undergo the rigorous disciplines involved in creation mysticism, but everyone could believe that Jesus had done it, and could love one another as Jesus had loved them. As celebrated in a ritual sense, these differences impact the views that early Christians in these communities held of "beginnings", particulary at the beginning of the ritual year, which was associated with creation, as well as of "endings", their sense of what the future would feel or look like. They also influenced the ways that these groups saw themselves in distinction to other groups with claims to the Jesus tradition (see Klijn 1992).

While Thomas' approach to Christology and Protology seems to differ from that of John in a number of respects, for instance, Jesus' nature as Word/Wisdom, some Syriac versions of John (Old Syriac, Peshitta) evidence a Semitic interpretation of Jesus as Word-at-the-beginning that is more in harmony with that found in Thomas. We can see here indications of a tradition that seems to straddle the extremes of sole reliance on either self-knowledge or faith. In this strand of tradition, Jesus seems to tell his disciples that a love- and faith-connection to him can help lead them to re-experience creation as he had done.

THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN IN THE PESHITTA AND OLD SYRIAC

In John 1:1, the Peshitta uses the Syriac phrase *brã□ãta)ãtwa hewà melñà* which can be rendered "In/with beginningness was existing the ongoing word [or conversation]."

The Syriac here can carry the same synchronic sense as the ancient Hebrew of Genesis or the Coptic of Thomas: that creation is a continuing process in which one can participate. We can also see this expression related to the Hebrew concept of *d)b9ar*, the ongoing creative word by which the Holy One brought everything into being. As Boman (1970) has pointed out, this "word" is very different from the Greek concept of *logo*s. In Greek thinking, the divine Logos is immutable, residing in a place or space beyond the line (or circle) of time. In ancient Hebrew thinking, the divine Dabhar continues to act, create and change. In Greek thinking, word is separate from action. In Hebrew, speaking the "word" is its action, just as the Holy One spoke creation into existence. One can only judge it good ("ripe") or bad ("unripe"), depending upon whether it ultimately fulfils the purpose for which it was intended. The Syriac *melñà* participates in the ancient Hebraic sense, in that the word or conversation is ongoing and connects the divine and human realms of existence. (This also relates to a saying of Jesus about his "word" or life's expression continuing in the synoptic gospels in Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31 and Luke 21:33).

The Old Syriac and Peshitta versions also allow for ambiguity about whether creation is happenening *through*, *by* or *in* the Word in 1:3 (as first noted by Ruzer, 1997, in relation to the Old Syriac). Here the Syriac (*kul b)ãd¸à hewa*) could be rendered as "all things were existing through/in him or through/in it (the Word)" or "through/in it (the Word) all things were coming into being by its own hand." Throughout the Johannine hymn, the Peshitta also maintains the ambiguity about the question: Is it Jesus personally that is meant or the original divine image of humanity that he represents as Word-Wisdom?

In relation to 1:5 ("And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not"), the Peshitta (and Old Syriac-Curetonian) uses the Syriac *þe□uÉà* and *nuhra*, which correspond directly to the Hebrew words used in Gen. 1:2 and 1:3 for darkness and light (*hø□eÉ* and (*or*). One could argue that in the context of the ambiguity just discussed, the use of these terms would have been heard by a Semitic speaker as referring to the part of the original creation story just after light arose from divine breath and darkness (Gen. 1:3). As retold by John 1, the divine light-intelligence was not being understood or comprehended (*deraÉ*) by the divine dark, the

unilluminated aspect of being; rather, both are held together in the unity of the divine.

Again, as Boman has pointed out, ancient Semitic ideas about the co-existence of divine light and dark are very different from the Greek polarity. In the ancient Semitic languages, "darkness" simply carries the connotation of that which is unknown or mysterious, "light" that which is known. If we were, for instance, to hear this part of John's prologue with Semitic ears, one version might be:

> First Consciousness shined with Unconsciousness,
> Light shines with the Darkness,
> Knowing will shine with Unknowing,
> and one has not and will not
> overcome the other. (Douglas-Klotz 2003b)

In this light, hearing John's prologue again with Semitic ears brings us much closer to the cosmic creation story of Holy Wisdom in Proverbs, with Jesus re-enacting the story as her embodiment.

BEING BORN AGAIN

In John 3, where Jesus advises Nicodemus to be "born again," the Peshitta and Old Syriac (Sinaitic) render this phrase with the words *yiled men drãs*, which can mean to be regenerated from the first beginning or from the head or start of a process. The Syriac expression *drãs* recalls through its roots the Hebrew *b)r¹)*□*i* ∀*Â* so we could hear this with "Semitic ears" as:

> Unless you are reborn
> from the First Beginning –
> you will not be able to
> understand the realm of God.

Shortly thereafter, Jesus tries to clarify for Nicodemus what he means by this in the passage about being born of water and spirit (John 3:5). Here the Peshitta and Old Syriac render "water" and "spirit" as *mayà* and *ruþà*, words that would have alerted a Semitic listener to resonances with the related Hebrew words (*màyim*, *råaþ*) used together in the cosmogenesis described by Genesis 1:2 ("And

the spirit of God moved over the face of the waters."). In a Semitic sense, *màyim* indicates not simply "waters," but also primordial flow; *råaþ* not only an ineffable "spirit" but also primordial breath. That is, a person listening to the story with Semitic ears could as easily have heard an experience as a belief being described.

Following this (John 3:6), Jesus speaks of a birth of breath (*ruþà*) and a birth of flesh (*besrà*), and says that Nicodemus needs to learn to distinguish between the two. Just as *ruþà*, as breath, wind and air, is also partly physical from Western cultural point of view, so also *besrà* as "flesh" is not wholly physical. This word is cognate with the Hebrew *bàsàr*, and actually comes from a root meaning to relate or tell, a concept related to ongoing, creative divine Word (*d)b9ar*). In a Semitic sense, as Boman has pointed out, flesh can express the divine image and would not be possible without it. Flesh is only considered a separate thing – a body or a corpse – when it no longer does so. Hence ancient Hebrew has a word for living flesh, that is, a substance, but lacks a word for what we would call "living body," that is, a form in itself. As a Semitic gloss on this episode, we could say that, if Nicodemus were to return to his original divine image at the beginning-time, he would then understand both "languages" of existence, breath and flesh.

BEFORE ABRAHAM

The Syriac language of the Peshitta and Old Syriac versions, taken in a similar protological context, also seems to iluminate a reported saying of Jesus in John 8. The meaning of this saying again hinges on the fact that in a phenomenological experience of the ongoing, first moment of creation, not only are all the prophets still alive and moving ahead of one, but so is the divine image reflected by Elohim (as God is called there) through the First Human in Genesis 1:26.

In this episode, Jesus gets into a heated conversation with some Judean listeners about what it means to have Abraham as one's father. Into this, Jesus inserts the statement that if a person did what he were advocating, that person would not "see death". If, for instance, one's *ruþà* were reconnected to the living divine image at the first beginning, the passing of the flesh would be a matter of no consequence. His listeners get upset, saying:

> Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? (KJV, John 8:52-3)

Here Jesus can be seen to reply with a Semitic sense of time, in which the past is ahead of one and moving forward, the future behind and moving into formed existence (see again Boman). He refers in this regard to the living connection that he has to his divine image at creation:

> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at him. (KJV, John 8:56-59)

In a Bereshit sense, the "day" (*yaumà*) Jesus refers to is the original cosmological moment in which the divine creates Adam, which in the synchronic sense of Semitic languages includes both the present and the future. The Peshitta and Old Syriac texts' use of verbs in the passage usually translated "before Abraham was, I am" (8:58: *(aólà newà)ab9ràhàm)ena)iÂ*) can indicate that the past is not over, but a continuing experience, for instance: "Before Abraham is existing, I am being." Again in a Semitic sense we could hear any "I am" statement as indicating the connection between the personal "I" to the only, divine "I Am." Such an interpretation allowed various Eastern Christian communities to maintain a view of Jesus as a non-exclusive "son" of God (the so-called "low Christological" position) for much of its existence up until the rise of early Islam (see Kung 1993).

PREPARING A PLACE

A Semitic sense of time in relation to the protological "beginning time" is also evidenced in the Peshitta and Old Syriac versions of John 14:2-4 ("In my father's house are many mansions. … I go to

prepare a place for you."). Both versions use the word (*aÂrà* for "place," a word which can indicate a level or mode of being. For instance, in the Peshitta version of the vision of Ezekiel (3:12) the same word is used to translate the Hebrew word *meqºm*, referring to the glory emanating of the Holy One from its primoridial "place." To the Semitic mind this place is not a "space" out of time, but a mode of existence. It was another word for the "seat" of the divine at the protological moment of *b)r¹)□i ∀Â*. Likewise, neither the "house" (from *baità*) nor the "rooms" or "mansions" (from)*awànà*) indicate Western cultural constructions of fixed material, spatial realities. Both can be seen as easily as cosmological and phenomenological (using Western terms that bridge the linguistic gulf between experience and what is experienced).

Continuing this thread of interpretation, the mode of being that Jesus would prepare by his passing was the same kind of living resonance that he experienced in his connection to the *ruþà*, *spirit* or *breath*, of Abraham and the prophets. Through the same phenomenological connection, Jesus' disciples could connect to him at any moment. Each person's individual divine image (the "room" or experienced "accommodation") would have a place in the one, original and all-inclusive divine image of humanity (the dynamic "house") present at the first beginning. Jesus' pre-existent and continuing presence, connected to the first "I am" and the divine image, becomes then a source of guidance for his individual disciples.

Because his disciples were so attached to his outer form and literal words, Jesus predicted that they would better be able to contact his living essence and experience when he was not longer enfleshed among them. He also adds that they "already know the way" (14:4) he is going. When they try to deny that they know the way, he first tells them (in the Peshitta and Old Syriac versions) that the "I am" ()*enà*)*enà*, literally, I-I) – that is, the original divine image of humanity that reflects the only and divine "I Am" – exists as the "way, the truth and life" (14:6). This "I am" or "I-I" formula also echoes words of Holy Wisdom in several late Hebrew texts. In the Peshitta and Old Syriac versions, these words, normally translated "way," "truth," and "life," are rendered in the Peshitta by)*urþà* (the path), □*eràrà* (the sense of right direction) and *þay¹* (the energy to travel it). Jesus also reminds his disciples of their own divine image, present from creation, which is what they have seen and loved in him, mirroring it back to them. When they have really seen and

experienced this image in him, they have also seen the image of the parent of all creation, the "father", as it is usually translated (14:9: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father?").

Two things are striking here: The layers of meaning the Peshitta and Old Syriac versions allow here clearly straddle the notions of faith and self-knowledge or experience. Second, in this light the Jesus of John comes much closer to the Jesus of Thomas.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this preliminary work, I would argue for a range of understandings about the nature of creation and Wisdom-at-the-beginning that permeated the formative stages of Judaism and Christianity for several hundred years and are reflected in various textual transmissions. In other words, one doctrine did not simply succeed another in either community in a "survival of the fittest" way, but existed side-by-side as both communities very gradually took on the identities we now see as "Christian" and "Jewish" over a period that lasted well into the 4th century CE. This would accord with, for instance, Boyarin's (1999, 2004) research on the hybrid construction of early Jewish and Christian identities in general.

In Midrash Genesis Rabbah, for instance, the earliest rabbinic commentary on Genesis (dated between the fourth and fifth centuries CE), the position of Wisdom at the beginning, found in Proverbs 8, is equated with the Torah (Parashah I:I, Neusner (1985) trans., p. 1). The link between Wisdom and Torah appears to be mediated by the concept of "Word," which occurs in the book of Sirach (second century BCE), as we saw above. The conversation about Wisdom-at-the-beginning in which the communities of John and Thomas may have engaged also then needs to include the community or communities out of which Midrash Genesis Rabbah arose.

As Christian scholars like Kung (1993) and Islamic scholars (Khalidi 2001, Nasr 1997 and Schimmel 1975, 1994) have shown, Islam enshrines low Christological notions of Jesus as well as protological ideas of creation, with which Muhammad came into contact through Eastern Christians. Some of these protological ideas appear in the Quran and parallel the statements made by the Jesus of Thomas (and in its Semitic sense, of John). These include the idea of

return to original creation and divine image held within the bowels of the first human (the so-called "day of Alastu" found in Sura 7:172) as well as a primordial cloak of light that spreads from the first beginning throughout created existence (Sura 2). Elsewhere the Quran describes the human journey as a return to this original condition of the divine image found at creation (see Suras 7:172, 33:72-73 and 41:9-12). Here the notion of Word/Wisdom at the beginning evolves into the concept of the *nur-i-muhammad.* In a hadith, Muhammad echoes Jesus' "Before Abraham was…" saying with his own equivalent: "Adam and the prophets follow my banner."

Using the preliminary study presented here, along with the ideas of hybrid identity formation in early proto-Judaism and Christianity, we may begin to map out a trajectory for Bereshit ideas, stories and practices that includes early Islam as well. If nothing else, this trajectory shows that Semitic protological ideas of time and space carried power and authority for hundreds of years in the Middle East, a power that on a personal level, to its individual practitioners, translated at the times of ritual beginnings – whether of moments, days or years – as "Genesis Now!"

Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Learning
7 East Champanyie, Edinburgh EH9 3EL

Notes

1 James Barr (1961) in *The Semantics of Biblical Language* attempted to refute Boman's assertions of the differences between Greek and Hebrew language thinking in relation to their respective views of time. As Chilton (2002: 11-12) has pointed out, Barr's motivations were more theological than linguistic. Barr saw Boman's work supporting a salvation-historical basis for theology, which posits that God intervenes in human history sequentially in order to make history meaningful (a position popularised by Barth, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann among others). I would argue, in addition, that Barr never successfully refutes Boman in that the latter did not posit a simple dichotomy between linear and circular time, but rather one in which the synchronic nature of ancient Semitic languages constructs a cosmology in which the past, present and future are all in motion at the same moment within and through a dynamic reality that is nothing other than divine at its heart. Boman's "pulse-time" is neither strictly circular nor linear, and so arguments for

or against the development of some sort of teleology by the ancient Hebrews need to be tempered by deeper consideration of languages that construct neither the sort of time nor space that we tend to take for granted in mythological and biblical studies.

2 In preparing this article for publication in *Cosmos*, I was directed to the excellent article by N. Wyatt (1996) on the vocabulary and neurology of orientation in Ugaritic religion. Wyatt unpacks both the ahead (past)/ behind (future) and left/right polarities from several viewpoints that I find very suggestive for future work. The intersection and interaction of culture and neurology/anatomy in the way these orientations are considered and experienced in ancient Semitic culture support a number of points made here. A further factor for discussion would be whether the distinction between spatial and temporal orientations in ancient Semitic languages was as definite as presumed by Wyatt. In relation to the origin of a moving, past (ahead)/future (behind) orientation towards the east, one factor could well stem from a paleolithic, nomadic culture, before any settlement, in which a pulsed movement ahead (that is, at regular intervals), following in the footsteps of the ancestors, was a more or less constant awareness. On this whole question, I also find the study of nomadic consciousness by Berman (2000) very stimulating.

References

Greek New Testament (Nestle-Aland, 27th Edition, second printing) (1995). Gramcord Institute (electronic edition). (1993). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, A (Abridged). (1997). Based on *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907. Digitised and abridged as a part of the Princeton Theological Seminary Hebrew Lexicon Project under the direction of Dr. J. M. Roberts. Vancouver, WA: Grammcord Institute.

Hebrew Masoretic Text. (1994). Westminster Hebrew Morphology. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary. Electronic Edition. Vancouver, WA: Grammcord Institute.

Peshitta Syriac Bible (1979). Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. London: United Bible Societies.

Syriac New Testament and Psalms. Based on the 1901 Oxford: Clarendon Press edition prepared by G. H. Gwilliam. Istanbul: Bible Society in Turkey.

Ali, Yusuf A., tr. (1938). *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation, Commentary.* Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf.

Barr, James (1961). *The Semantics of Biblical Language.* London: Oxford University Press.

Berman, Morris (2000). *Wandering God: Studies in Nomadic Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Boman, Thorlief (1970). *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960. Repr. New York: W.W. Norton.

Boyarin, Daniel (1999). *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. Stanford: Stanford Univerity Press.

---- (2004). *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Chilton, Bruce (2002). *Redeeming Time: The Wisdom of Ancient Jewish and Christian Festal Calendars.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Davies, Stevan (1992). The christology and protology of the Gospel of Thomas. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111,4: 663-83.

Douglas-Klotz, Neil (1999a). Midrash and postmodern inquiry: suggestions toward a hermeneutics of indeterminacy. *Currents in Biblical Studies* 7, 181-93.

---- (1999b). *The Hidden Gospel: Decoding the Spiritual Message of the Aramaic Jesus.* Wheaton, IL: Quest.

---- (2000). Genesis Now: midrashic views of bereshit mysticism in Thomas and John. Paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in the Thomas Traditions Section; Nashville, TN, November 21, 2000.

---- (2003a). Reading John in Bereshit Time: semitic constructions of creation mysticism in the early Syriac versions. Paper presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in a joint session of the Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Section and the Christian Apocrypha Section; Atlanta, GA, November 24, 2003.

---- (2003b). *The Genesis Meditations: A Shared Practice of Peace for Christians, Jews and Muslims.* Wheaton, IL: Quest.

Kanagaraj, Jey J. (1998). *"Mysticism" in the Gospel of John*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 158. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Khalidi, Tarif (2001). *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Kiraz, George Anton (1994). *Lexical Tools to the Syriac New Testament.* Sheffield: JSOT Press/Sheffield Academic Press.

Klijn, A. F. J. (1992). Jewish Christianity in Egypt. in B. Pearson and J. Goehring, eds. *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity.* Philadelphia: Fortress, pp. 161-75.

Kung, Hans (1993). *Christianity and World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Lambdin, T.O. (1989). The *Gospel According to Thomas* [English translation]. In *Nag Hammadi Codex II. 2-7 together with XII,2*, Brit. Lib. Or.4926(1), and P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655*, ed. B. Layton, Vol. 1, pp. 53-93. NHS 20. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Lee, Bernard J. (1988). *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Miller, Robert J. et al., eds (1992). *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version.* Sonoma: Polebridge Press.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossain (1968). *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man.* London: Unwin.

Neusner, Jacob (1985). *Genesis Rabbah:The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation*, Vol. I. Atlanta: Scholar's Press.

Pagels, Elaine (1999). Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118,3: 477-96.

Parrinder, Geoffrey (1995). *Jesus in the Quran*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Patterson, Stephen and Marvin Meyer (1992). The Gospel of Thomas [English translation]. In Miller et al., eds.

Patterson, Stephen J., James M. Robinson, Hans-Gebhard Bethage et al. (1998). *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age.* Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Ruzer, Serge (1997). Reflections of Genesis 1-2 in the Old Syriac Gospels. In *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*,

ed. Judith Frishman and Lucas Van Rompey, pp. 91-102. Louvain: Peeters.

Schimmel, Annemarie (1994). *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam.* Albany: State University of Islam Press.

Smith, J. Payne, ed. (1903). *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sokoloff, Michael (1990). *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period.* Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press.

Wyatt, N. (1996). The Vocabulary and Neurology of Orientation: The Ugaritic and Hebrew Evidence. In *Ugarit, Religion and Culture*, ed. N. Wyatt, W. G. E. Watson and J. B. Lloyd, pp. 351-80. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag.

King and Warrior-Hero in Ritual Time

DEAN A. MILLER

The two figures of king and warrior-hero discussed here in relation to ritual time are inextricably linked – but also are often drawn as essentially opposed. In political-historical terms the monarch frequently must deal with an aristocracy that traditionally also has an active and not completely trustworthy warlike (warrior) dimension; in imaginal terms, that is in literary or folk evidence, oral or written, the king must deal with the warrior-hero type, and all sorts of tensions arise from this confrontation, though (or perhaps because) the structural images and foci of each are quite different: centre contrasted to periphery, royal stability as against heroic mobility, vertical-hierarchical *versus* horizontal and planar space, civilisation and social order against violent, agonistic individualism – or even culture, at least potentially, as opposed to nature. In terms of ritual and ritual acts, the king is a well-known player, the warrior-hero less so. However, I think that the two types can be drawn together in the ambit of "rituals of clarification" (or "validation"), a ritual mode that I describe below.

Edward Shils, an eminent sociologist seeking a definitive image of ritual (as compared to the categories of ceremonial and etiquette) offers us the following:

> Ritual is a stereotypical, symbolically concentrated expression of beliefs and sentiments regarding ultimate things. ... Ultimate things are sacred things. (Shils 1975: 154-5)

Here is a definition that perhaps shows some of the problems we will encounter. The first part of the declaration is hard, clear, solid social scientific terminology (even as it segues into a softer focus on "beliefs and sentiments") but then we read: "Ultimate things are sacred things." And when we cautiously reach into the numinous realm of "the sacred" we must know that we move from the solid to the insubstantial, from the probative to the world of shadows (though these are *powerful* shadows, to be sure). Yet Shils undoubtedly was correct: minimal as it is, this is *one* way ritual can be parsed.

Cosmos 18 (2002), 159-171.

In a provocative and enlightening review article published in 2002 the medievalist Geoffrey Koziol might, on the one hand, seem to upset our equilibrium in terms of examining ritual time by remarking that "A sure way of knowing that a concept has ... outlived its usefulness is that experts begin to polish it off with encyclopedic treatments whose smooth-cut surfaces leave no traction for the imagination" (Koziol 2002: 367). The study of ritual, he says, may fall victim to such a fate – but, let us hope, not quite yet. By inference, Koziol authenticates the controlled or disciplined use of imagination in organising and explaining the "facts" of ritual, and his remarks can be taken as a balance to Shils.

SOLAR IMAGERY AND THE KING

Let me begin by isolating one set of images from the vast collection of royal associations, connections, and *Gestalten*, with some observations on a natural phenomenon where ritual has from the most ancient times been created, continued, and adjusted to "mediate" between humankind and a particular, regular, eternally present and renewed power: the lucent, vivifying, ultra-potent patterns of the sun, with its daily as well as its calendrical-seasonal significance well to the fore. This is one way to introduce the king-figure into our discussion, noting that the king-figure used here will mainly be drawn from the fund of narrative describing Indo-European sovereignty in traditional Indo-European-speaking societies, following suggestions first made by Georges Dumézil in limning his Indo-European *idéologie* (see Littleton 1982). I shall be looking at the following solar or heliacal themes: apparition, calendrical/seasonal significance and potency.

Apparition

Apparition refers to the rising of the heavenly solar body in the east, and here we have a fund of data that appears to immediately engage the king. The Byzantine (East Roman) emperor was, I am convinced, an original Sun King, though pre-Christian imperial Rome had already experimented with and inflated heliacal signs and associations for the ruler as early as Nero's reign, while the Persian

Shahinshah had a powerful solar and ouranal resonance.[1] The first emperor Constantine was a great deployer of solar symbolism (see Miller 2002), and inasmuch as each successor to the imperial office was greeted as *Ho Neos Konstantinos*, "the new Constantine", we might expect to see a considerable amount of recapitulated solar and lucent imagery displayed in Byzantine ritual theory and practice – and in fact I shall come back to this important Constantinian connection. For two immediately accessible examples of egregious imperial sun-symbolism, I can point to the so-called Throne of Solomon ceremonial held in the Magnaura Palace, where in a morning rite intended to greet and to awe foreign visitors and ambassadors the emperor appeared from behind the Veil and literally "rose in the East" of this basilicate palace, on the hydraulically-powered Throne, all re-robed and resplendent. The second extraordinary "rising" occurred in the imperial box in the Hippodrome, the Kathisma, where the emperor appeared in ceremony and sat high in the eastern part of the structure with the "microcosmos", that is the Hippodrome, its reference-loaded "courses", and of course his subject people, all spread out beneath him and his beneficent, his sunlike and radiant gaze.

Calendrical/seasonal significance

With the calendrical/seasonal category we get right into the heart of the royal insertion into and resonance to the symbolic valences of the sun. I set aside the regnal year as it essentially shows a re-creation (a re-starting) of time. The key notion here would seem to be a "regularising" and possibly a ritually reinforced image of cosmic harmony. "Harmonising" sovereigns are not far to seek. The Chinese emperors, from a ritual centre called the Hall of Light, placed themselves in precise harmony with the four seasons through the orientation of keys rites, the colour of their robes, even the food served them and the serving utensils used (Soothill 1951: 25-34). Rome's emperors (in the later empire), according to one panegyrist, sought to imitate "the order of the world and the heavens" as they associated themselves with (and named themselves after or were imaged as) the gods who maintained that supernal order, and Jupiter in particular (Mamertinus, in *Pan. Lat*. 4, 4, 1f; cited in MacCormack 1981: 172). The Byzantine rulers, from their novel Christian

perspective, came very early to the Christomimetic posture observed in so many of their ritual observances – these naturally were tied to the Christian round of sacral occasions (connected, by a sort of pseudo- or para-history, to the earthly or human life of Christ) but not only to these portentous events. Constantine the Great dated his accession to imperial power in the spring, to the Kalends of March which marked "the ever-returning years" (ibid.). We are told that on May 11th, the traditional anniversary of the founding of the city, "a gilded image of wood that represented either Constantine or the sun – or both – was placed into a quadrigate chariot to circle, sun-wise, the great course-track of the Hippodrome" (Miller 2000a: 57, citing Dagron 1984: 45-6). (Under the associated rubric of a marvellous "provision of light" we might put those dramatic, nocturnal imperial ceremonies where the special provision of plenty of artificial light was very much to the point, with massive polykandela – borrowed from Hagia Sophia – set about to illuminate the course of the ritual processions: this was Grand Artifice indeed, and even a kind of magic). And I might add a Byzantine ritual recorded in the *De ceremoniis* (Constantine [VII] 1829: I, 5, 49ff.) and called "The Return from the Holy Apostles", this ritual explicitly associates the living and Christ-imitating emperor, at the primary feast of Orthodox Easter, both with a sepulchral locus (for the emperors were buried in the Holy Apostles) *and* with the revived year – along with that imperial "apostolic" image which had begun with the first Constantine, who called himself *isapostolos*, "Equal to the Apostles".

In all of these East Roman (and other) microcosmic examples we see the royal or imperial figure setting himself or being firmly set into an annual, predictable and periodic pattern, reinforcing harmony or (in another image) homeostasis. Our indispensable collection of their ceremonials, however, tells us that the Byzantines, when challenged by the vagaries of history, *invented* rituals – an important and emblematic example being a 10th century CE "reception" (*dokha*) laid on for a foreign (Kievan) potentate who happened to be a woman (that is "Helga", or Olga, "the Rus" [*De ceremoniis* 594ff]). In fact it adds to the problematic of ritual if we recall that the noted occasions – rituals evidently devoted to reflecting and reinforcing the "governing", and overt image of the Sun's diurnal or seasonal pattern – are themselves definable as "left hand"operations, that imperial left hand which extended and manipulated mysterious and in fact *magical* powers.[2] So some of these rituals – especially those attached to the

legend of Constantine – show less of a passive, reflexive, and harmonising aspect and more of an active, creative, energetic and magical one; here the king-figure is no mere reflection of heliacal radiant energy, passively recognisant of those good things provided and balanced in season, but instead he *propels* time into being, as Christ himself inaugurated – created – a totally new time (in what Hannah Arendt called a "transmundane event").[3]

Potency

Finally we move into another set or zone of ideas about measurement and temporality, ideas having to do with the king's creatively imagined (rather than real) *age* – recognising the complicating fact that the ruling monarch may simultaneously be called "ever young," "old in wisdom." and finally "ageless". To the *young* king Luc de Heusch once assigned the quality of *celeritas*, that is, the ruler is imbued with what he termed "la violence créatrice" (de Heusch 1962: 19-20, 25) though I think that this is balanced by and balances the *gravitas* and the imaging and reinforcement of magisterial harmony seen in the wise (and signatively, simultaneously stable or static "old") ruler. At this point I suggest that we might find another example reinforcing N. J. Allen's important theory regarding an Indo-European Fourth Function, one in which so-called contradictions (the ruler seen as ever young, as old, as eternal and ageless – seen as not subject to ageing at all) are simply submerged in his overarching potency – where he, as king, is not simply Sovereign but stands above, outside of, exterior to any specific "functional" or other defining or limiting category (see Miller 1999).

THE WARRIOR-HERO

Now, how to insert the second modality or icon of power, the warrior-hero, into this ritual or ritualised context? Again, I am drawing my data from Indo-European narrative contexts (that is, epics or hero tales). How can "clarification" or a ritual of clarification be discovered in the heroic *bios*? In the matter of temporal notation – time – we have a new and disruptive set of images, again with important contrasts and oppositions added. At

first it seems that the *human*, even the *superhuman* hero is rarely if ever overtly attached to the stately rhythms (or ritually defined moments) of the processing year – though he certainly is more at home in nature, specifically in wilderness, than he is in culture and its restrictive constructions and enclosures. (The biography of a mythological or divine hero-type of course may be parsed in terms of the symbolic death and rebirth of the year). Time is a measurement and a carrier or current that is *extended* for the king (and we use ritualised terms and formulae in reference to his putative "age" and his aging that can be ambiguous and contradictory, but usually stress extension, imperishability and even limitlessness – "May he reign forever", "Many years", and so on).[3] The warrior-hero's mundane time, on the other hand, is very strictly demarcated, and in fact is severely contracted. The "parabola" of his life, as I have described it elsewhere (Miller 2000b: 84-8) usually is incredibly energetic but very short. He is physically precocious and in fact dangerous at a very early age, his entire persona is dominated by the dark urge toward violent and often deadly confrontation with his peers or other powerful, testing forces. Usually he has no normal family life, and if he generates offspring (for example, a son) a very widespread Indo-European scenario has him kill that son, if only unknowingly or by accident – that is, effectively he kills the future, and in generational or temporal terms he completely isolates himself. Seldom is he personally (as compared to the "mythic" and extensive persistence of his narrative legend and fame) granted what we call a span of ordinary durative time (old heroes are rare, and usually show quite other characteristics in addition to – or instead of – the irrepressibly confrontational and martial – for example, the Tricksterish). He, this hero, is the predictor, master, *and* the victim of the violent, final and fatal point, of the dramatic punctual, terminal occasion, which in the end he does not survive, nor does he wish to.

Nevertheless the warrior-hero is engaged in at least some ritual or ritualised behaviour, or at least I think that a case can be made for this assertion – though these usually are "rituals of violence" or "rituals of rupture", for they are not concerned (or not overtly concerned) with any construction or reinforcement of homeostatic social order, unless at the end they remove someone who is potentially dangerous to that order. These ritualised occasions certainly have a sacred element to them (looking back to Shils' definition of ritual) because they involve the taking of life – and quite possibly they involve a form of human

sacrifice. The micro-rituals of combat are "of the right hand", of course – we would say the sword hand. They begin with the identification of an attested "fitness," that is, they demand the proven equality of the combatants one to the other, meaning a comparable, recognisably elite or warrior status. Then the resulting combat may see its beginning in a verbal exchange – for having accepted the comparability or equality of the foe, this "flyting" speech (we can easily find Greek, Celtic, ancient Persian and of course Germanic/Norse examples) tries to insult, derogate, or reduce him; this sort of "heroic" exchange probably is itself a fossilised remnant of a ritual obligation.[5]

In the drama of the actual combat we will see how an opponent essentially declared to be equal in persona, energy and force must fall and die – a very ancient theme is revealed here. Of course there can be a simple matter of chance or luck – or the working out of Fate (Achilles slew Hector but knew that he himself – perfectly deadly warrior that he was – would also die, and die soon, and young).[6] The intervention of otherworldly or divine powers in the heroic or agonic end-game is very often seen. The most complex scenario is, I would contend, visible in the Celtic hero-tales, where we observe that nonpareil heroes – Cú Chulainn would be the prime example – are granted the most extraordinary personal and martial powers for their lifetime, but their heroic actions are at the same time closely surrounded, governed or slyly limited by *gessa*, "prohibitions". So at the end of his violent and confrontational life the great Cú Chulainn is placed in a situation (a supernatural antagonist is involved here as well) where in order to obey one *geis* he must violate another – the primordial Catch 22.[7] The Irish Celtic tales also give us another "hero's death", and one that takes us to the arena of Emain Macha and that strange (but real, verifiable) incendiary event, the destruction of a wooden structure evidently erected there for that very purpose. As Chris Lynn has remarked, and I think cogently, this big circular structure, as its carbonised remains have been excavated and its shape reconstructed, closely resembles the descriptions we have of the *bruiden*, the "hostels" frequently encountered in the ancient Irish tale-cycles (in Lynn and Miller forthcoming). These Irish hostels are uncanny places, considering that they supposedly are given over to riotous hospitality, and they are structures where certain heroes (or more precisely, certain Irish war-kings) tend to meet their end. The most famous of them is Da Derga's Hostel, where the king Conaire

Mór met his death; this besieged *bruig* was thrice set on fire, but not burnt down (Conaire's death ultimately resulted from another case of conflicting *gessa*). The imprisoning, fatal *bruig* was definitely burnt in the case of Diarmaid mac Fergus and of Diarmaid's victim Flann mac Dima (see Rees and Rees 1975: 333-5)[8] and we can see that destroyed by fire or not, the *bruiden* are where, as Jeffrey Gantz observes, "the slaying of a king, in the house of death, at Samhain" is seen (Gantz 1981: 60 – in the case of Cormac mac Airt the king's death occurred in "the *ráith* of Spelán the Hospitaller" [see Ó Cathasaigh 1977: 68], and the circular *ráith* is taken by Ó Cathasaigh to be an Otherworld place).[9]

KING AND WARRIOR-HERO

The paradigmatic Irish hero Cú Chulainn and the paradigmatic Irish king Conaire Mór both were slain at Samhain, which begins the time of death (and the new year) in the Celtic calendar.[10] Even when the calendrical date is not established, the deaths in *bruig* or *ráith* signify that the dead hero or warrior-king crosses over or fatally dives into the realm of Otherworld powers, which is by definition a realm of non-time (in human terms) and non-being (see Sterckx 2003).[11] From the signs of the sun, with its daily predictability and its observed seasonal variability, we have come to that place where mundane time and all its marks and rituals has ceased to exist – where hero and war-king are swallowed up, though their great tales may – with luck – long endure in the human world.

My evidence for this essay, mainly taken from the two ends of the European subcontinent, seems to show our two principal players, king and warrior, caught in a more complex mixture of ritual occasions and acts, and of temporal signatures and meanings, than we might at first recognise. I suggest that the ligature that can bind the two "powerful" iconic figures, king and warrior-hero, together, is in the form of a "ritual of clarification". Heliacal or solar ritual "radiates" the king-figure, and he is drawn toward the generalised theme of light; he is made Lucifer, the Light-Bearer (and so nearly divine). At the same time, the Christ-imitating ruler is drawn into the temporal frame of the Christian mystery (with its pre-Christian echoes): he is "born" into the dying year's darkness, he is "reborn" as the year is reborn. What is clarified in the case of the warrior-hero is *humanity* –

how through the intensification of the rituals of violence death is welcomed, extinction is ennobled, and the mysetery of humanity's inevitable fate is made less of a mystery. Royal ritual reaches heavenward, heroic ritual moves in the other direction. The king connects himself to the permanent and the eternal; the warrior-hero knows – and his ritual shows – that only fame can be immortal.

University of Rochester

Notes

1 To say nothing of ancient Egypt. When in 624 AD the emperor Heraclius captured Khusrau's capital of Ganjak he found "Khusrau's own image in the domed roof of the palace, as though enthroned in Heaven, and around it the Sun, Moon and Stars" (Cedrenus repeating Theophanes, cited in L'Orange 1973: 316). For Persian influence on East Rome, see Miller 1999b.

2 The theory assigning specific kinds of powers to the Right and to the Left hand of the monarch is laid out in Miller 1978, and is a theory expanded from ideas found in Needham 1973 which are reinforced by Dumézil's conception of a Mitraic-Varunaic scission in Indo-European sovereignty; see Dumézil 1988. The idea is given additional dimensions or morphisms in Miller 1998a and 1998b, along with other "mysteries of duality".

3 Arendt 1963: 27. On the birth of Christ we note the Byzantine Nativity ritual's cantorial declaration: "A star foretells the sun, Christ, born in Bethlehem of a Virgin" after which the emperor himself stood forth (Constantine [VII] 1829: *De ceremoniis* 35-8). We also see that *new* rituals – rituals created to "control" new situations – are excused or ameliorated by the claim that "the Christ-loving Constantine" had presciently left word that the ritual was proper, acceptable: ritual *innovation* thus is made subject to a prepotent Founder's presumed *authentication*; see Miller 2000a: 55.

4 Kantorowics, in *The King's Two Bodies*, would assign these attributions of agelessness to the "other" aspect of the king: see Kantorowicz 1957: 314-450.

5 See e.g. Sayers 1997 for a Celtic context; Miller 2000b: 232-6 for a general picture of the taunting "contest".

6 See Miller 2000: 120, 126, 355-9 for Achilles. Elsewhere, and out of a huge body of commentary and exegesis, see Katherine Cullen King (1987), Jasper Griffin (1980: esp. 81-102) and Rachel Bespaloff's small classic, *On the* Iliad (Bespaloff 1947).

7 *Brislech mór Maige Muirthemne*, "The Death of Cú Chulainn". In Cross and Slover 1989: 333-9.

8 In fact these are "threefold deaths", which is another topic; see Ward 1970, Radner 1983, Sayers 1990a and 1990b.

9 Cormac, rather unheroically at first glance, choked to death on a fish-bone, but it was the bone of a salmon, and salmon have a special significance in Celtic lore; see Nagy 1985: 155-9 for the case of Finn mac Cumall and the Salmon of Wisdom, or see the Welsh tale of *Culwych ac Olwen* for another "wise" and knowledgeable fish: the Salmon of Llyn Llyw (Ford 1977: 148-9.

10 The Celtic practice of counting by "nights" rather than by "days" and beginning their year when the year is dying is commented on with typical lucidity in Sterckx 2003.

11 Dalton (1970: 1) lists the deaths of fourteen Irish kings: "of these seven are said to have happened at the autumn festival, Samhain (Hallowe'en), and none at any other time of the year." So we have an obvious pattern.

References

Arendt, Hannah (1963). *On Revolution.* New York: Viking.

Bespaloff, Rachel, tr. M. MacCarthy (1947). *On the* Iliad. New York: Harper Torch and Bollingen Library.

Brislech mór Maige Muirthemne = The Death of Cú Chulainn (1989). In Cross and Slover, pp. 333-40.

Constantine [VII] Porphyrogenitus (1829). *De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae*. Bonn: Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae.

Cross, Tom Peete and Clark Harris Slover (1969). *Ancient Irish Tales*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble.

Dagron, Gilbert (1984). *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le receuil des "Patria".* Bibliothèque Byzantine, 8. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Dalton, G. F. (1970). The Ritual Killing of the Irish Kings. *Folklore* 81, 1-22.

De Heusch, Luc (1962).Le pouvoir et le sacré. *Annales du Centre d'Études des Religions*, v. 1. Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Institut de Sociologie.

Dumézil, Georges (1988). *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*. New York: Zone.

Ford, Patrick, ed. and tr. (1977). *The Mabinogion and Other Welsh Tales*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Gantz, Jeffrey, tr. (1981). *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Griffin, Jasper (1980). *Homer on Life and* Death. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Janin, R. (1964). *Constantinople Byzantine: Développement urbain et répertoire topographique.* 2nd edn. Archives de l'Orient Chrétien, 4A. Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines.

Kantorowicz, Ernst (1957). *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

King, Katherine Cullen (1987). *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle* Ages. Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press.

Koziol, Geoffrey (2002). The Dangers of Polemic: Is ritual still an interesting topic of historical study? (Review article). *Early Modern Europe* 11/4, 367-88.

L'Orange, H. P. (1973). *Likeness and Icon: Selected Studies in Classical and Early Medieval Art*. Odense: Odense University Press.

Lynn, Chris and Dean Miller (forthcoming). Crossing Boundaries: Literary and Archaeological Evidence for Early Irish Royal Inauguration Rites and Sites. *Studia Indo-Europaea.*

MacCormack, Sabine (1981). *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity.* The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 1. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Miller, Dean (1978). The Emperor in Ritual: Magic and Harmony. In *Studies in Honor of Peter Charanis*, 1, ed. J. S. Barker, pp. 112-29. *Byzantine Studies/Études byzantines*. Tempe, Arizona.

---- (1998a). Destroyer or Builder and Other Bifurcations. *Proceedings of the Seventh UCLA Indo-European Conference, Los Angeles, 1995*, ed. A. della Volpe and E. Polomé, pp. 173-87. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Monograph Series no. 27. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man.

---- (1998b). Mysteries of Duality: Ringing the Changes in Indo-European Sovereignty. *Cosmos* 14, 57-67.

---- (1999a). Who Deals With the Gods? Kings and Other Intermediaries. In *Miscellanea Indo-Europea*, ed. E. Polomé, pp. 261-74. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Monograph Series no. 33. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man.

---- (1999b). An Imperial Metamorphosis: Persia and the Construction of Absolute Authority in East Rome. In *Actes des Deuxièmes Rencontres d'Anthropologie du Monde Indo-Européen et de Mythologie Comparée. Métamorphoses = Ollodagos* 13, 109-33.

---- (2000a). Constantine and His City: Cosmic Readjustments in Art and Politics. *Byzantine Studies/Études byzantines*, ns 3, 54-64.

---- (2000b). *The Epic Hero.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nagy, Joseph Falaky (1985). *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Needham, Rodney, ed. (1973). *Right and Left: Essays in Dual Symbolic Classification*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Ó Cathasaigh, Tomás (1977). *The Heroic Life of Cormac mac Airt.* Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Radner, Joan Newlon (1983). The Significance of the Threefold Death in Celtic Tradition. In *Celtic Folklore and Christianity: Studies in Memory of William W. Heist*, ed. Patrick Ford, pp. 180-99. Santa Barbara, CA: McNally and Lofton.

Rees, Alwyn and Brinley Rees (1975 [1961]). *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Sayers, William (1990a). *Guin agus Crochad agus Gólad*: The Earliest Irish Threefold Death. In *Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies, Halifax, 1989*, ed. Cyril Byrne, pp. 65-82. Halifax, NS: Chair of Irish Studies, St. Mary's University.

---- (1990b). The Three Wounds: Tripartition as Narrative Tool in Ireland and Iceland. *Incognita* 1, 50-90.

---- (1997). Contracting for Combat: Flyting and Fighting in *Táin Bó Cúailgne*. *Emania* 16, 49-62.

Shils, Edward (1975). *Center and Periphery: Essays in Microsociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Soothill, William E. (1951). *The Hall of Light: A Study of Early Chinese Kingship*. London: Lutterworth Press.

Sterckx, Claude (2003). Le temps et le non-temps des Celtes: pourquoi la nuit avant le jour? Représentations du temps dans les religions. *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège*s, Fasc. 285, pp. 251-65.

Ward, Donald (1970). The Three-fold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice? In *Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. Jaan Puhvel, pp. 123-42. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Marking Liturgical Time: The Ritual Year in the Illustrations of the Book of Hours

ROSEMARY WRIGHT

One of the most likely places to look for evidence of the ritual year might be the calendar pages of books of hours. This usage of the word ritual describes the medieval representation of the various human activities marking the passage of the agricultural year by which the months could be identified. These seasonal occupations illustrated in the calendar pages could be understood as representing the rituals marking the passage of earthly time in the twelve-monthly cycle. But these activities did not simply identify the appropriate month or illustrate the timing of the earthly round. These rituals were normally, at least in the Middle Ages, subject to the authority of their accompanying text, namely the diary of liturgical celebrations appropriate to the chosen "use" adopted by the book's owner. This "diary of events" literally sanctified the month and brought the ritual turning of the seasons under the control of liturgical observance within the devotional life of the user. Books of Hours, however, cannot thereby be classified as liturgical any more than they can be classified as simply devotional. Much depended on the practical personal use of any given example, for books of hours operated in different ways and in different locations. Questions concerning who looked at the book, for what purposes and how often are crucial conditioning factors in how we might interpret the illustrations, including those of the calendar pages (Lowden 2003: 17-53). If we remain open to a range of possibilities concerning the use and display of such books, so we should be equally alert to the possibility of visual diversity, even in the apparently straightforward conventions of the calendar cycle.

The entries of the medieval calendar acted as a prefatory sequence to the book as a whole. Familiarity of use and an awareness of the design plan would have allowed the readers to find their way through this multi-text volume using the page markers established by the book's decorative programme. The texts of the hours represented a series of prayers, psalms and lessons, often appropriate to the time of day at which they were said. The main orientation of these devotions

Cosmos 18 (2002), 173-191.

was to the Virgin through a traditional devotional sequence comprising the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This daily office required the division of the day into a series of *horae* (hours) which marked out the times of the day, and brought the daily ordering of devout lay men and women into accord with the daily devotions required from the clergy.[1] The choice of illustrations often revealed as much about ownership as about devotional practice. Despite this focus on the individual needs and aspirations of the book's owner, the artist was careful to reinforce the interplay between the actual experience of the reader and the over-arching guidance of the Church.

This interplay operated with particular resonance in the calendar pages, where the textual entry of each month laid out the feasts and celebrations of the church year. However, these monthly entries need not describe actual "use" in a liturgical sense because a genuinely liturgical calendar would have left empty spaces against certain days. Instead the calendar could be a composite, a compilation of different observances so that every day had an entry. In this case the calendar could be described as historical, each day filled with a commemoration introduced for private reflection. The flexibility of the calendar text suggests that these entries may not always be relied on as practical guides to daily observance but are intended to represent the church at prayer in a more generic sense (Figure 1).[2] It also suggests a loose relationship with the marginal illustration as changes in the calendar entries need have no bearing on the decoration of the page. This decoration relied on a distinct visual tradition with its roots in late Antiquity and was intended to identify the calendar month by its star sign and the ritual activity associated with it. With this labelling function, the decoration of the calendar page, where it existed at all, was confined to the margins. Edging the lettering of the calendar entries, this imagery could be said to belong to the space of the world rather than the sacred space of the text (Camille 1992: 20). By their position in relation to the writing on the page, these pictures would be interpreted as touching the reader's experience. This connection with daily life was the more insistent as the decoration expanded from marginal notation to a ribbon of narrative surrounding the calendar text on all sides. Even when the illustrations almost take over the calendar, as in some early sixteenth-century examples, the calendar itself was still visually assertive, sometimes in a wooden frame, sometimes illusionistically tacked on to the picture field or left floating on the picture surface. In addition, these framing devices

often draw attention to the important feasts written into the calendar entry by recording them in the marginal frame as relief carvings or painted cameos (Figure 2). Eventually, the calendar illustration acquired a visual life of its own so the calendar cycle could offer a double-page spread in which one leaf was devoted to the illustration of the month.[3] It will become apparent that the medieval calendar picture represents a different object from its Renaissance successor where the visual accent on the representation of the natural world shifted the viewer's attention towards the depiction of seasonal or atmospheric changes recognisable from actual life. Instead of a labelling function, the calendar illustrations could be considered as having acquired a function descriptive of the passage of time.

The medieval calendar illustrations were informed by two visual traditions, both of which reinforced the notion that this opening section of the book had to do with the intersection of two different concepts of time, cosmic and earthly, represented by the zodiacal signs and the earthly labours. The star sign as a symbol or the constellation itself presided over that activity on earth appropriate to each month, exerting its influence over nature and human endeavour. The star sign of each month acted as an identifying label and evoked a set of expectations regarding favourable influence or otherwise. At the same time this zodiacal reference point marked out the movement of the heavens, tracking the passage of the planets across the sky and reminding the reader of the created order of the heavenly bodies which governed the time-keeping of the stars.[4] The second tradition was that known as the labours (occupations) of the months. A set of conventions had developed by which the months came to be identified with a cycle of activities usually associated with the need to provide food and warmth. These labours were not intended to present the reality of toil but were traditional indicators of the time of year, a kind of visual clock with origins deep in the world of classical antiquity. The slaughter of the pig, for example, usually denoted December while the pruning of the trees indicated the month of March. In the medieval calendar those classical roots had been transformed by the insertion of the monthly entries of the Christian liturgical year. The two-faced god, Janus, the Roman god of the new year who looked to the past and to the future, became transformed into the figure of January who presided over the start of the year (Webster 1938: 62-3, 132-3).

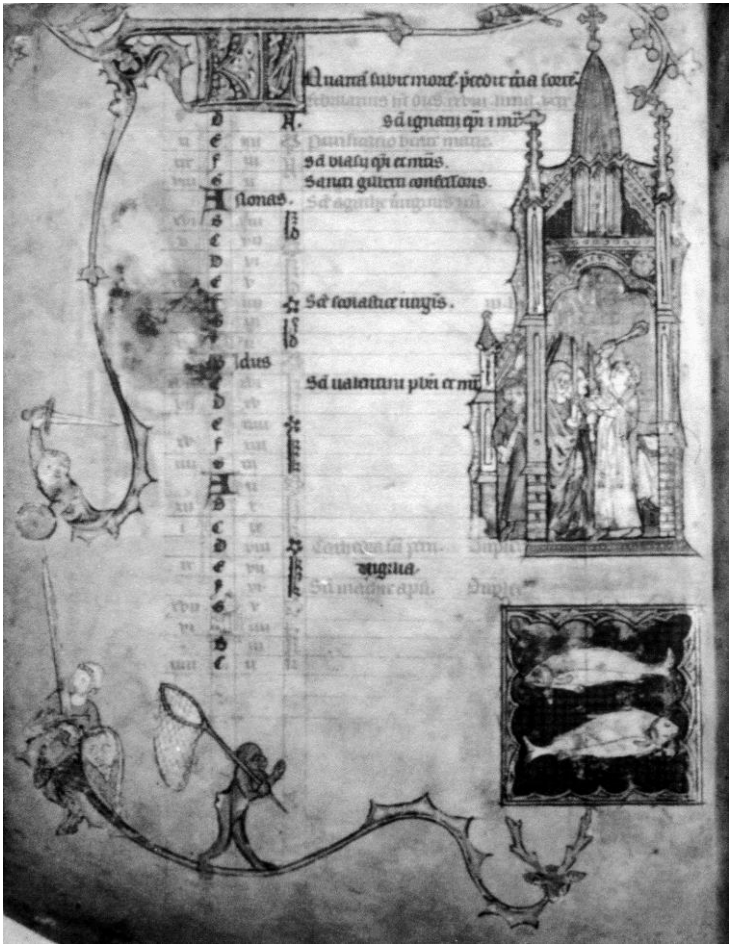
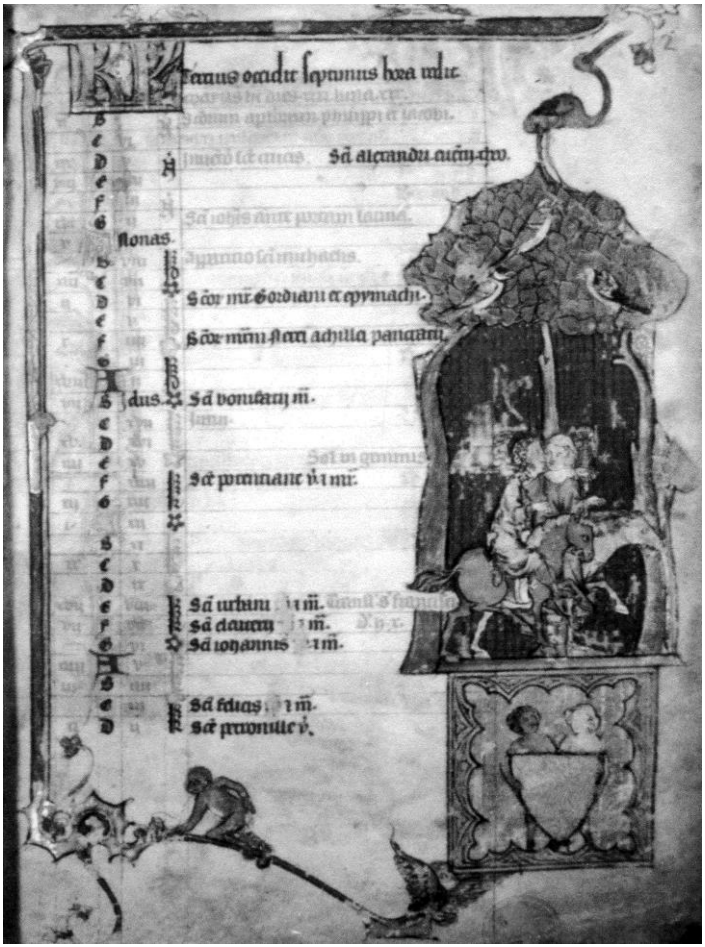


Fig. 1. Calendar pages for February and May; Book of Hours, Flemish, c. 1300 (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.11.22, ff. 1v-2r). Reproduced with the permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.



Marginal scenes coupled with star signs of Pisces and Gemini. Calendar with its blank days suggests liturgical "use" especially as the conventional labour has been replaced by the scene of the Purification of the Virgin which is the major February feast.

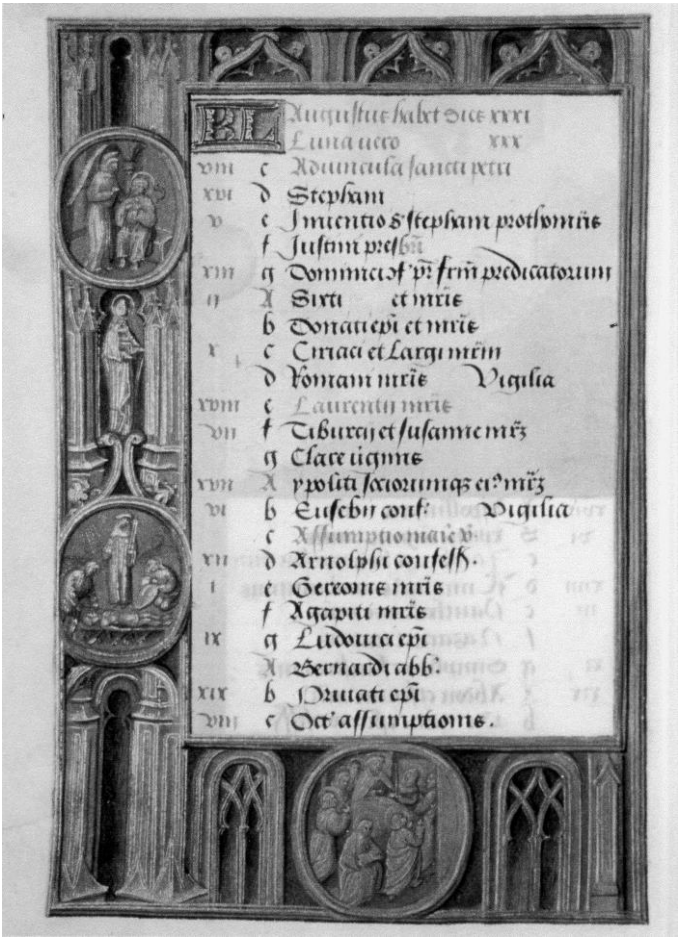


Fig. 2. Calendar pages for August; Book of Hours of James IV and Margaret Tudor, c. 1503 (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 1897, ff. 8v-9r). Reproduced with the permission of the Bildarchiv d.ONB, Wien.

Within the carved reliefs of the border are the important feasts such as St Peter in Chains, the Assumption of the Virgin, the martyrdoms of Stephen, Bartholomew and John the Baptist. The star sign of Virgo, the maiden, hangs in the aperture of the sky.

The calendar conventions were so well rooted that they provided a stock of patterns which could be adapted to any format and developed to suit the book's owner, ever aware of the harmonious connection between the sun's passage across the sky and the activities of society on earth below. They belonged to a symbolic system which marked out the ideal harmony of humankind with the world of creation in accordance with the authority given by God to Adam over the animals. Appropriated in the Christian calendar, the occupation of the months could be regarded as a mnemonic of God's pronouncement in Genesis 3, 19 that required man's co-operation with the earth for his survival: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken … ."[5] This reminder was reinforced by the assertive text of the monthly record of liturgical observances as if they offered a way by which man could once again live in harmony with created things. Consequently this visual reminder of liturgical time may have been a controlling factor in the way in which the artist presented the labours of the ritual year so as to suggest the concordance of the operations of the heavens and of the earth. The medieval calendar illustrations are not about the changing seasons as natural phenomena. Rather they act as symbols of the concordance of earthly labour with God's plan for humankind. As such, the pictures are not naturalistic in intention despite their increasingly naturalistic portrayal in the late Middle Ages (Figure 3).

But the realistic techniques of Renaissance painting, especially in Flanders, were to change that. Artists like Simon Bening could suggest atmospheric conditions, and even weather changes, which did present the seasons as natural phenomena. While in the medieval calendar, nature herself did not change, the images of snow falling in December and January in the work of the Ghent-Bruges illuminators of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, are dependent on the observation of how nature appears under certain seasonal conditions.[6] Although depicted nature may well continue to be presented under an unchanging light and permanently green, the natural world increasingly offered a believable backdrop for the labours of the seasonal year, especially when variations of these seasonal activities were introduced, such as making barrels or conducting markets. These replacements suggested that the scenes of the months were in some way reflections of the reader's own experience. As such they became extremely convincing as actual occupations rather than symbolic ones, albeit of an idealised peasant society.

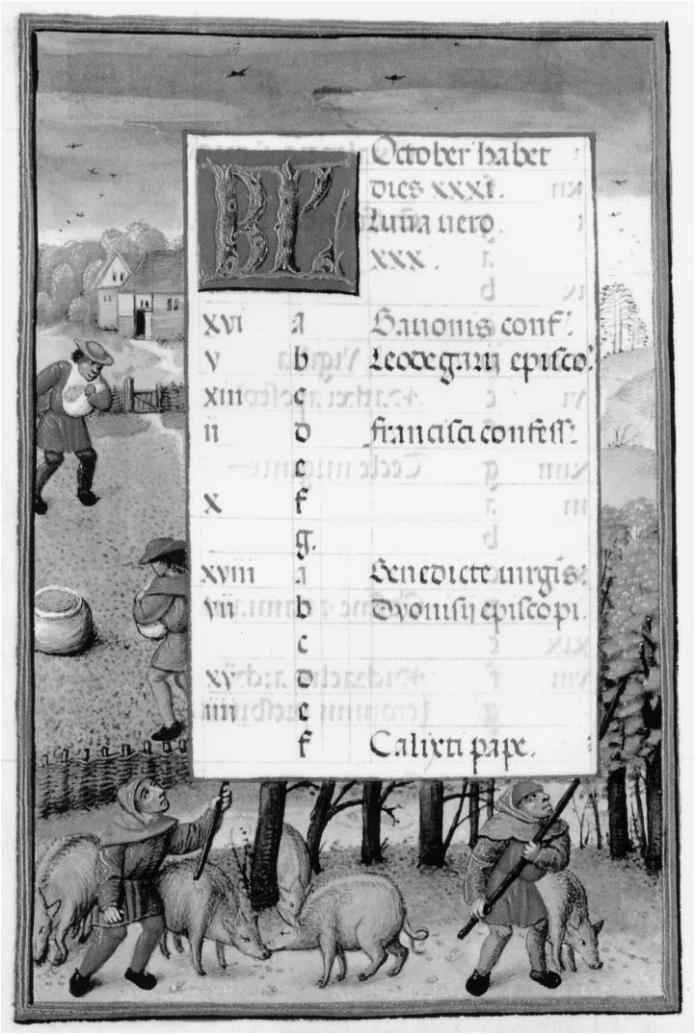


Fig. 3. Calendar page for the first half of October; Croy Hours (Vienna Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 1858, f. 10v). Reproduced with the permission of the Bildarchiv d.ONB, Wien. The borders depict the traditional activity for the autumn months: shaking the trees to let the acorns fall to feed the pigs to be fattened up for the winter feast. In the background, the field is being sown.

It would be tempting to consider the full-page calendar pictures of this late date as illustrative of an ideal world of peasant labour and aristocratic coexistence. While they do provide an encoded value system of the social mores of the day, and may indeed have been treasured on that account, their iconography still suggests the earthly reflection of God's ordering as proclaimed by the psalmist. Just how the imagery of the psalms might operate in this context for the contemporary reader is the subject of this paper.

We suggested at the outset that the calendar illustrations were informed by a range of sources and subject to layers of meaning in their alignment to the calendar text. Artists shared motifs in different settings if they were appropriate, as in the illustration of Virgil's *Eclogues*, in which the *Agricola* begins with an image of the farming year (Wells-Next-The-Sea, Holkham Hall Library, MS. 311, fol. 41v). Each time a motif was used in a different type of text, it brought with it some residue of its former home even when the artist was simply drawing it from a stock of patterns. For example, the motif of the ploughman driving his furrow occurs on folio 156v as part of scenes of rural life in the *Le veil rentier d'Audenarde* made for the Lord of Pamele between 1275 and 1291 (Smeyers 1999: 145, fig. 50). A similar motif occurs in the illustration of September/ October in Simon Bening's leaf dated c. 1540 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Salting MS 2600).

These books of hours were, of course, the property of the wealthy, the aristocracy and the upper merchant class and their illustration necessarily reflected this social and political position. Even the illustration of the calendar pages was appropriated to this end, as the "*terra*" they depicted could be interpreted not only in the general sense of the land but also as the specific area over which they had, or aspired to have, control. Such an identification of lordship could also be seen in the illustration of luxury Psalters made for the same clientele. It is likely that the vignettes and decorated borders could find their way on to the calendar pages which had previously used the limited range provided by the zodiac and the seasonal activities of the year. From the second half of the fifteenth century, as little cameo pictures inserted into the calendar borders, the images of the months' labours expanded into the marginal field to form another layer of illustration behind the calendar text as it were (Figure 3). Inevitably this opened up a larger pictorial field, which could now encompass the requisite occupation within a descriptive landscape setting,

customised for the patron, by representing his castles, his fields, his domain. The monthly round of activity on the land, essential to the identity of the month apart from the zodiacal sign, could now be presented from the perspective of the book's owner. This inflation was to lead to the depiction of miniature landscapes as a subject in themselves: artists like Simon Bening and Gerard Horenbout with their mastery of light and atmosphere turned the locations for the rituals of the year into believable earthly settings by individual characters.

It has been pointed out that there are no obvious religious overtones in the calendar pages.[7] But there is one tradition of illustration through which the calendar landscapes might have evoked religious sentiments. This was the manner of literal illustration, *imagines verborum*, previously applied to the illustration of the psalms (Freeman Sandler 2000: 75-6). These words would have been so familiar to the reader that they would have been easy to recall on the visual prompt. Some of the motifs produced by these word/images were common to both the Psalter and to the depiction of the occupations of the ritual year such as the harrowing of the fields, harvest activities, plucking the fruits of the season. But it is possible that echoes of the poetry of the psalms still charged the calendar pages even when there were no occupations depicted on the landscape, as, for example, in the case of the calendar pages of the luxury Book of Hours produced in Ghent by the illuminator Master Fernando de Lucena for a patron in the circle of Philip the Good, c. 1460-1470. Here star signs are simply superimposed on uninhabited landscapes in a manner which anticipates the Hours of James IV and Margaret Tudor (Smeyers 1999: 398, fig. 58, 330-1, figs 60-1). The visual reminder that all creation is subject to God's ordering is demonstrated in the illustrations by Simon Marmion to the *Livre des Sept Ages du Monde* (Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 9047, fols 1v and f 12) copied for the bibliophile, Jean de Croy, c. 1453. On those pages both the landscape of Paradise and that of the created earth are set below the revolving spheres of the planets under the governance of the Deity. These peaceful landscapes are seen from above in such a way that they share the same mood as the idyllic landscapes of the Master of James IV, where the images of the months contain uninhabited landscapes with no hint of human activity (Figure 2); instead, only the zodiacal sign marks out the month. Such landscapes are themselves unusual in the output of the Flemish books

of hours produced in the Ghent-Bruges circle (Lyle 1999: 162-9). Moreover the fact that such uninhabited landscapes do not seem to have been readily reproduced might suggest that they were designed for a particular patron and that the abandonment of the traditional occupations was not a popular invention. None the less, these landscapes must have been appropriate to a reading of the calendar pages, which could still be understood without the occupations of the months. such a reading might have been encouraged by another pictorial convention used in the illustration of the Psalter whose poetic imagery celebrated the marvels of the created world as God's gift to humankind.

> Thou hast subjected all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, moreover the beasts also of the fields.
> The birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea that pass through the paths of the sea. (Psalm 8, 8-9)

David's song of praise to God for the beauties of the earth is a reminder of the original harmony between man and nature. What better illustration of this bounty than the unchanging nature depicted in the landscape of these hours? It is possible that the iconography of the calendar would have resonated with the words of the psalms. The incorporation of the liturgical psalms within the daily offices of the Book of Hours meant that there was no other opportunity to illustrate the psalms themselves except at the penitential psalms, which carried their own tradition. If there were to be a place where the reader could reflect on the language of the psalms it had to be in the calendar illustrations, which offered a range of opportunities within the existing conventions of labours and star signs.

> Thou shalt bless the crown of the year of thy goodness: and thy fields shall be filled with plenty.
> The beautiful places of the wilderness shall grow fat: and the hills shall be girded about with joy. (Psalm 64, 12-13)

It is possible that conventions relating to the illustration of the psalms could be applied to the calendar illustrations as a variant if required. This would have been entirely appropriate as the language of the psalms flowed through each devotional day.

> For Thou shalt eat the labours of thy hands; blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee. (Psalm 127, 2)

It would be possible to look to the psalms for reference in validating the little scenes of men and women working in seasonal time. The winter months traditionally carried images of fire and feast (protection against wind and rain). Indoor images of feasting or warming at an open fire gradually incorporated glimpses of the outside world so that, by the end of the fifteenth century, illustrators of Flemish hours were depicting the landscape backdrop as a world in the grip of frost or snow derived from the well-known model of the winter scene representing the month of February in the *Très Riches Heures* of John, Duke of Berry (Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS. 9) which was then in the collection of Margaret of Austria in Mechlen. This scene topped by the zodiacal sign and its heavenly orbit was itself the model for the month of February in the Grimani Breviary created by Gerard Horenbout, c. 1510. If the fourth verse from Psalm 101 were applicable to the conventional representation of winter, warming at the fire, "For my days are vanished like smoke: and my bones are grown dry like fuel for the fire," the January feast could equally recall the words of Psalm 64, 5:

> Blessed is he whom thou hast chosen and taken to thee; he shall dwell in thy courts.
> We shall be filled with the good things of thy house ... .

The months of spring traditionally display the work of preparation of the earth and the evidence of new growth. At the core of the calendar tradition was the emphasis on cultivation, nurture and stocking.

> The trees of the field shall be filled and the cedars of Libanus, which he hath planted:
> There the sparrows shall make their nests. (Psalm 103, 16-17)

In the later representations, these activities could be supplanted by images of the courtly enjoyment of the season as in the celebration of May in terms of hunting and hawking and the suggestion of new love. The summer months concentrated on the yield of the field, mowing, reaping, and haymaking.

> Thou hast made all the borders of the earth; the summer and the spring were formed by thee. (Psalm 73, 17)

Because the medieval calendar cycle was agricultural, there was little room here for the introduction of new occupations until there was a shift towards the naturalistic depiction of familiar reality in the depiction of the calendar activities. It has been pointed out that the infrequency of variation should caution us against seeing the calendar images as reflections of medieval economic life. The autumn months, for instance, conventionally dealt with the grape harvest, with ploughing the fields in preparation for new seed, with the fattening up of livestock for the winter.

> … the earth shall be filled with the fruit of thy works;
> Bringing forth grass for cattle and herb for the service of men.
> That thou mayst bring bread out of the earth;
> And that wine may cheer the heart of man.
> (Psalm 103, 14-15)

These are random quotations taken from the psalms recited during the hours of the day. Remembering that the book of hours evolved from the Psalter, it is logical that some of the imagery associated with that tradition should be absorbed into the decoration of the book of hours especially as both texts contained a calendar. One type of psalm illustration is particularly significant in providing a thread of continuity to link the words of the psalms with the illustrations of the calendar cycle. This is the type of text/image relationship mentioned above known as *imagines verborum* or images of words (Freeman Sandler 1996; 2000: 75-6) in which the creative flash point is a word or phrase, or even a syllable, within the text which lends itself to a concrete image. For example, the verse, "He hath set me in a place of pasture, he hath brought me up on the water of refreshment." (Psalm 22, 2) was recalled by images of mountain goats, flocks and herds and running streams. This literal illustration of the poetry of the psalms reaches back to authoritative models from early Christian Rome and is most familiar in the Utrecht Psalter known to have been in England at the beginning of the eleventh century. This system was also used in the marginal illustration of private Psalters where the imagery was generated by key words, or letters, from the psalm text in the centre of the folio.

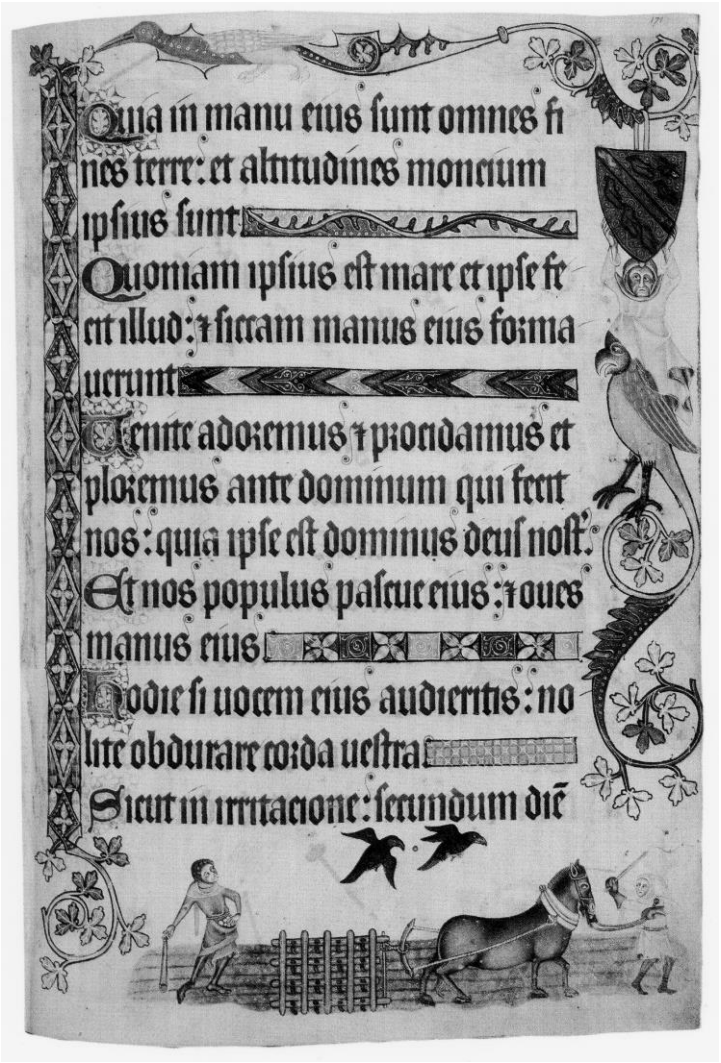


Fig. 4. Part of Psalm 94, Luttrell Psalter, England, 1320-1340 (London, British Library, MS Add.42130, f. 171). Reproduced with the permission of The British Library. The border illustrates the work of harrowing the fields with one man leading the horse while another with a sling shot keeps the birds from taking the seed. The Luttrell arms are held aloft in the right margin, possibly in illustration of the phrase "*in manu eius*" (in his hand).

One such example is the Luttrell Psalter, c. 1310-1330, made for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, Lord of Ingham in East Anglia. As has been pointed out, the book of psalms is a book about lordship, understood in the sense of psalm 110 (*Dixit Dominus*) as referring to the lordship of God the Father and the Son. The marginal imagery of this Psalter points to another sense of the word lordship in the form of Sir Geoffrey himself. Geoffrey is also *dominus*, and as such he appears in the margins as master of his fields and his hall. The word *pes*, for example, from the verse, "If I said, my foot [*pes*] is moved: Thy mercy, o Lord, assisted me." (Psalm 93, 18), could evoke the plough foot driven by the labourer and this idea of toil is picked up in the lower margin on folio 170 in the illustration of the ploughman (Camille 1987; Backhouse 1989: 9). It is the labours of Luttrell's tenants, of course, which put food on his table. Such work includes sowing, harrowing, the removal of thistles, reaping and threshing, all of which can be seen to move from the marginal space of the Psalter to inhabit the calendar pages (Figure 4).[8] It has been pointed out that many of the details of this Psalter's illustration are the result of acute observation, like the workings of the plough or the harrow, or the heavy-duty working gloves given to the driver in Figure 4. The Psalter imagery may itself share motifs with the symbols of the seasonal year, but the fact of their conflation in the illustration of the text of the psalms meant that the labours of the calendar in their turn could have carried additional references beyond the identification of the calendar year.

Reference to the psalms could explain why those empty landscapes of the James IV Hours could still function as calendar pictures provided they were supplied with the identifying star signs. Suspended in the blue heavens like a fissure in the membrane of the sky, the Master of James IV set the zodiacal signs by which he established the non-naturalistic quality of these landscapes of the mind. Given that these calendar images carried the zodiacal sign, it is possible that there was an overlap between the labours tradition and that of the psalm references, so that the essentially classical sources of the former could be overlaid by the imagery of the latter. However, without the depicted occupations, the illustrator might have found difficulty in distinguishing his months unless the seasonal landscapes themselves could be distinguished. Especially among artists of the Ghent-Bruges associates, there is evidence that, prior to the Master of James IV, changes in the depiction of the setting meant that the old-

fashioned system of labours and zodiacal signs could be replaced by a cycle illustrating the climatic changes to the land itself. New techniques of oil glazes, the mastery of aerial perspective and atmosphere, meant that what had previously been idyllic landscapes could be presented as subject to seasonal change.[9] This too embraced the poetry of the psalms, which indicated shifting weather patterns. Once the landscape settings appeared as if they were real, so the occupations of the months could be reinterpreted as visual reminders of actual activities and events. For example, the traditional activity of the winter months shifted towards a representation of the seasonal enjoyment of the wealthy.

As the book of hours itself evolved so the imagery once pertinent to the text of the psalms as a reference to the created world itself might have influenced the medieval calendar decoration to ensure that the new full-page illustrations would be the one place where the reader could expect to see images of pertinent human activity played out within a landscape of familiar topography. The permanency and changelessness of the rituals associated with the medieval calendar had been replaced by one which hinted at the contrariness of nature, social mutability and potential hazard.

University of St Andrews

Notes

1 Wieck (1988: 41): "By praying from a Book of Hours a lay person enjoyed spiritual privileges usually reserved for the clergy."

2 Display volumes such as the Book of Hours of James IV and Margaret Tudor often presented a full monthly entry. Virginia Brown (1984: 390) claims that inclusiveness rather than usage is the principal aim of such historical calendars.

3 Smeyers 1999: 420, fig. 3 The Golf Book of Hours, c. 1520 (London, British Library, Add. MS 24098, fol. 25v).

4 Saxl (1957: 58-72) discusses changes in the fourteenth century in the belief in the stars towards practical astrological ends: "The renaissance gave a decisive new turn to the argument. Instead of merely experiencing the conflict of forces which contend for him man now

intervenes in it." See also Henisch 1999: 223-6 for a full bibliography on the "Labours of the Months" motif and its historical background.

5 Henisch 1999: 8. She points out that the punishment of unrelenting toil took place in a Nature which had itself been corrupted by the Fall. In a sense, the depiction of labour in the Calendar activities restored something of the vision of that harmony in Paradise in a pictorial world in which no weather threatens to destroy, no hint of death or decay tinges the seasonal round, even the pig is resurrected the following year (p. 11). All Biblical quotations are taken from the Vulgate translation: *The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate and diligently compared with other editions in diverse languages* (Douay, A.D. 1609; Rheims, A.D. 1582), Westminster, 1914.

6 Kren 2003: 450-1. "In the Da Costa Hours the iconography of the calendar is largely conventional, but Bening's treatment of the settings makes the personality of the months come sharply to the fore."

7 Henisch 1999: 16: "Work goes on quite outside the framework of religious belief, doctrine or discipline."

8 This border illustration of harrowing is paired with a scene of sowing on the opposite verso and forms part of a cycle of border scenes representing the agricultural year.

9 Kren and Ainsworth 2003: 52: "Beginning with the Voustre Demeure Hours, circa 1475-80 . . . , calendar cycles developed narratives that, whether figures predominated or not, traced the slow but deliberate course of a year's continuous climatic change."

References

Backhouse, Janet (1989). *The Luttrell Psalter*. London: British Library.

Brown, Virginia (1984). A new Beneventan calendar from Naples: The lost "*Kalendarium Tutinianum*" rediscovered. *Mediaeval Studies* 46, 385-449.

Camille, Michael (1987). Labouring for the Lord: The Ploughman and the Social Order in the Luttrell Psalter. *Art History* 10, 423-54.

---- (1992). *The Image on the Edge*. London: Reaktion Books.

Freeman Sandler, Lucy (1996). The Word in the text and the image in the margin: the case of the Luttrell Psalter. *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54, 87-99.

---- (2000). The Images of Words in English Gothic Psalters. In *Studies in the Illustration of the Psalter*, ed. Brendan Cassidy and Rosemary Muir Wright, pp. 67-86. Stamford: Shaun Tyas.

Henisch, Bridget (1999). *The Medieval Calendar Year*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Kren, Thomas (2003). New Directions in Manuscript Painting, circa 1510-1561. In Kren and McKendrick, pp. 411-515.

Kren, Thomas and Maryan W. Ainsworth (2003). Illuminators and Painters: Artistic Exchanges and Interrelationships. In Kren and McKendrick, pp. 35-57.

Kren, Thomas and Scot McKendrick, eds (2003). *Illuminating the Renaissance: the Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe*. Los Angeles and London: The J. Paul Getty Museum and Royal Academy of Arts.

Lowden, John (2003). Illuminated Books and the Liturgy: some observations. In *Objects, Images, and the Word: Art in the Service of the Liturgy*, ed. Colum Hourihane, pp. 17-94. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lyle, Suzanne (1999). *The Patronage and Production of the Book of Hours of James IV and Margaret Tudor*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of St Andrews.

Saxl, Fritz (1957). *Lectures: II*. London: Warburg Institute, University of London.

Smeyers, Maurits (1999). *Flemish Miniatures from the 8th to the mid-16th century: The Medieval World on Parchment*. Turnhout: Brepols

Webster, J. C. (1938). *The Labours of the Months in Antique and Medieval Art to the end of the Twelfth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wieck, Roger S. (1988). *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life*. New York and Baltimore: George Braziller and The Walters Art Gallery.

The Magic Circle of Time

NIKITA I. TOLSTOY

The idea of the cyclical character of time, of the completeness of a cycle and its reiteration, is typical not only for Slavonic culture in the past and present but also for Indo-European culture as a whole, as well as for all the peoples of the world. This concept is universal, and that is so primarily because of its extra-linguistic, extra-psychological and extra-human basis – it is tied up with nature, with the movement of the sun and its influence on the earth. The closed year circle and the 24-hour-day circle are also exclusively of a natural character, while the division of these circles into periods of time is based on thought, perception and the experience of humankind. We can note in addition that the division of the diurnal cycle into two parts, day and night, also has a purely natural basis – the mind and language only realise it and denote it; but it should be observed that further, more detailed, division into shorter periods of the diurnal cycle and of the year depends upon human consciousness and the language which reflects it. The ideas are coloured ethnically and/or nationally, since they are connected with a specific group of people, and, as with language itself, they can be changed and modified in the course of historical development.

Thus we have at our disposal a vast amount of ethnographic data concerning the fact that the Slavs in former times, and in the remote villages and regions almost up to the present day, have divided the year into two halves (winter and summer), not into quarters. For example, the Bulgarians who live in north-western Bulgaria (Vidin, Kula and Lom regions), according to the evidence provided by Dimitar Marinov (1984: 49-50), believed that the year was divided into two periods – the summer and the winter ones. The periods were denoted using the notion of the sun: "the summer sun" (*ljatno slantse*) and the "winter sun" (*zimno slantse*). The summer sun appears at the "summer east" (*letnija istok*) and the winter one at the "winter east" (*zimnija istok*). According to a legend, once upon a time there were many suns, but later on only the two that I have just mentioned were left.[1]

Cosmos 18 (2002), 193-206.

The idea of two suns and two related year seasons is known in south-eastern Bulgaria (near the city of Aitos) and in Pirin Macedonia (i.e. in the south-west of present Bulgaria). In the village of Gabrene people believe that these two different suns move on different paths: one is located closer to the earth, the other further away from it. The suns do not appear in the sky at the same time; each sun stays in the skies only for one half of the year. According to some folk calendar beliefs, the summer sun appears at Annunciation Day (25 March, old style) and goes away at the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 October, old style). This is a local Bulgarian belief, but the same principle of division of the year is known to the Eastern Slavs. The South Slavs (who are mainly Orthodox Christians and are Bulgarians of other regions besides those mentioned above and also Serbs and Macedonians) divide the year according to the two holidays: Juriev Day (St George's Day, 23 April) and Dimitrov Day (St Dimiter's Day, 26 October). Cattle-breeders, shepherds and hired labourers employ this second way of reckoning.

Again, in north-western Bulgaria, according to Marinov (the material dates back to the end of the nineteenth century), on Annunciation Day all the snakes emerge, the cuckoo returns and the *samovili* (fairies, female spirits of nature, similar to the Russian *russalki*) appear. At dawn on Annunciation Day the springs, wells and whirlpools are full of bathing *samovili* and that is why on this day it is prohibited to go early in the morning to fetch water. In the same way all of a sudden the *samovili* and the reptiles disappear on the Day of the Beheading of John the Baptist (29 August, old style).

According to another version recorded by Marinov in western Bulgaria in the Teteven region (in the village of Brussy) there is only one sun, but in the course of the year it moves in different directions: on Juriev Day it reaches the border-line from which the summer journey starts and it continues till the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross (Bulg. Krustovden), when it changes its direction to the winter one until Juriev Day.

Those ideas correlate very strongly with East Slavonic beliefs and prohibitions concerning Annunciation Day and the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross. In Polessje, where the archaic rituals are as a rule well preserved in their fullness, there existed a prohibition against touching the earth before Annunciation – digging it, ploughing it or driving stakes into it – in a word, waking it up, stopping its winter sleep (*PES* 1983: 84). On Annunciation Day the

earth wakes up, all the snakes which have gone into it come out again, the cuckoos fly back and all creatures show renewed signs of life. On the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross all the snakes go back into the earth. That is why the Russians on that day had a prohibition against going into the woods, fearing to see the snakes which were preparing to take up their winter rest. The Ukrainians say that on the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross, "the earth is moved from the summer towards the winter" (Tolstoy, ed., 1995-2004: 1.400). The Bulgarians in the Rhodopes believe that the first day of the winter period and the end of the summer period is Dimitrov Day, when the work in the fields and the grazing of cattle are over.

Apart from the strictly marked borders of the summer and the winter which are denoted and affirmed by feast-days with their rituals, there exist also border-line festival days which mark the middle – the halves of the summer and winter periods. I am talking primarily about the day (and especially the night) of Ivan Kupala (the Nativity of John the Baptist, 24 June, old style) in summer time and Christmas (or the Twelve Days or Epiphany) in winter. The day of Ivan Kupala (Bulg. Janiovden) among the Bulgarians of the Rhodopes is regarded as the middle of summer and is correspondingly denoted (Srediljatoto); on this day, time is turned round towards winter (*Rodopi* 1994: 111). There is still a conviction that on this day the sun is warmer than it is on other days and that that is why the flowers and herbs gathered at this time have the strongest healing powers (*Pirinski kraj* 1980: 449).

Interestingly enough, according to folk belief, on these days the skies open. This belief is not found everywhere, but still in some regions in the Rhodopes (e.g. the village of Dobralak) people say that on Janiovden the sky opens (*Rodopi* 1994: 111). This mythological event is also known to the South Slavs, but it is connected by them with the eve of Epiphany and the eve of the Annunciation. Rachko Popov states that according to the Bulgarian views the skies open on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day itself and at Easter, and also on Whitsunday and St George's Day (Stojnev, ed., 1994: 227). So this supernatural event takes place, apart from the "border" days, only at Easter and Whitsun, which is understandable if one takes into account the exceptional importance of these holidays in Christianity.

Some signs and traces of the year division into two halves – the winter and the summer ones – can be found not only in Bulgarian and Serbian, but also in other Slavonic folk traditions. Presentation of this

data would however demand greater space, so I will give a short linguistic summary of the terminology of the seasons in the Slavonic languages.

All the Slavonic languages and dialects have words **zima* ("winter") and *lěto* ("summer", Slovene *polétje* for "summer"). As far as the terms for spring and autumn are concerned, they differ in the Slavonic languages. The word **vesna* ("spring") is used in all East Slavonic languages and in Polish, while in most of the South Slavonic languages spring is denoted by derivatives from the stem *lěto* and the prefix *pro-*: Serbo-Croat *proleće* (in the dialects *premaleće*), Bulgarian and Macedonian *prolet* or in Slovene *mládo léto*, more often *pomlád*. The time of the reaping of the spring crops among the West Slavs was denoted by the word which in the literary languages now denotes "spring": Czech *jaro*, Slovak *jar*, Lower Sorbian *jaro*. A very interesting case is the Kashubian name for spring – *podlato*, defining the period of May and June; this period is denoted by the Upper Sorbian *předléćo*. Kashubian *předlato*, structurally identical to *podlato*, and the South Slavonic *prolet, proleće* have the same meaning.

In several Slavonic languages the same pattern can be found in the names for autumn: Czech *podzim* (literary *jeseň*), Upper Sorbian *podzyma* ("last months of autumn, before the winter"), Slovene *podzímen* ("relating to last months of autumn, before the winter"), Bulgarian dial. (Rhodopes) *podzima* "autumn". We can see here the etymological connection between the name for autumn and the name of one of the two major periods of the year – winter. All the other Slavonic languages define autumn with one lexical unit: Polish *jesień*, Slovak *jeseň*, Kashubian *jesėń*.

So far as the dates of the spring and autumn periods are concerned, they vary according to different contemporary traditions. In the urban tradition the year is divided into four equal quarters. We regard March, April and May as spring and September, October and November as autumn. According to two academic dictionaries – these of the Czech and Slovak languages – the term for autumn covers the period from 23 September to 21 December (new style), while the term for spring covers the period from 21 March to 21 June (new style). In other traditions the situation is different. If we speak of Russia with its vast territories reaching from the North to the South, the terms depend upon the climate.

The very concept of spring can be different. In Ryasan region (in the village of Deulino) in the 60s of the twentieth century the dialectologists from Moscow recorded the meaning of the word *vesna* ("spring") as "the warm season", "the period between winter and autumn": "The spring starts after Easter and then … up to the holiday of the Nativity of the Virgin (8 August, old style) when autumn comes. We celebrate Dormition in the spring in August. Snow has fallen and has covered the spring [the warm weather is finished]. As the snow starts to melt and up till September it is all spring, and then the autumn comes and lasts for ten and a half weeks. [Mushrooms] turn up in the spring, beginning from St Peter's Day." (*SSRNG* 1945-68*:* 79). We would suggest, therefore, that the word *vjasna* in the Ryazan dialect of the village of Deulino has partly driven out the word *leto* from the semantic sphere of the seasons, while this word (*leto*) in the meaning "year, year-long period of time" is still preserved without change.

So the archaic folk system of dividing the "round" year does not coincide with the generally accepted system and the one we are familiar with. If we depict the year as a circle like the face of a clock and liken the movement of the sun to the movement of the clock hands we will have the following scheme:

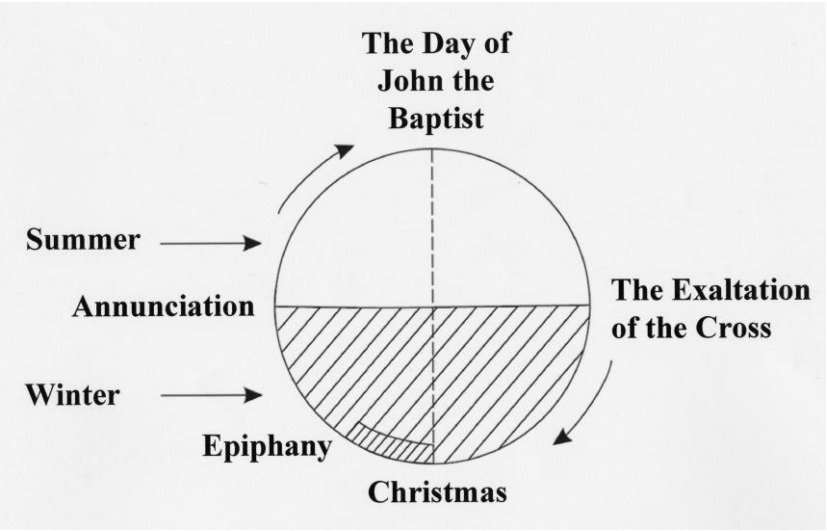


Fig. 1

Unexplained remains the period depicted on the scheme which runs from Christmas (25 December, old style) to Epiphany (6 January) and which is known among the Russians as *svjatki* "sacred days". It actually falls into two periods: *svjatye vechera* (sacred, holy evenings") 25 December – 1 January, old style, and *strashnye vechera* ("fearful, frightening evenings") 1 January – 6 January, old style. The Serbs and Bulgarians use many terms to denote the period of the twelve days:

Serbo-Croat
nekrsteni dani ("non-baptised days"), *nesrećni dani* ("unlucky days"), *nečastivi dani*, *nečisti dani* ("impure days"), *Đavolski dani* ("Devil days"), *Babini dani* ("Old Lady days", *baba "*evil spirit"), *beli dni* ("white days"), *nesnov, nesnovanice* (days when warping is prohibited), *blagi dni* ("non-vegetarian" days [i.e days when people did not fast on Wednesdays and Fridays; otherwise fasting on these days was obligatory for the whole year apart from this period]);

Macedonian
nekrsteni denove (*nochi*) ("non-baptised days [nights]"), *Karakondjerovi dene* (*nochi*) ("days [nights] of the evil spirit Karakondzho"), *pogana nedelja* ("pagan week"), *bishkini dene* ("pigs' days"), *galatni denove* ("dirty or meat days");

Bulgarian
pogana nedelja ("pagan week"), *chernata nedelja* ("black week"), *nechisti dni (noshti)* ("dirty days"), *krivi dni* ("crooked days), *bugani dni* ("pagan days"), *Djavolski denja* ("Devil's days"), *nefeli noshti* ("bad, dangerous days"), *gluhi dni* ("deaf days"), *blazhotii, mrusnici, mruslec, blazhni dni* (all the four terms mean "non-vegetarian days").[2]

The terminology reflects the negative attitude to the winter period we are interested in, the period which follows the winter solstice (22 December, new style). During these days, "Christ was not baptised," according to folk belief and that was the reason why the evil spirits came out on Earth and caused havoc among the people. At that time something like the opening of the earth, the underworld, from which all the demons come out and misbehave, especially during the nights,

takes place. The Serbs in the Gruzha region believe that evil spirits and supernatural creatures obtain extreme strength during the twelve days. At this time, the dead turn into vampires, bad women and old women turn into witches, plague kills the sick, the cries of devils are heard, evils spirits (*karakondzho*) attack the people and so on. During this period, people do not let the children out into the yard in the evenings; they cover the windows with blinds and hide the cattle; they fear child-birth, because "the baby born on these days turns into a witch or a vampire, when it grows up; it may become a suicide or may drown." (Petrovic 1948: 223-4).

The Serbs in the Pomoravje region regard the days from Christmas to Epiphany as a time "when the cross has no power over the evil supernatural spirits", and so people can expect many disasters and even death (Djordjevic 1958: 350). The masked Christmas mummers (Bulg. *koledari*) oppose these forces, while the New Year groups of men (*sirovari*, *sirovarshtina* – region of Gornja Pchinja [Filipovic 1955: 93-4]) expel the demons. The twelve days' masked groups and the belief in evil spirits coming out from the underworld are known in all Slavonic traditions; again, a description of these facts would require more space. I will mention only the purifying power of fire, which is used in the South Slavonic ritual of *badnjak* (the Yule log) and in other Christmas customs. According to the South Slavonic beliefs, during the "unbaptised days" the underworld is open and demons wander on the sinful earth. The earth closes on the eve of Epiphany. On Epiphany itself the skies open at noon. At that moment the winds stop blowing, the rivers and the streams cease to flow, and the water turns into wine (Petrovic 1948: 235). This is not a full list of the special features of the twelve days in the Serbian tradition, many of which are shared by the Bulgarian and Macedonian traditions. Western and Eastern Slavs also have an abundance of rituals and a complex of prohibitions, recommendations and beliefs concerning seasonal mythological creatures – *shulikuny* (winter evil spirits), *svjatochnicy* (the Twelve Days evil spirits) and others.

The twelve days in terms of time are close to the winter solstice. They correlate from the point of view of the rituals and beliefs with the day (more exactly, the night before the day) of St John the Baptist, which follows the day of the summer solstice. A ritual, described by Alexander Makarenko in his book *The Siberian Folk Calendar* shows the direct connection between the Twelve Days and the common Slavonic summer St John's Day. The description goes as

follows: "The person who wishes to be lucky and rich has to make a haycock on the eve of St John the Baptist and keep it till the Twelve Days," – so the people from Angara say. Then one should go to the haycock during the night, make a circle around it with a prayer and draw a circle with charcoal from the first brand lit in the autumn [when it was no longer light enough in the evening for people to do without torchlight]): the devils who chose the "John's haycocks" for their gatherings will ask to be left out of the circle, promising to fulfil all the demands of this brave man." (Makarenko 1993: 65).

According to East Slavonic beliefs, the holiday of St John is marked by the activity of witches and sorcerers who steal the milk of other people's cows and transfer the crops from neighbouring fields to their own. Against their harmful activity various magical preventive measures are taken. These beliefs are also found in the South Slavonic areas, but not everywhere. Thus, the Bulgarians in the Rhodopes, apart from the rituals of gathering healing herbs and making wreaths and throwing them into the water, perform some different magic rites. They draw crosses with tar and throw hawthorn into the fields so as to prevent the witches (*mageshnici*) and the sorcerers (*mamnici*) from going out naked to the fields riding on weaving beams to steal somebody's corn (*Rodopi* 1994: 111).

The people used to divide the year not by months, but by holidays, agricultural needs, or periods of fasting which created a specific system of counting. The Bulgarians who lived in north-western Bulgaria identified the months in this way (Marinov 1984: 56):

January was called Goljam (big) Sechko and it included special days and holidays such as Survaki, Vodici, Babinden, Sv. Atanas.

February was called Mali (small) Sechko.

March – *baba* Marta – was divided into two parts by the holidays of Mladenci (Forty Martyrs) and Blagovec (Annunciation).

St George's Day was celebrated in April and so the month was called *Gergjovski mesec*;

May was *Spasovski mesec* (because of Ascension), or *kopane kukuruz* (digging the corn).

In June, three periods were denoted: *Rusalska nedelja*, *Enjovden* and *kositba* (mowing).

In July people marked out *goreshnjacite* (the hot days), St Elias and harvest.

August contained *Preobrazhenje* (Transfiguration), *Golema Bogorodica* (Dormition), *Seknovenje* (Beheading of John the Baptist), *vurshitba* (threshing).

September was regarded as Mala Bogorodica (The Nativity of the Virgin), Krustovden (The Day of the Cross), *grozdober* (gathering the grapes).

October – *Dimitrovskija mesec* – was regarded as the month of St Dimiter, and contained Petkovden (St Paraskeva's Day), Dimitrovden (St Dimiter's Day), *ubranje kukuruz* (harvesting of the corn).

November – *Rangelovski mesec* – contained the day of St Michael (Rangelovden), Martincite (Martinmas, 11-13 November), St Andrew's Day.

December, *Nikulica*, included St Nicholas, St Ignat, Koleda (Christmas) and the Twelve Days, passing over to Goljam Sechko.

The literary and city system of the twelve months, which came into being later, was accepted partially and additionally, and most of the months were renamed after the biggest key holidays.

Let us analyse now the Slavonic folk beliefs about the 24-hour circle and the behaviour of the evil spirits in this relatively short period of time. In a similar way to the year, but with a more obvious dependence on the movement of the sun, the diurnal cycle is divided into day and night. The border-time markers are sunrise and sunset, and midday and midnight. The time of sunrise or sunset plus a location on a field border are the best situation for bewitching, sorcery and charming. It is prohibited to leave baby's nappies and some other objects out after sunset for the night. At midnight and midday the supernatural mythological creatures and demons are believed to be very dangerous, because they are their favourite times. The time when the evil spirits feel themselves most free and exercise their strength – a very dangerous time for people and all living creatures – is the so called "deaf night" (in Serbian *gluva doba*, Polessian *glupica*), which lasts from midnight until cock-crow. In this period of time the devils or similar beings could eat a person up leaving only the bones, could ride him, taunt him, or trample him down into the mud and so on.

Many short stories, episodes in fairy-tales and memorates depict this evil activity at night; it is not necessary to give quotations here for they are well known in all the Slavonic traditions. Less well known is the activity of the evil spirits at midday – also a very dangerous time. The demons appearing at this moment are even denoted by special names. The Russians speak of a female spirit called *poludnica*, a horrible (or the opposite, a very beautiful) woman, who appears in the field on the stroke of noon during the period of the ripening and reaping of the corn. There is also a male spirit, *poludenik*, that is especially dangerous to young children. In Polessje, *poludzenik* is the ghost of a murdered person, a fearful and terrible black human figure that can be seen at noon. In the Gomel area (village of Velikoe Pole, Petrikovskiy region) the children were not allowed to go to the river at noon, otherwise "the *poludenik* [the water spirit that appears at noon] would take the child away" (Levkievskaja and Usacheva 1995: 158). In the Russian North on the river of Pinega local people talk of the *bes poludennyj* (midday spirit), and speak of the *poludnicy* as his off-spring (Cherepanova 1983: 37). *Poludnica* could also tickle those who remained in the field at noon until they died (Pomerantseva 1978: 148). This evil spirit is of common Slavonic origin: compare Czech *poludnice*, dialectal *polednice*, "a female ghost", who smothers her own children and Polish *przypołudnica*, "a field fairy who appears at noon". Adults use the latter figure to frighten children who eat too many peas in the field: "Do not go into the field – *poludnica* will tear you apart!" Compare also Upper Sorbian *připołdnica* "a noon witch – a beautiful and insidious woman in a white dress". There are two monographs on the noon spirits (Caillois 1936 and Pomerantseva 1978), so we can leave aside a detailed interpretation of this interesting topic.

Analysing the fore-mentioned data as a whole we cannot fail to notice the strict isomorphism of the scheme of the 24-hour-cycle division into periods and the scheme of the year division into periods. One can only admire this isomorphism. Let us present the diurnal cycle in a form of a circle or a clock, as we did for the year cycle.

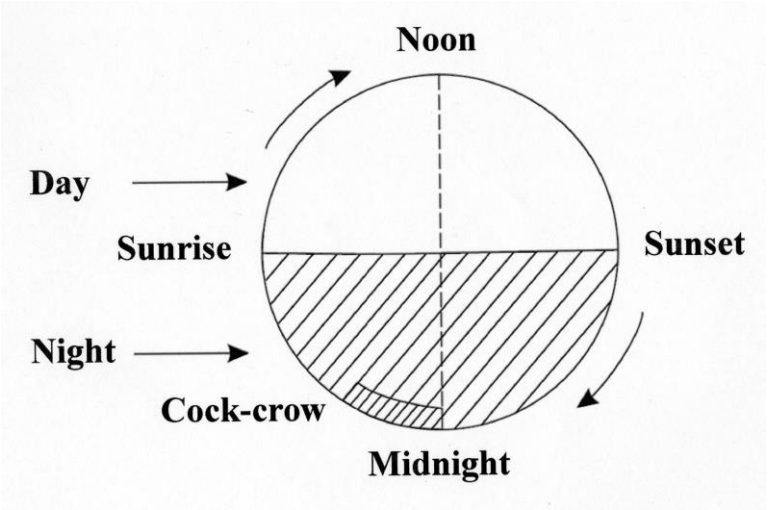


Fig. 2

We can see from the scheme that **night** correlates with **winter**, **day** with **summer**, **midnight** with **Christmas**, **noon** with **The Day of John the Baptist**, **sunrise** with **Annunciation** and **sunset** with **The Exaltation of the Cross**. Noon divides the day, and midnight divides the night. The whole 24-hour day is divided by sunrise and by sunset into day and night and, in exactly the same way, the year is divided by the Annunciation and The Day of the Exaltation of the Cross, or St George's Day and St Dimiter's Day. The point of special interest in these two schemes is the isomorphism of the periods after midnight in the diurnal circle and after Christmas in the year circle.

Noon lasts a very short time, just a single moment, and at this instant the evil spirit (*poludenik* or *poludenica*) can, according to the folk beliefs, cause harm to a human being, and then the danger disappears. Midnight with all its peril is the beginning of the "deaf" period of the night, which lasts till the cock crows. This deaf period of the night corresponds in the whole year cycle to the twelve fearful days, the "unbaptised" or "pagan" days. In the middle of the summer these days correlate with only one day or, more exactly, one night – the Eve of Ivan Kupala (Nativity of John the Baptist, Midsummer Day). This is the night of ritual and strictly regulated excess, the night of the presence and activity of evil spirits, the night of water and

bathing, the night of fire and purification by fire. This night is also the night of revering the fruitful earth, which has prepared its crops; this is the night when it is advisable and obligatory to beat the earth with sticks with live embers on their ends to induce its fruitfulness. At other times it is a great sin to beat the earth, because it is our mother – Mother-the-raw-earth (*Mat' syra Zemlja*). These beliefs are expressed most fully among the Russians and the Eastern Slavs, but they are shared by all the Slavs. Probably the system of the year cycle and the diurnal cycle depicted here is typical not only for the Slavonic folk tradition, but also for the traditions of other Indo-European peoples. This suggestion, however, needs to be confirmed by reliable data and detailed analysis in the future.

Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Notes

1 In the encyclopedia *Bulgarian Mythology* the prominent Bulgarian ethnographer and folklorist Rachko Popov writes in his article "Summer": "Summer is the main season, personifying the Sun, warmth and life. According to the folk calendar, the year is divided into two natural and agricultural cycles – the winter and the summer ones. The days of St Dimiter and of St George mark these halves. Spring and Autumn do not have evident independent meaning for the Bulgarians. The spring is equivalent to the summer, and the autumn to the winter." (Stojnev, ed., 1994: 205). The Serbian ethnographer, Mile Nedeljkovic, explains that in Serbian folk apprehension "the year is divided into two halves: the Juriev one (Djurjevsko), which lasts from Juriev Day (St George's Day) till Dimitrov Day (St Dimiter's Day) and the Dimitrov one (Dimitrovsko) which lasts from Dimitrov Day till Juriev Day (Nedelkovic 1999: 62-3).

2 The days in between Christmas and Epiphany are marked almost all over Europe: French *Douze jours*, Spanish *Duodenario mistico*, German *Zwischennächte, Unternächte, Lösungsnächte* and others, Austrian *Mitwinternächte* and others, Romanian *câşlegi*.

3 This article was first published in Russian as N. I. Tolstoy 1997; the translation into English was made by Irina Sedakova and revised by Emily Lyle. Academician Nikita Iljich Tolstoy (1923-1996) was a

distinguished Russian linguist, folklorist and ethnologist and the author of over 750 publications. He founded the Moscow academic school of ethnolinguistics. Tolstoy was the first during the Soviet times who launched a detailed complex field research of Polessje – one of the most archaic (from the ethnological point of view) zones in the Slavonic world.

References

Caillois, Roger (1936). Les spectres de midi dans la démonologie slave: les faits. *Revue des études slaves* 16, 18-37.

Cherepanova, O. A. (1983). *Mifologicheskaja leksika russkogo Severa.* Leningrad.

Djordjevic, D. (1958). *Priroda u verovanju i predanju nashega naroda.* Vol. 1. Belgrade.

Filipovic, M. and P. Tomic (1955). *Gornja Pchinja.* Belgrade.

Levkievskaja, E. E. and V. V. Usacheva (1995). Polesskij vodjanoj na obshche-slavjanskom fone. In *Slavjanskij i balkanskij fol'klor.* Moscow.

Makarenko, A. (1993). *Sibirskij narodnyj kalendar'.* Novosibirsk.

Marinov, D. (1984). *Izbrani proizvedenija Etnograficheskо izuchavane na Zapadna Bulgarija*. Vol. 2. Sofia.

Nedeljkovic, M. (1990). *Godishni obichaji u Srba.* Belgrade.

PES (1983). *Polesskij etnolingvisticheskij sbornik. Materialy i issledovanija.* Moscow.

Petrovic, P. Zh. (1948). *Zhivot i obichaji narodni u Gruzhi.* Belgrade.

Pirinski kraj (1980). *Pirinski kraj. Etnografski, folklorni I ezikovi prouchvanija.* Sofia.

Pomerantseva, E. V. (1978). Mezhetnicheskaja obshchnost'poverij iI bylichek o poludnice. In *Slavjanskij i balkanskij fol'klor.* Moscow.

Rodopi (1994). *Rodopi. Tradicionna narodna duhovna I socialnonormativna kultura.* Sofia.

SSRNG (1945-1968). *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo jazyka.* Vols 1-17. Moscow and Leningrad.

Stojnev, A., ed. (1994). *Bulgarska mitologija. Enciklopedichen rechnik.* Sofia.

Tolstoy, N. I. (1997). Vremeni magicheskiy krug (The Magic Circle of Time). In *Logicheskij analiz jazyka: Jazyk i vremja* (*Logical Analysis of Language: Language and Time*), ed. Nina Arutjunova, pp. 17-22. Moscow: Indrik.

----, ed. (1995-2004). *Slavianskie drevnosti. Etnolingvisticheskij slovarj*. 3 vols. Moscow.

Openings and Endings: Symmetry and Asymmetry in the Slavonic Calendar

IRINA SEDAKOVA

One of the main aims of the traditional folk perception of the seasons and of day and night and the rituals and beliefs connected with them is to follow the natural symmetry of time and its periods, as has been proved by many scholars in ethnology and cultural anthropology on the evidence of various vernacular calendars.[1] The tendency to organise the calendar is the process of making it "cultural"; that is why one of the terms for symmetry is "harmony" which partly conveys both the logic of time and the calendar reflecting it. A striking example of symmetry, both natural and conceptual, is the parallel between the division of the year circle with its dark period and the 24-hour circle given by the prominent Russian ethnolinguist, N. I. Tolstoy in his article on the calendar (Tolstoy 1997, reproduced in his collection Tolstoy 2003: 31, 35; see English translation in this issue. Cf. Lyle 1990, 2000 [2004]).

The idea of the cyclical character of time, of its strictness and reiteration of the solar and lunar periods, is very important for the development of both the large and small ritual complexes which have their endings and openings. Some of them show precise symmetry, while others are asymmetric in many ways – formally and semantically. The calendar rites are not as well preserved nowadays as some other rites, for example, the life-cycle ones. What is important though is that the reminiscences of seasonal transition – the openings and the endings – are well retained. This allows us to draw a parallel between calendar customs and life-cycle customs when stress is laid on the idea of transition.

This article is devoted to an analysis of openings and endings of certain periods that are particularly interesting from the point of view of the symmetry and asymmetry of the folk calendar. It concerns the Russian (East-Slavonic) and the Bulgarian (South-Slavonic, or Balkan-Slavonic) ritual year as found in peasant vernacular culture in the 19th-20th centuries. This is the time when the Christian and non-Christian traditions (pagan, or combined, based on the well known situation of the so-called "double faith") coexisted, without the

Cosmos 18 (2002), 207-222.

struggle typical for the medieval Slavonic countries, depicted, for example, in Russian manuscripts (see Gal'kovskij 2000). I would call it a stable, well-organised ritual year, which reflects very well the interrelation between the natural and the cultural (religious) course of time. This study is based both on printed data and on my own field experience, mostly in Bessarabia (1984-1987) and Bulgaria (1997-2003). [2]

I am comparing the calendars of the Eastern and the Southern Slavs for several reasons. Although close in their languages and religion, having common Slavonic (Indo-European) roots, these two traditions of Slavia Orthodoxa are quite different in the structure of their ritual years. Various climatic conditions, vegetation cycles and corresponding agricultural activities produce differences, and, apart from natural reasons, we have to take into account the specific characteristics of the Bulgarian tradition: the Thracian legacy, the non-Slavonic neighbourhood, the active cross-cultural Balkan (Greek) influence and five centuries of the dominance of the Ottoman empire in the peninsula. Such comparison gives a researcher additional possibilities for exploring the basis of differences in calendrical symmetry and asymmetry. Of course, even when analysing only Russian folk tradition, we can see the differences among local Russian calendars as well, partly because of the variety of climatic zones in the vast territory of the country.

Not only natural, cultural, historical and geographical factors are of importance for creating diversity. As the prominent Russian ethnologist, Petr Bogatyrev, shows in one of his essays on East Slavonic rituals, which he published in the 20s of the twentieth century, the role of the personality of the informant is sometimes the most decisive factor for the interpretation of folk beliefs and magic acts (Bogatyrev 1971: 179). The explanations of the openings and endings of calendar periods that I have noted in my fieldwork prove the validity of this observation.

CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN ASPECTS OF SLAVONIC CALENDAR RITUAL

The Slavonic calendar is formally Christian, but pagan or mixed in its content (Tolstaya 2005: 9). Periods of mixed religious and pagan character often start in their pagan form but end with Christian rituals and an obligatory visit to the church. I will leave the Slavonic area to

give one example from the Greek calendar (PA, Scyros, 2004), which is typical for the Balkan peninsula as a whole. During Shrovetide, men dress up as frightening personages, *geros* "the old men", who wear goatskin masks and old rags with bells attached to them and make a great deal of noise with the ringing of the bells on their clothing and the blowing of conch shells. When the day is over, they take off their masks and odd garments and wash the ash from their faces and make the long journey up to the St George monastery on the mountain, where they kiss the icon of St George and attend a service.

This ritual, which is probably a Thracian legacy, is very well known in other regions of Greece (Håland 2001 [2005]: 209-20) and also among the Balkan Slavs with the same name ("the old men") in its Slavonic form (*starci*). In Central, Southern and Eastern Bulgaria these carnivals take place during Shrove Week (in some regions they last until the Monday after Shrovetide) (Loveshki kraj 1999: 306). In Western Bulgaria the carnivals are organised during the Twelve Days. All the winter and spring guisers and mummers in Bulgaria end the last day of the carnival with the ritual bathing of the *starci* in the river. Occasionally the *starci* go to the Liturgy, confess and take communion (Stojnev, ed., 1994: 186-9)

Some pagan beliefs that are found independently are sometimes incorporated into the ritual calendar and here we can illustrate differences both inside one tradition and between Eastern Slavonic and Southern Slavonic traditions. Thus the cult of the wolf which is known in all European cultures involves prohibitions on certain words or actions. In Russia, St George has, among other folk titles, that of patron of the wolves (compare the Russian sayings: "What the wolf has in his mouth, St George has given to him." and "Without George's permission the wolf will not be full.") (*Russkiy prazdnik* 2001: 157). The St George Days (23 April and 3 and 26 November, old style) are connected with definite ritual activity, aimed at warding off the wolves and preserving the cattle.

Only among the Balkan Slavs the folk cult of the wolf develops into a whole cycle of Wolves' Days when magic acts are performed and many types of home activity are prohibited for the sake of men and the cattle. Wolves' Days differ in local traditions, but usually they are in February or November. 21 November, old style, marks the celebration of the presentation of the Virgin, who is called the Wolf's Godmother (Valchata Bogoroditsa in Bulgarian). The

prohibition against working on these days is very strict. It is a dangerous period which lasts from three up to eleven or twelve days in Central and South Bulgaria (Sakar 2002: 325; Loveshki kraj 1999: 295), while in some other Bulgarian regions (PA, Ravna; PA, Stakevci) it is celebrated on only one or two days (Gura 1997: 147). On the eve of St Martin's Day (11 November, old style), or the Presentation of the Virgin (21 November, old style), or St Philip's Day (24 November, old style) the oldest member of the family goes three times around the sheep with an unlocked padlock; then he locks it as if he locks the wolf's mouth. It is said that a man wearing socks knitted by his wife (or trousers sown by her) during the Wolves' Days may be attacked by a wolf. There are many narratives describing how a man was followed by wolves and remained safe after having taken off and thrown away the piece of clothing made by his wife during this time. If a dead man was buried with such socks he would become a werewolf. Many other beliefs and magical practices are still kept in Bulgaria.

The period of Wolves' Days also differs from the point of view of whether the opening or the ending is more relevant (Sakar 2002: 325-6; Kapantsi 1985: 229-30). When the period is long, the ending is more important. In Sakar and other southern parts of Bulgaria the last day of the 7-11 Wolves' Days is known as the Day of the Lame Wolf (Kutsalan), the most dangerous and aggressive of all the wolves. A feature like the believed lameness of the wolf allows us to compare this animal with the Devil and to regard the Wolves' Days as a liminal, chthonic period.

Another zoodemonic period is the Mice Days. While among the Eastern Slavs many ritual complexes include customs to drive away mice, it is only among the Balkan Slavs that there is a ritual calendar period connected with these customs. In Bulgaria the Mice Days are celebrated on the first three days of February or occasionally on the five days after St Dimitriy Day (26 October, old style) or after 27 October, which is the day of St Nestor who is occasionally called the patron of mice (PA, Tvarditsa; PA, Shipkovo; Loveshki kraj 1999: 294). In some Bulgarian regions (Northern and Western parts) there is only a single Mice Day and it is usually falls in a time of seasonal transition – from the summer (autumn) to the winter, as in the case of the St Dimitriy and St Nestor feasts, or from the winter to the spring – the first days of February. In Thracian Bulgaria, St Catherine is believed to be the patroness of the mice, and is venerated as such on

her day (24 November, old style), when people drive away mice by magico-ritual means (Stojnev, ed., 1994: 217-18).

The Christian structure of time is well-defined, and strict periods of fasting and celebration organise beginnings and endings. We find clear opening and closing ceremonies in official church celebrations and in social events such as the school year but rarely in the folk calendar. For example, the Church calendar gives us certain dates for the Twelve Days period (from Christmas till Epiphany), which in the folk ritual year are not observed. Though the pagan circle of time is also organised, it has its own special features, aimed at changing Christian time, that is, at stretching out time by adding some rituals and days or doubling it by dividing one feast into two, as, for example, when St Peter and St Paul (29 June) are celebrated as separate days (29-30 June, old style) (Tolstaya 2005: 162).

The Church division of the year involves symmetry on different levels: there are symmetrical feasts such as St Athanasius in the winter (18 January, old style) and St Athanasius in the summer (5 July). Those dates in the folk belief of some Bulgarian and Bessarabian villages indicate the beginning of the other half, of turns towards the warm time or the cold time (PA, village of Kirsovo, Bessarabia). In Russia the celebration of two days dedicated to St Athanasius does not show this symmetry. While St Athanasius in January marks the coldest days, his summer feast (5 May) is connected with the beginning of the period of sowing (Sedakova and Tolstaya 1995: 119-21). In Russia there are also symmetrical saints' days, like Jury (St George) in the summer (23 April, old style) and Jury (St George) in the winter (26 November), the second of which is a feast day celebrated by the Orthodox but not the Catholic Church. Proverbial sayings like "Jury starts the work in field, Jury finishes it" show the symmetry of natural agricultural activities as fixed to the two feasts of this saint (*Russkiy Prazdnik* 2001: 151-60).

Not only days but whole periods of time are symmetrically doubled, especially the days of chaos and transition that are dangerous in folk perception, for example, the Twelve Days and the Whitsuntide period in the Russian tradition. Bulgarians have another type of calendrical harmony in organising the "dangerous" periods in the year. In addition to the periods just mentioned, they observe also (as days when the supernatural beings come to the earth) the first week of the Great Lent in the spring. The first week of the Twelve Days, the week after Whitsun and the first week of the Great Lent are

spoken of as the three mad sisters; thus the idea of a triad is being employed in the Bulgarian perception of time (Popov 2002: 86-7).

OPENINGS AND ENDINGS

Speaking of the ritual year we have to remember that its whole course consists of endings and openings. Not only every day, but every hour, something ends and something opens. It depends upon how widely we are treating the concepts of ending and opening. The folk calendar reflects the solar and the lunar cycles, follows the detailed changes in nature, agricultural activities, animal behaviour and the growth and decay of vegetation. Furthermore, the church calendar with its feasts round the year cycle, observance of certain days of the most revered local saints, etc. dictates its own periods, which are marked by strictly dated beginnings and endings.

The life rituals and social customs (childbirth, wedding and burial complexes as periods of transition) correlate with the calendar rites, thus developing additional periods with openings and endings. One of the examples of such involvement is the Bulgarian calendar custom for newly weds – "the washing of the grooms". This takes place on the day of the Convocation of John the Baptist, January 7, old style, when all the men married during the year are bathed in the river while the young women are sprinkled with water at the wells. This feast marks the end of the period of their transitional status and their achievement of the full status of married couple (Sakar 2002: 336; Kapantsi 1985: 187). In Russia the corresponding time of acceptance of newly-weds in their status as married couple is Shrovetide (Agapkina 2002: 247-9; *Russkiy prazdnik* 2001: 330-1). There is a sort of gathering of all the young couples in the street, and all the villagers who pass by ask them to kiss each other as a token of their mutual love. This is a typical case of the situation when the opening (wedding) can be on an "individual" date, while the ending (accepting the newly-weds into society) would be calendrically fixed for all the young couples in the village.

The openings and endings in the course of a ritual year are connected with the concepts of cosmos/chaos, time, counting and order and as such reflect obvious changes in the surrounding world and in society and/or its mental reflection (Sedakova and Valentsova 2004: 674-9). Openings correlate mostly with cosmogonic views,

initiation, apotropaeic and mantic rituals. Endings usually involve acts of destruction and purification.

Openings and endings are often close, or similar, to the archaic semantic oppositions: the first / the last and the old / the new or the young. We know, however, that the binary oppositions are not as straightforward as that, and that there is something in between them. In fact, an interesting aspect of the folk calendar is the concept of the middle of a season. This idea is a widespread one. Thus several days in various traditions mark the middle of winter: St Peter (16 January, old style), St Timofej (Timothy) (Timofej-Half-of-the-Winter, 22 January) in Russia; St Athanasius (18 January, old style) in Bulgaria (Sedakova and Tolstaya 1995: 119-21). In Bessarabian villages the people believe that St Athanasius on his feast changes his clothes from the winter ones to lighter ones. The inhabitants would climb a hill and shout "Saint Athanasius, look at us!", thus calling the warmer weather (PA, Kirsovo). The idea of the middle of a season can be expressed through food metaphors, e.g. Russian Aksinja Polukhlebnitsa (Aksinja-Half-of-the-Grain, January, 24, old style), denoting that the winter supplies of grain are halved. The division of the summer by Midsummer Day seems to be typical for many traditions. In Bulgaria St John the Baptist (June 24, old style) is called Sred-ljtatoto (Midsummer). Not only season periods can have their mid-points, but zoodemonic weeks as well. Thus, the Wolves' Days were sometimes marked in their middle, not at the opening or the ending. In Eastern Bulgaria among the ethnic group of Kapantsi the third day (St Philip's Day, November 14, old style) of the Wolves' Week was believed the most dangerous. The middle of the lents are marked by folk calendar dates and rituals, like the baking of biscuits in the form of crosses when the first half of the Great Lent is over (Tolstaya 2005: 229; Aleksandrov et al., eds, 2003: 629). In Bulgaria the middle week of the Great Lent (Sredopostnitsa in Bulgarian) is connected with strict bans on work in the home (Loveshki kraj 1999: 307). In south Bulgaria, St Barbara's Day both starts the Christmas celebrations and also marks the middle of the Christmas lent (Sakar 2002: 326-8). These illustrations indicate that the climax sometimes was not at the end or the beginning, but at the middle of a period. In the Russian folk calendar, as far as Shrove week is concerned, we can speak of the growing (enforcing, multiplying) of the rituals beginning from the middle (on Thursday, when the Broad Shrovetide starts), till

Shrove Sunday – a big celebration of seeing off the Maslenitsa (the female image of Shrovetide and simultaneously the winter).

We could identify three types of semantic links in terms of symmetry-asymmetry between calendar endings and openings:

(1) where their significance is equal, or
(2) where the significance of the opening is dominant, or
(3) where the significance of the ending is dominant.

The Twelve Days period (1) starts and finishes on a set date with two equally meaningful complexes of rites for the opening and for the ending, while other rituals such as the spring/summer opening focus on the beginning (2) and yet others, such as those of spring rain-making (Tolstaya 2001), place the accent on the ending (3).

This would be an ideal scheme. However, it is often difficult in practice even to define, firstly, where is the end and where is the beginning of a ritual period, and, secondly, the degree of the importance of these points for a certain vicinity.

THE BEGINNINGS AND ENDS OF THE TWELVE DAYS

While the twelve days in the church tradition will be 12 days and will end on Epiphany, according to the vernacular rhythm the opening will be at the beginning of December and the end during the last days of January. Doubling or multiplying the same semantics, celebrating different feasts, is one of the main principles of the magico-ritual *Weltanschaung*; to make the wish come true it has to be repeated several times, with words, symbolic acts and/or ritual objects. The intention is to make the period of solstice and the corresponding celebration very concentrated, because the highest points in the ritual year draw smaller rites to the epicentre.

Yuletide among the South Slavs starts at the beginning of December or the end of November when rituals of first footing are consequently performed on St Andrew (30 November, old style), on St Barbara (4 December, old style). The most typical "start" is though the day of St Ignatius (Plotnikova and Sedakova 2001: 220-1; PA, Ravna; PA, Tvarditsa). According to the apocryphal texts the Divine Virgin felt her first pangs then.[3] That is why this day connects with

Christmas and then the period goes on to Epiphany when, according to the folk-religious version, Christ was baptised.

Having mentioned above the role of personal interpretation of ritual activity, I will give one example of such specific view here. In the Bessarabian village of Tvarditsa one of my Bulgarian female informants told me that the Yuletide period starts on St Barbara (4 December, old style) and finishes on Babin Day (St Domenica, Babin Den "The day of the midwife", 8 January, old style, an official Bulgarian holiday for obstetricians at the present day).[4] This is a typical example of gender attitude to the calendar; she counts periods according to the women's activities on certain dates. On the day of St Barbara mothers observe certain rituals so as to keep illnesses away from their offspring (Loveshki kraj 1999: 196). Babin Den is a women's celebration as well and is a highly structured one. It starts with all the young mothers visiting the house of the midwife, where they wash her hands. Then they have a feast and the midwife gives the young women symbolic presents, wishing them many babies. In the evening the whole procession takes the midwife to the river to bathe her. Thus with purification ends the period of the folk Twelve Days.

In Bulgaria, Babin Den is a typical folk continuation of the Church celebrations, Epiphany in this case. On this day the priest, having blessed the water in the church, goes to the river, then blesses all the houses. After this act all the evil spirits that appeared during the Twelve Days go away. The restriction on the use of water for washing up dishes and washing clothes and hair that marks the period of the Twelve Days "when the water is not blessed" is lifted. Vice versa it is essential on this day to wash the icons and the plough in the river.

Thus, in different Bulgarian locations the Twelve Days last for two to three weeks, or even more, depending upon which dates people mark as the beginning and the ending of the period.

THE OPENINGS OF WINTER AND SUMMER

Openings, like anything first in the cosmic order, have a larger influence on the events following than the last, the endings. The intention of performing the ritual complexes is to prevent the stopping of the natural movement of the cosmic order.

The rituals of the young people at Yule and the beginning of spring are mainly of an initiatory character. Those who have not taken part at least once in Christmas processions, or in the spring girl processions, cannot get married. There is also another parallel between the two beginnings – those of winter and spring. I mentioned above the Bulgarian first-foot rituals, which are performed in winter, but in Russia and the Ukraine the first foot is connected with the beginning of spring (Annunciation, The Great Thursday before the Good Friday and St George's Day [23 April]).

The first appearances or sounds of the animals and insects or natural phenomena seem to be also more magically valued signifying the beginning in folk belief. Hearing the first cuckoo or the first thunder causes the person to perform some rites so as to open a productive new period. When someone hears the first frog he has to boast of everything so that the house will be full for the next year (Sakar 2002: 344, for Bulgaria). The first sounds of particular insects or birds mark the opening of various stages of agrarian work. The arrival of the first birds seen migrating from the south in Russia announce the beginning of ploughing. There was a ritual welcoming of the first birds in spring (Gura 1997: 95).

In the folk calendar, the beginning of a period can consist of a set of openings. This is not typical for Christian Time, where the feasts and lents follow in a strict order.

A set of openings is characteristic for the beginning of seasons. If we speak of the winter, we have to remember, that the metaphor Winter-Dream-Death is more than just a poetic figure; it is based on the belief in a sleeping or dying Nature. Nature falls asleep not at once, but gradually. Thus for Russia there is a set of days thought of as the opening of the winter, and the period of "going to sleep" is quite long. The first period is from the day of St Sergij (7 October, old style) till the day of St Ann (9 December, old style); the whole period of the beginning includes in local traditions such dates as St Dimitrij (26 October, old style) and St Andrew (30 November, old style) (Sedakova 1999: 327-8).

For the spring (summer), nature has to be awakened (there are rituals of waking up the grass, the earth, etc.). Again, it is not an immediate awakening, like "opening the eyes". For Bulgaria we would speak mostly of the beginning of summer and the dates are: the First of March (Baba Marta), The Forty Martyrs (9 March, old style),

Annunciation (25 March, old style), St George's Day (23 April, old style), the Easter and some others (Sakar 2002: 343-58).

The life of natural objects serves as a sign of a beginning. Thus in the Northern Russian regions, where the rivers are of immense importance, the people watch for the melting of the ice.

At the end of March the ice on the river Sukhona starts to lift up and the fishermen are very happy. When it starts to move the first who sees it runs from house to house with the news crying, "*Poshla, poshla*! ("It is off, it is off!"; "It is on its way!") Having heard this everybody takes a piece of bread and salt and runs over to the bank, where they wash their faces, saying "*Slava Bogu, poshla nasha kormilitsa zhelannaja!*" ("Thank God she has started, our Beloved Food-Giver.") Then they throw the bread into the water as an offering (*Russkiy Sever* 2001: 649).

At first glance, it is a very simple, material approach to the calendar but, as we can see, it reveals deep archaic spiritual and religious roots. The river is compared to the Earth as the Food-giver and, even more, the image of the river is very similar to that of the Earth as the mother, the great Goddess, who gives birth to the crops and fruit and food. The water was similar to the earth which gave food and energy. The same attitude is found towards the sea among those Bulgarians who live on the shore; their ritual year has set endings and openings according to the marine life. Studies of the Slavonic ritual year have not yet paid much attention to the differences in the landscape and climate characteristic of such a vast territory as that of the Slavonic world but clearly the mountains and the sea or a lake or river in an area change drastically the course of the ritual year and its emphases.

ENDINGS

As I have mentioned, openings are the more important in the ritual year, but there are still some periods we could point to in which the end is very significant. In the Central Eastern Slavonic regions, where there are special folklore texts and rituals for inviting the spring with crying aloud and singing during the Great Lent, when singing is forbidden (Agapkina 2002: 171), there were also special farewell songs to the winter. This symmetry – welcoming spring and seeing the winter off – is not always found, however. In the Vladimir

region of Russia, for example, the winter is seen off, but the spring is not welcomed at the opening, so that the only marked point is the ending (*Russkiy Prazdnik* 2001: 243-53). To this we can add that the end of the winter is usually celebrated widely: by processions, making fires, burning or throwing into the river images of Winter, burning old objects like wheels, shoes, etc. People say farewell to the winter; they drive it off – "Go away, Winter, to Kiev!" – and sing calendric songs (Tolstaya 2005: 196-8). The end is expressed through the idea of death and takes the ritual form of a funeral. In folk ethics saying farewell is connected with asking for forgiveness, and there are vivid parallels between the year and the life cycles. Thus, Shrovetide Sunday in the Orthodox Church is called Forgiveness Sunday, when people ask for forgiveness, pronouncing set phrases. This Sunday marks a transition, saying farewell to non-vegetarian food and winter and meanwhile asking for forgiveness before the opening of Great Lent. In the life cycle, such ritual complexes as birth, marriage and death (funeral) also connect the ideas of saying farewell and asking for forgiveness. Slavonic languages use for these two actions verbs derived from the same root (**prost*-): *proshchanie* and *proshchenie* in Russian and, in Bulgarian, the single verb *prostja se* which means both "to say farewell" and "to ask for forgiveness" (Sedakova 2004: 402-7).

Apart from the ritual of the burial of Winter (on Shrove Sunday among the Eastern Slavs), we can point to other customs in which the ideas of the death, end and funeral come together, e.g. the Russian burial of the flies, which means the end of the summer season (Gura 1999: 444-5).

The desired end of a drought is symbolically represented by a funeral procession which has the aim of provoking rain. This occasional ceremony is supported both by church and folk actions. Though in Bulgaria the prayer of the priest for rain marks the beginning of the ceremony, the significance of the "pagan" ending dominates. The burlesque burial, or destroying, or throwing into the river of a mythological personage, German (a male doll made of mud), marks the climax of the rite. The ritual funeral of German includes a commemorative feast, as is customary for a "normal" burial as a means of saying farewell to the person buried (Tolstaya 2005).

In many cases the ending of one period is combined with the opening of another, as the whole calendrical year consists of longer or

shorter periods, defined by the Church or by the folk perception of time or by the life of Nature. The following example illustrates this. Shrove Sunday ends Shrove week and opens the 40 days of Great Lent, and so the Sunday of Forgiveness is the end and beginning simultaneously. The repertoire of folk calendar songs assigned to one date in the ritual year shows how the ideas of endings and openings can be expressed in folklore. In the Brjansk Region of Russia on the night before Annunciation all the female inhabitants of the village would gather together on a bridge and sing songs, one part of which was dedicated to seeing off the winter, and the other to welcoming the spring (*Russkiy Prazdnik* 2001: 250).

In my paper I have tried to show that the quantity and the ritual quality of special periods do not coincide either in one Slavonic cultural tradition or in several close, but still different, traditions. The sacredness and markedness of particular periods differ even among close traditions. The relevance and the ritual concentration is more evident and more characteristic for the openings. There is a certain symmetry in the course of the ritual year, but the cases of asymmetry described above demonstrate the vagueness of ritual borders and, similarly, of the pairs or triads.

Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Traditional Cosmology Society for the Cosmos Fellowship which allowed me to visit Edinburgh to attend the conference on "The Ritual Year" held in July 2004 at which this paper was given, and to express my special gratitude to Dr Emily Lyle for sharing ideas with me and for all her assistance with the editing of this article. My fieldwork in Ravna was carried out as a part of collecting materials for the Small Dialectal Atlas of Balkan Languages (Institute for Linguistic Research, St Peterburg), and my fieldwork in Shipkovo and Stakevci was carried out with the sponsorship of the Bulgarian Research Society DIOS; I am grateful to all the people involved in the organisation of these expeditions and to the informants.

Notes

1 There is a vast literature on the Slavonic ritual year; for detailed bibliography, see Chicherov 1957; Propp 1963; and Tolstoy, ed., 1995-2004. Two books available in English are Ivanitz 1992 and MacDermott 1998.

2 The local folk interpretation of the saints depends upon many factors, such as cultural heritage, the role of borrowings and folk etymology, climate, etc. In the Balkans St Trifon (Dionissius) is the Tsar of vineyards celebrated on 2 February, old style, but in Central Russia there are no grapes, so there is no such cult. One example of the development of a calendric cult built on folk etymology (Len–Oljona, making a connection with linen) is celebrated on the day of St Constantine and Helen (Oljona) (21 May, old style).

3 There are many Balkan folk songs depicting this event. The same concept was characteristic for Russian views on Christmas; the vernacular religion pictured the pains of the Virgin and celebrated the day after Christmas as a special feast in honour of God's mother. (Gal'kovsky 2000: 169) regards this as the pagan feast dedicated to the goddess of kin.

4 In some areas of Russia the second or third day of Christmas (26 or 27 December) is known as the day of the midwives (Aleksandrov et al., eds, 2003: 623; *Russkiy Prazdnik* 2001: 16).

References

Agapkina, T. (2002). *Mifopoeticheskie osnovy Slvajanskogo narodnogo Kalendarja: Vesenne-letnij tsik* (*Mythopoetic grounds of the Slavonic Folk Calendar: Spring and Summer Cycle*). Moscow: Indrik.

Aleksandrov, V. et al., eds. (2003). *Russkie* (*The Russians*). Moscow: Nauka.

Bogatyrev, Petr (1971). *Voprosy teorii narodnogo iskusstva* (*Questions Concerning the Theory of Russian Folk Art*). Moscow: Iskusstvo.

Chicherov, V. I. (1957). *Zimnij period russkogo narodnogo zemljedel'-cheskogo kalendarja XVI-XIX vekov. Ocherki po istorii narodnyx verovanij*. Moscow: Nauka.

Faltaitis, M. (1987). *Scyros.* Athens.

Gal'kovskiy, N. M. (2000, reprint of 1913 edition). *Bor'ba Khristianstva s ostatkami jazychestva v Drevnej Rus* (*Struggle of Christianity and the Remains of Paganism in Old Russia*). Moscow: Indrik.

Gura, A. (1997). *Simvolika zhivotnykh v slavianskoj narodnoj tradicii* (*Animal Symbolism in Slavonic Folk Tradition*). Moscow: Indrik.

Håland, E. J. (2001 [published 2005]). Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative Approach. *Cosmos* 17, 197-251.

Ivanits, L. J. (1992). *Russian Folk Belief.* Armonk, New York and London: M. E. Sharpe.

Kapantsi (1985). *Etnografski i ezikovi prouchvanija*. (*Ethnographic and Folklore Research.*) Sofia: Izdatelstvo BAN.

Loveshki kraj (Loveshki Region). (1999). *Materialna i Dukhovna Kultura* (*Ethnographic and Folklore Culture*). Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov".

Lyle, Emily (1990). *Archaic Cosmos: Polarity, Space and Time.* Edinburgh: Polygon.

---- (2000 [published 2004]). Interpreting Yule and Other Transitions in the Year. *Cosmos* 16, 151-8.

MacDermont, M. (1998). *Bulgarian Folk Customs*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

PA = I. Sedakova, Personal Archive.
PA, Kirsovo – Village of Kirsovo, Bessarabia, 1984.
PA, Tvarditsa – Village of Tvarditsa, Bessarabia, 1987.
PA, Ravna – Village of Ravna, Provadia Region, Bulgaria, 1997.
PA, Shipkovo – Village of Shipkovo, Loveshki Region, Bulgaria, 2000.
PA, Stakevci – Village of Stakevci, Montana Region, Bulgaria, 2001.
PA, Scyros – Island of Scyros, Greece, 2004.

Plotnikova, A. and I. Sedakova (2001). "St. Ign'atije." In *Slovenska mitologija*, pp. 220-1. Belgrade: Zepter Book World.

Popov, R. (2002). Bezumnye nedeli v kalendarnom tsikle bolgar (Mad weeks in the calendar cycle of the Bulgarians). In *Priznakovoe prostranstvo kul'tury* (*Qualities in the Space of Culture*), pp. 86-102. Moscow: Indrik.

Propp, V. J. (1963). *Russkie agrarnye prazdniki (opyt istoriko-etnograficheskogo issledovanija).* (*Russian Agrarian Festivities*.) Leningrad: Nauka.

Russkiy Prazdnik (2001) *Russkiy Prazdnik. Illjustririvannaya encyclopedija.* (*Russian Holiday: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*.) St Petersburg: Iskusstvo SPb.

Russkiy Sever (2001). *Russkiy Sever. Etnicheskaya istorija I narodnaja kul'tur XII-XX veka* (*The Russian North: Ethnic History and Folk Culture. XII-XX centuries*). Moscow.

Sakar (2002). *Etnografsko, folklorno I ezikovo izsledvane* (*Ethnographic, Folklore and Linguistic Study*). Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo "Marin Drinov".

Sedakova, I. (1999). *Zima* (Winter). In N. I. Tolstoy, ed. (1995-2004). Vol. 2, pp. 327-30.

---- (2004). Proshchanie i proshchenie. Opyt etnolingvisticheskogo analiza (Saying farewell and asking for forgiveness. An Approach to Ethnoliguistic Analysis). In *Jazyk kul'tury: semantika I grammatika.* (*Language of Culture: Semantics and Grammar*), ed. S. Tolstaya, pp. 209-24. Moscow: Indrik.

Sedakova, I. and S. Tolstaya (1995). Afanasij (St Athanasius). In N. I. Tolstoy, ed. (1995-2004), Vol. 1, pp. 119-21.

Sedakova, I. and M. Valentsova (2004). Pervyj-poslednij (The First, the Last). In N. I. Tolstoy, ed. (1995-2004), Vol. 3, pp. 674-79.

Stojnev, A., ed. (1994). *Balgarska mitologija. Enciklopedichen rechnik.* (*Bulgarian Mythology. An Encyclopaedia.*) Sofia: 7M+LOGIS.

Tolstaya, S. (2001 [published 2005]). Rites for Provoking and Stopping Rain in Slavonic Folk Tradition. *Cosmos* 17, 179-95.

---- (2005). *Polesskij Narodnyj Kalendar'* (*Polessian Folk Calendar*). Moscow: Indrik.

Tolstoy, N. I. (1997). "Vremeni magicheskiy krug." In *Logicheskij analiz jazyka: Jazyk i vremja* (*Logical Analysis of Language: Language and Time*), ed. Nina Arutjunova, pp. 17-22. Moscow: Indrik.

---- (2003). *Ocherki slav'anskogo jazychestva* (*Essays on Slavonic Paganism*). Moscow: Indrik.

----, ed. (1995-2004). *Slavianskie drevnosti. Etnolingvisticheskij slovarj.* 3 vols. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija.

The *Maggio Drammatico* in Frassinoro: Its Meaning and Function

LICIA MASONI

The *Maggio drammatico* (literally dramatic May) is a form of Italian popular theatre in verse. The *Maggio* is expressed in long series of quatrains of eight-syllable verses rhyming according to an ABBA scheme (*rima baciata*) which are sung as a slow chant, without background music. The stories it presents are mostly inspired by tales of chivalry, lives of saints, episodes from the Old Testament and nineteenth-century popular literature, such as French serialised novels (*feuilletons*) and gothic novels. This may sound as if the *Maggio* was a literary form of theatre, but, on the contrary, with only a few exceptions, the authors of the scripts were people from those villages in the Tosco-Emilian Apennine mountains, to which the performance tradition was limited – very often people with little education. The *Maggio* was produced and performed for the enjoyment of the people of the community. It was set up by small groups of people, *compagnia* (Fig. 1), who would perform it for their own village and often for the neighbouring ones as well.

Nowadays it is still performed in a few places in those mountains, one of which is Frassinoro, a small, secluded village which lies in the province of Modena, though it is very near the border with Lucca and is just as near to Florence as it is to Modena. This is the area analysed in this paper, and where the *Nuova Compagnia del Maggio* struggles to keep the tradition alive by promoting not just a revival of the later forms, but also new scripts that might justify a use of the *Maggio* nowadays and re-establish it as an expression of a community, as it had been when the community had to look within itself to find ways of entertainment. These were the times not so much before the first television set arrived in the village around 1963 (since it still functioned as a storyteller, bringing people together in the same room), as before the second and the third television sets arrived, which began to divide the groups up and relegated the people to their homes.

This paper is concerned with the last period of vitality of the *Maggio*, from the 1930s to the 1960s (with an interruption during the

Cosmos 18 (2002), 223-254.

second world war and the period of reconstruction that followed it; see Magrini 1992: 8) and aims to represent the *Maggio* in Frassinoro through the reminiscences of those who enjoyed it in those days. The intention is to benefit from what people can still say about their actual experience.

It does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the *Maggio*, nor a full account of its origin. Detailed research has been carried out on these subjects (Magrini 1992; Toschi 1976; D'Ancona 1971), and the texts of the *Maggi* (pl. of *Maggio*) are being analysed in connection with their original sources of inspiration by Cavallo (2004), in an attempt to trace the exchanges between oral tradition and chivalric literature. A book that has been especially relevant for this paper, *Il Maggio* by Sesto Fontana, was published in 1964 after a lifetime of observation of the *Maggi* in the mountains around Modena in particular. Fontana was among the first people to write extensively about the *Maggio* having spoken to the people who performed it. His work is fundamental because it was fieldwork-based and never detached from the people whose tradition he describes. He wrote with a mixture of dream and romance, which makes his book one of the most pleasant reading experiences I have ever encountered. In his lines one reads of the villages and almost sees the people he talks about, the people he spent time with, by the fire. One of the people he talked to was Giacobbe Biondini whom he mentions as a great *maggiarino* and author of one *Maggio* (Fontana 1964: 27-8).

My paper draws upon material collected during fieldwork in 2002-2004 in Frassinoro,[1] since interest in the *Maggio* was instilled in me by those very conversations, especially with Giacobbe Biondini (1916-2004), a fervent lover of the *Maggio drammatico* from an early age and grown to be the best *maggiarino* (singer of *Maggio*) Frassinoro remembers, a man willing to go through his memories with a critical eye, that of a real tradition bearer, who does not only pass the tradition on, but also tells you how to use it and what to gain and learn from it. Giacobbe is the one who slowly taught me what the *Maggio* was. He and his wife, Maria, sang the quatrains for me and sat down to try and explain to me what it was all about. They never attempted a concise definition of the *Maggio*, never said the *Maggio* is theatre, for example.

Figure 1. Pavullo, 1961. *Maggio d'Altavilla*. The *Compagnia del Maggio di Frassinoro*. Courtesy of Giacobbe Biondini, who is shown holding the lion shield.

Giacobbe started by singing many verses and he told me the stories – he spent a long time untangling all those narrative bundles of love, battles and religious fervour in front of me – explaining them, telling me why certain things happened, what the moral was, who was good and who was bad, why one should be punished and another was rewarded; which were the qualities that brought happiness and which instead left the characters in misery. He drew parallels with fairytales and other stories he had learned from broadsides.

I began to realise the dimensions of a web of verbal arts that used to exist in the village, because Giacobbe told me about the sources of many of the scripts of the *Maggi* (books they had read and broadside ballads) and about the other uses they made of rhyming (rhyming for weddings, witty speech, ready remarks, and *stornelli*, literally "starlings", which are rhymed dialogues typical of Tuscany). People used to have competitions where the two contestants had to compose on the spot, or try to remember as many lines as possible, often lines from the *Maggi*. The *Maggi* were recited and sung during *filò* (evening gatherings in barns, where stories and games were

exchanged and women would carry on with some work, such as spinning [*filare*], from which the gathering possibly takes its name) along with legends, folktales, songs etc.

It became clear that the *Maggio* had a life also outside the annual performance moment, and that it did not belong only to the *compagnia del Maggio*, but to all the people in the village who made daily use of it. The *Maggio* appeared then as part of a wider tradition; those people were poets. Embroidering and playing with words was something within them, an instrument of daily life.

In their attempt to make me fully understand what the *Maggio* was, Giacobbe and his wife Maria referred to people who used to sing it and to places where it used to be sung. Stories about people and places were associated with these memories. A web of cross-references to their life was activated by the talks about the *Maggio*. I learnt about their lives and opinions about: religion, world view, moral values, sex and relationships, family, economy, emigration, priests, feelings, aspirations, leisure, fears, bereavements, people who had died and had meant a lot for the village, etc. They drew from their feelings, from description of their own nature and character, to explain the effect that the tune, the language and the quatrains had on them. Hearing Maria prompting Giacobbe, when he was singing some *Maggi* for me, I learnt that women knew the *Maggio* by heart too and we talked about the role of women in the *Maggio*. When Maria told me that she learnt those verses from Giacobbe who was always singing while she was working, we got to talk about their working life in those days and from there came a long conversation about their aspirations when they had just married, what they wanted to build together and how hard life had been. At that point, the conversation plunged back into the themes of the *Maggio*, because in order to describe their feelings, they reverted to examples from the *Maggi*: "It's a bit like in the *Maggi*, when....", and they would give an example of a scene or of a quatrain incorporating the feeling.

Therefore, just as to explain the *Maggio* they had to use examples from their lives, to explain their lives they felt like drawing examples from particularly poignant moments of the *Maggi*. This shows how deeply interwoven in their life the *Maggio* was and how strongly represented by it they felt.

ORIGINS OF THE *MAGGIO*

Despite the name, the actual performance was not held in May. It was always held in the summer (a season which is considered in Italy to start on 21 June) and this was partly because it was performed in the open air and it had to happen in the good season – as stated in the prologue which welcomes the arrival of the days when all is blooming again – and on those mountains, the spring could still be very cold.

The main reason why the *Maggio* was attached to the summer season was that, being the expression of a community, it had to wait for the community to be reunited. Giacobbe explained to me that they had to wait for seasonal workers to come back to the village – people who had been away for the transhumance or cutting wood in Tuscany or Sardinia or girls who were away as servants. (Audio 2003.4). The *Maggio* could return when everyone had returned; it was a celebration of the reunited community. Only then could rehearsal start.

This unity is embodied by the habit the people have, at the end of the performance, of joining the *maggiarini* and hugging in a circle. Then for hours they go on singing together the favourite quatrains and octaves. The *Maggio*'s endings, like those of many fairytales, display and promote the courage, honesty and goodness which bring about the hero's reward, after hours of suffering (the *Maggio* performance could last up to three hours). It makes sense then, that the *Maggio* is performed at the end of a long period of hard work away from home and family, in difficult conditions and circumstances.

The celebratory character was enhanced by the habit of singing it on a Sunday. The *Maggio* was somehow a tribute to God and Mother Mary in particular. One could easily speculate that this is a result of the many attempts of the Church to assimilate "pagan" practices into the religious calendar. The truth is, though, that we do not know when and how this habit of Sunday performance started and, given the fervent religious devotion of those communities, it could well have been a spontaneous act of devotion on the part of the people, or, alternatively, it could have arisen simply out of the necessity of performing the *Maggio* on a day of rest.

It is difficult, and it is not the aim of this paper, to state what influences and transformations brought the *Maggio* to the shape that is known to us. The remote roots of the *Maggi*, are probably to be

found in pagan May rituals (Fontana 1964: 39-40; D'Ancona 1971: 337; Toschi 1976: 524), in the celebration of the victory of spring over winter, as some aspects of the play would suggest. Another form of *Maggio* which is still alive in those mountains is very reminiscent of agricultural rituals. This is the *Maggio lirico*, or s*erenata*, which consists of a group of young men strolling down the lanes of the village singing serenades, in quatrains, for the young women and collecting money from house to house. Sometimes a tree and a May queen were paraded through the village, symbolising the victory of spring over winter. This form of *Maggio* is entirely sung, with a musical background. The collection of money is common to all forms of *Maggi*, mostly for religious purposes, but sometimes just to pay for some wine for the singers, who, not being professionals but simply people from the village, do not receive any payment for their performance. Other elements in common between the *Maggio drammatico* and the *Maggio lirico* are the initial request for permission to sing, the verses welcoming the warm weather and the fact that the verses are sung. The *Maggio drammatico*, though, as indicated by the name, is closer to a theatrical representation. The element of the procession is not present, apart from the short one when the singers arrive at the performance space. The music is no longer a background, but just a brief tune to set off the quatrains. The *Maggio drammatico* appears as a development of the *Maggio lirico*, from which, among other elements, the *Maggio drammatico* takes its metrical scheme (Fontana 1964: 41; D'Ancona 1971: 342; Toschi 1976: 527).

Evidence of the habit of "*cantar Maggio*" (singing *Maggio*) can be traced to before 1792, in a recently discovered document in which a bishop complains about the mess created by those "youngsters in armour and women's clothes" and refers to it as to an "ancient ritual" (Piacentini 1998: 1, 4; my translation). Although the expression "*cantar Maggio*" could have referred to the *Maggio lirico*, the document lists spaces which hosted the Maggio – the square and the churchyard – and this suggests the idea of a non-processional representation which could have been a kind of performance very similar to the *Maggio drammatico*, which is limited to a circumscribed area of action. The *Maggio drammatico* as we know it, though, had strongly established itself from the second half of the nineteenth century (Magrini 1992: 24-5), when references to performances start intensifying in contemporary documents.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE SCRIPTS

The years between 1850 and 1940 coincided with the phenomenon of the mass circulation in those mountains of popular novels, and some of the *Maggi* scripts were adapted from those very novels. Giacobbe and other interviewees declared they were eager readers of this "popular literature". When Giacobbe as a young man had to spend a long time in bed, due to an operation, a lady in the village lent him her books and he read them all (Video 2004.6). He was so touched by one of them that he decided he would call his first son after the hero in the novel, Rolando (Phone conv. 2005.1).

All this narrative material came to the mountains through the activity of the popular printers, which allowed the circulation of cheap translations of some famous works as well as some poor quality tragic novels. These books became popular in Frassinoro especially around the 1920s and 1930s. The *cantastorie* (broadside ballad singers) also flourished in the years preceding the second world war and their stories, a mixture of *noir* and romance, appealed enormously to the people, so much so that Giacobbe could still recite many of the ballads by heart.

Along with popular novels, books of chivalric narratives reached the mountains, often in the form of collections of episodes. Giacobbe and other interviewees read the stories in *I Reali di Francia* ("The Kings of France"), a book which contained epic material mostly drawn from the Breton Cycle. The most frequently represented adaptation of the Breton Cycle in Frassinoro was *Tristano e Isotta,* which was found in the village in an anonymous and undated manuscript. Other texts came from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, works well known by some of the old people in the village, who often accessed them through abbreviations or through their oral versions. The battle between winter and spring had merged with the chivalric epic and turned into a battle between Christian and Pagan. All these sources inspired many *Maggi* scripts. Others were inspired by Biblical episodes, as well as European gothic literature and fairytale themes. The Scottish gothic became the subject of a famous *Maggio*, *Gli Esiliati a Barra* ("The Outlaws of Barra"), which Giacobbe could still recite. Eighty-year-old people in Frassinoro know of the isle of Barra because of this *Maggio* which was inspired by a late translation of the gothic novel *St. Clair of the Isles, or, the outlaws of Barra*, by Elisabeth Helme.

Dante figures as a source for the *Maggi* too. A famous *Maggio* was taken from the extremely popular legend in the mountains concerning Pia dei Tolomei, which had developed from the introduction into oral tradition of an episode in Dante's *Inferno*. The *Maggi*'s Pia had undergone a few changes and had become a semi-holy being. The story was so popular that Carolina Invernizio fixed it in a book, and in 1940 a film was made out of it. Giacobbe saw the film when it had just been released, when he was in Pisa on his way to Sardinia to cut wood. As sometimes happened, if they had some money and some time between the train and the ferry, the men would go to the cinema and then tell stories about the films when they came back home, thus inserting new narrative material into the fabric of the village. Not totally new though, given that a look at the titles of the films released between the early forties and the late sixties, reveals that cinema production was relying on exactly the same kind of stories as had given life to the *Maggi*: from the *Reali di Francia* to *Le meravigliose avventure di Guerrin Meschino*, *Lancillotto e Ginevra* etc… The narrative material the *Maggio* had used for so long was being made available, though in different form, to the public at large.

Fontana, in the 1960s, was able to put together fifty-four *Maggi* scripts, most of which were by authors actually known to him. Despite the fact that the authors of the *Maggi* were always "peasants", people from the villages in the area interested in the *Maggio*, the *Maggio* was not expressed in the local dialects (the area had very vigorous local dialects which were used as daily language), but in standard Italian. Given the level of education of the authors, which was usually not beyond the third year in elementary school, the language of the *Maggi* was often grammatically incorrect and full of repetitions (Fontana 1964: 97-108).

Frassinoro had two authors of *Maggi*, Giacobbe Biondini and his uncle Pasquino Turrini. Both of them were described by everyone as poets and great readers: "Oh, he used to read many books!" They were perceived by the people as individuals with special dispositions, since they liked reading. This made them individuals of a special kind, placing them on another level, that of the ones who knew more because of what they had read in books.

These authors were extremely dedicated. Mario Bernardi told me about the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Maggio* written by Giacobbe Biondini, with the participation of his uncle, which was entitled *Il Re della Montagna* ("The King of the

Mountain"), or *Maggio di Nadir*, as Giacobbe used to call it from the name of its protagonist. It was written in 1946, in Maremma (a forest region in Tuscany), during breaks from hard work cutting wood. Mario said that no one could talk during the breaks; he and all the ones not involved with the writing had to observe silence, because the poets – Giacobbe and his uncle – had to think of the quatrains for the *Maggio*. Mario laughs and remembers: "They used to write with what they could find, sometimes a piece of burnt wood was used as a pen and they would write on a stone!" (Minidisc 2005.2). Apparently, they came back with a few stones in their pockets from that long season of work.

Mario also recalled a technique for composing verses that was employed by a man he regarded as a genius; this old man used to stick his head in a hole he had cut in a wall in his house, and would come out with a quatrain! (Audio 2002.1) This semi-legendary character actually existed and I found the description of his "technique" in Fontana's book: his name was Domenico Cerretti and he, as stated in a piece of writing he left, became a poet and author of *Maggi* after he had an accident which left him blind. Giacobbe had also heard about his technique and referred to him as *il cieco di Rovalo*, "the blind man of Rovalo" (Rovalo is a group of houses a few kilometres away from Frassinoro). The document left by Cerretti and reported by Fontana reveals how much the *Maggio* and the composing of poetry were able to free that man from the prison of his blindness.

Cerretti was a poet and was considered as such by the whole community. It was no shame to spend time composing verses; on the contrary it was something highly appreciated by the community. Though constantly struggling for a living, often having to work twenty hours a day, none of the people I interviewed considered rhyming and singing a waste of time. They regarded it as indispensable for their lives. People used to sing during their work, to make things easier. Verses were exchanged from one field to another, between young men at work. The inspiration for verses was often nature around them. Giacobbe once told me he used to be overwhelmed by the surroundings, when he could lie on the grass for some time, while grazing the sheep. He used to recognise every bird in the woods by its singing, which inspired him with tunes and verses.

The poet had a function in the community. The people used to invite them to weddings for example: exchanges of witty rhymes

were considered a well-wishing practice. Each toast to the wedded couple was accompanied by some clever verse, often teasing the bride and groom or the guests. Frassinoro was still a place where the poet was considered a pillar in the community, with a precise role and reason for being, just like the priest or the teacher. The poet was aware of his role. He was often a person of great sensitivity, who could detect the tastes and needs of his people. Therefore he made sure he could give them what they could enjoy and understand.

In the transition from the books that were the sources of inspiration to the scripts of the *Maggi*, the stories underwent not just the major and necessary modifications due to the transposition from one literary form to another, but also some changes in the way themes were delivered. The authors being people from the village and not expert dramaturges, the scripts often ended up lacking balance, developing some aspects to excess: some texts display too many characters and confuse the audience with too many dialogues, for example. Some others host too many battles. Fontana, in his review of the style and contents of most *Maggio* scripts available at his time, notes that some of the texts of the *Maggi* were swarming with battles (Fontana 1964: 36). Nevertheless, these "mistakes" are useful, as they help us to detect what the tastes of the people were, as each exaggeration must have been dictated by the knowledge that the audience would have appreciated certain ingredients. Giacobbe declared more than once that battle was part of life and that the clashes were seen not only as adventurous moments, but also as a projection of the people's own struggles.

New texts were regularly written, derived either from new novels or from narratives which had already been dramatised but that the new author felt like revisiting in a new style. The texts were exchanged among the companies (other villages in the are around Frassinoro had *Maggio* Companies) and were not the exclusive property of the author, this partly because there were people who could pick up a *Maggio* by heart after having heard it twice. Therefore, even though the *Maggio* was written down, it was subjected to the laws of oral transmission and it could be stolen by some careful ear. Sometimes the scripts were lost or caught fire and had therefore to be pieced together from memory and ended up undergoing some changes. At other times small modifications were applied to the already existing scripts from year to year just out of a desire to refresh the narrative material; some quatrains were added,

new lines replaced the existing ones, more battles, less battles and more love verses, etc. (Audio 2004.4).

Changes to the texts were meant to satisfy people's desire to recognise themselves in the *Maggio*. Sometimes, it was just a matter of enhancing certain sides of the story chosen as the basis for the *Maggio*, or of adding some characters that the people perceived as fundamental in a *Maggio* – angels, devils and a buffoon.

There is a gallery of fixed allegorical characters that need to figure in a *Maggio*. Angels, for example, appear in almost every performance and script, often in the role that, at some point in the past, must have been covered by the messengers. The angel probably replaced the messenger of the chivalric *Maggi* when *Maggi* on sacred subjects started being performed and then it lingered on, with an added meaning as opposed to the lay messenger. (Toschi 1976: 553) In general, as confirmed by Giacobbe, the angel was an allegory of justice, of God's Word, superior wisdom and help. It was the embodiment of the supernatural world. Angels and devils are allegorical representations of the big elements in life – good and evil. In this encounter among titans the smallness of the individual finds its allegorical transposition in the buffoon, or sometimes in a peasant.

All these characters remained in the *Maggio* with functions which might differ from those they had had originally, but which now are fundamental to the organisation of the plot, despite their sometimes apparent lack of relevance to the general time and place where the action takes place. Marvellous creatures, such as giants and dragons, did not disappear from the *Maggi* either, because they represent something important to the people on the stage. Their presence is a manifestation of the supernatural world, a pagan kind of supernatural, as opposed to the angel. This aspect of the supernatural was extremely meaningful to the people, who cultivated legends and beliefs about ghosts and the evil eye.

Giacobbe, when I asked him if he found any similarities between folktales and *Maggi*, said he did, in that they both displayed fictional creatures and therefore "they were both fiction", as opposed to other stories he had heard or read. The marvellous is a fundamental aspect of the *Maggio*, which uses magic in the same way as fairytales, with animals talking and objects animating themselves. The presence of marvellous creatures was perceived as an emotional cross-reference to the often heard fairytales; see Bersotti, who also draws connections between fairytale and *Maggi* scripts, as far as structure is concerned

(1983: 25, 73-5). The Patriarca (Giacobbe's uncle, Pasquino Turrini), the best storyteller in Frassinoro, enchanted everyone on winter nights with adventures of dragons, ogres, and princes, mostly inspired by the stories in the Arabian Nights, and Giacobbe still remembered some of them. It comes as no surprise, then, that the source of inspiration for the *Maggio* Giacobbe wrote was the popular novel *Il Re della Montagna* by Emilio Salgari, an adventure populated with Sultans.

The choices of the stories to act reveal the real conception people had of certain issues, such as religion for example. The kind of morality dictated by the laws of nature and the laws of family is strong in some *Maggi*, even if it might be formally perceived as against the religion the people cherished so much. In one of the most performed and loved *Maggi* in Frassinoro, *Tristano e Isotta*, people always stood up for Tristano, even though he was technically a sinner since he had seduced his King's wife. I asked Giacobbe why it was so. The answer was that "since Tristano and Isotta were in love, their being together was how things were supposed to be since the beginning"(Video 2004.3). It does not come as a surprise that this kind of moral dichotomy actually created the tension upon which the success of many French *feuilletons* (Dumas, Eugène Sue, Hugo) was based. In many of these novels the hero fights for the poor and the helpless, following fundamental values such as love, family, pride, often regardless of some religious rules. These novels, like many broadside ballads, justify love and passions as strong motors of life and somehow forgive all foolish acts derived from them. Many popular writers, while interspersing their pages with prayers and orations, actually displayed this kind of morality, which agreed very well with the people's kind of natural religion. Some of the French authors had long been listed in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, but the people, who were unaware of this, never saw in them anything against their religion.

Antonio Gramsci observes that the reason why people in the mountains and in other backward areas of Italy were attracted to foreign popular literature was that they did not feel represented by their own national literature or their own intellectuals. "What is the meaning of the fact that Italian people prefer to read foreign writers?" he wonders (Gramsci 1985: 209). Especially given the fact that the narrative material was a hundred years old when it became so popular in Italy!

> The intellectuals do not come from the people, even if by accident some of them have origins among the people. They do not feel tied to them (rhetoric apart), they do not know and sense their needs, aspirations and feelings. In relation to the people, they are something detached, without foundation, a caste and not an articulation with organic functions of the people themselves. (Gramsci 1985: 209)

Elsewhere he states:

> The popular element feels but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element knows but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel … (Gramsci 1971: 418).

About *Les Miserables*, by Hugo, Giacobbe said (Video 2004.3): "I liked that book because the people there were suffering like us. It helped us being content with what we had. And I didn't mind crying while I was reading it, because I knew that in the end I would be happy." Whenever Gramsci discusses popular literature he names the *Maggi* as a self-made alternative the "peasants" found to the lack of entertainments that might represent them.

> In the absence of their own "modern" literature, certain strata of the *menu people* have satisfied their intellectual and artistic needs (which do exist, albeit in a plain and elementary form) in a variety of ways: the circulation of medieval romances of chivalry – the *Reali di Francia*, *Guerino ditto il Meschino*, etc.– especially in Southern Italy and in the mountains; the Maggi in Tuscany (the subjects presented in the Maggi are taken from books, tales and especially popular legends like Pia dei Tolomei; there are various publications on the Maggi and their repertoire) (Gramsci 1985: 211).

The people did feel represented by the *Maggi* and by its heroes, because those heroes were general heroes to whom anything might have happened. Persecuted or unjustly accused young men, betrayed and ill-treated ladies found their way to happiness in the end. The *Maggi* displayed and justified people's daily struggles. By being

repeated annually they confirmed this model of life as a struggle, while making it more tolerable because the repetition, the serialisation almost decreased its intensity.

One must not forget that the *Maggio* was mostly a performance, and that the script was there just to permit the performance. For this reason, changes in the scripts or in the choice of the sources, could have been due to changes in the way the *Maggio* was performed. If a single *maggiarino* felt like intensifying the recitative part of the singing, by making his gestures more similar to those actors had at the cinema, then the scripts might have started matching the style of his performances. The thirties brought about a change in the choice of the scripts; love became more important than battles and *Maggi* which contained more romantic scenes were preferred. At the same time, conveying feelings and emotions with gestures became very important and *maggiarini* who could recite well were very much appreciated. The rigid style that had been characteristic of the old *maggiarini* described by D'Ancona was not popular in Giacobbe's days.

The adaptations of the scripts and of the ways in which they were performed show that variation and modernisations were welcomed by the people and not considered threatening. This attitude is demonstrated also by the fact that in the eighties, in the attempt to use the *Maggio* as a living tradition and not just as something to revive, Marco Piacentini (the director of the new *Compagnia del Maggio di Frassinoro*) wrote a text about the second World War, *Marzo '44* ("March '44"). This subject deeply affects the people, especially because many young men met atrocious deaths at that time in those mountains. Giacobbe was glad to recite some quatrains for me. He did not feel betrayed by the new subject of the text; on the contrary, he welcomed the novelty, while respecting Piacentini as someone who knew the rules of the *Maggio* well. This is because Giacobbe was still in the frame of mind of someone who used the *Maggio* and not of someone who treated it as an artefact, an antiquity.

THE PERFORMANCE

The following pages outline some of the characteristics of the *Maggio*, looking at the performance as a form of *ad hoc* entertainment, created especially by the people and slowly modified

by them to satisfy, as Gramsci put it, "their intellectual and artistic needs".

The performance space

The setting for the *Maggio* is in the open air, usually in a clearing by a wood. In Frassinoro, though, in the years between the 1930s and 1950s, my informants remember that it was performed in an uncultivated field, named *Sut la Via* (lit. under the road) not too far from the main road. The field had a slope and acted as a natural arena. There were attempts to perform the *Maggio* in enclosed spaces, but they failed. The reason, according to Fontana, was that the *Maggio*, in order to function fully, could not be disjoined from its natural setting, the open air and the fields. The setting chosen reflects the pastoral character of the play and it certainly accorded with the element of celebration of the good season which figures in the prologue to the performance.

The open-air setting is also a symbol of the wilderness, where one could lose one's way and have strange encounters after dark, as many legends collected in Frassinoro relate. If seen within this context, the setting of the *Maggio* seems to acquire a special meaning. Being all together (the community is reunited for the *Maggio*), celebrating a cheerful occasion, in the daylight (when everything and everyone is visible and unfrightening), becomes a way of fighting a fear which was rooted in every one of them. This open air reunion somehow functioned as a declaration of the strength of the community against the unknown.

It is worth noting also that the forest figures as a place of action in many epic *Maggi*; it is an important element in the plot, just as it is in fairytales. In the *Maggio* setting, it is represented by some centrally placed branches in an in-between and undefined space. The forest setting of the actions in the play is mirrored by the field within which the performance is set (following the criterion of *mise en abîme*).

The performance space is a circle, defined by the audience sitting on chairs and benches they often bring from home, marking out the circular space in which the scenes are going to be set. The round theatre space links the audience and "encourages" a "sense of shared experience" (Devlin 1989: 28). In addition to this, the circle allows the audience to see each other, while making them feel all as one,

given also the "socially equalising effect" this arrangement achieves.

Interrupting the circle, here and there are a few pavilions, often made with blankets. On top of them are banners that indicate the city, the home or the castle that the pavilion represents and the setting of the action. After entering the performance space in a small parade led by the musicians, the actors circulate in a bunch from one pavilion to another and always along the internal perimeter of the circle, apart from the moments of narrative climaxes, performed in the centre. Between scenes, the *maggiarini* go back to their appropriate pavilions and rest, drink some wine and generally behave as audience, abandoning their role for the moment. Sometimes they actually mix with the people in the audience to discuss a quatrain, or the rest of the story.

Because of the simplicity of the theatre space, the audience needs points of reference to decode the meanings and uses of that space. The pavilions have a didactic function, in that they guide the comprehension of the action. The mere proximity of the group of *maggiarini* to a pavilion informs the audience of where the scene is taking place. The *maggiarini* stick to that area, unable to move much without the risk of confusing the people. In this aspect, one sees the influence on the *Maggio* of mystery plays and sacred drama, in particular the Stations of the Cross, *Via Crucis*. The latter is particularly well known to the people of Frassinoro, because the village is famous all over the mountains for its living *Via Crucis*, which the people have been setting up every three years since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, and which possibly dates back to the Middle Ages (Tollari 1994: 74, 83). Like a station or a medieval tableau, the scene of the *Maggi* is made up of "signs", in the semiotic sense. It carries a codified meaning with it. The position of the actor in the space somehow defines the quality of the mood in the action.

During climactic moments – battles, deaths, love scenes – the hero moves to the centre of the circle (Fig. 2). There are basic stage reasons for this movement. The round space does not allow the actors to be seen properly sometimes, and so the movement towards the centre provides a fuller view for more of the audience. Besides, in the case of battles more space is needed since as many as eight or ten people might be involved in the fight.

Figure 2. Frassinoro, 1946. *Maggio di Nadir*. A love scene with the *maggiarini* in the middle of the circle. Courtesy of Giacobbe Biondini.

In addition to these practical reasons, the movement to the centre is charged with a symbolic value. The middle space is not defined by banners. Without regard for giving space references to the spectator, the *maggiarino* moves into a non-defined space, a metaphor of the self, of the soul, of the realm of emotions in general. This space, deprived of spatial and tangible reference, is the ideal representation of interiority. The same space that is assigned to the forest hosts scenes of sorrow and emotional loss.

The audience is aware of the function of this space, as one can infer from their behaviour during the play. When the actors move to the centre, the tune changes (the verses are normally sung according to a slow and monotonous melody with little vocal twists at the end of each verse, all through the play), often becoming a beautiful aria, and the metre changes too (from quatrains into *ottave*) and these changes coincide with a visible sense of trepidation in the audience. When the *ottave* come up, a silence full of expectation arises from the benches. The audience knows that it is going to be an emotionally engaging

moment. The simple fact that the action moves to the centre arouses expectation. The audience is deeply affected; the tunes are sometimes sublime and cannot fail to affect and produce a moment of internalisation in the spectator, who is led to look into himself to find sympathy with the hero. And they always find that sympathy with the bad ones in the play too. The *ottava di morte* (*ottava* of death) sung by the evil character is always vigorously clapped! That space in the centre then, the space of emotions, is somehow neutral. Given that characters, whether good or evil, access that space only at times of deep joy and deep sorrow, each of them is transfigured by these feelings. All characters become alike or, better, they produce an equivalent effect in the audience.

Stylisation

The *maggiarini* appear first in a small procession, and file into the performance area led by the musicians. The *Paggio* ("Page") asks for permission to sing; he welcomes the pleasant season and introduces the main characters and describes the situation and what has led up to it in a way that suggests to the people who they should stand for.

The music, usually that of a fiddle, an accordion and a guitar, helps the *maggiarini* find the right tune at the beginning and for the rest of the performance it consists only of brief tunes (folk-motifs, waltzes, polkas, and mazurkas) played between sections of the action to set off the quatrains (and arias from operettas are sometimes used as musical interludes).

Stylisation affected the way in which the *maggiarino* sang, often addressing his public and not the character the verses referred to. He would walk within the circle, taking long steps, as if measuring the space of the performance (Barsotti 1983: 19-20). He would have special gestures to accompany the singing. Before the war and in the sixties, he would touch his temple when the verses contained reference to the actions of thinking, reflecting, understanding, or any mental activity and he would touch his lips to accompany verbs like speaking, saying etc. (Magrini 1992: 11).

The battle (Figs. 3 and 4) is a powerful and codified clashing of swords and shields, which has been compared by Toschi with the *moresca*, a stylised Tuscan ritual dance (Toschi 1976: 518-23).

Figure 3. Frassinoro, 1960. *Maggio D'Altavilla*. Scene from a battle. Courtesy of Giacobbe Biondini.

Figure 4. Frassinoro, 1961. *Maggio D'Altavilla*. Two *maggiarini* (Enzo Turrini and Giacobbe Biondini) in a battle scene. Courtesy of Giacobbe Biondini.

Just as stylised were the costumes which were made by the women who put together what could be found: wood for the shields and the helmets, and military jackets from the First War adapted for the armour, cardboard or iron for the crowns. They often relied on small details to tell the characters apart, sometimes a long blond plait hanging down from a helmet was used to indicate that that man was playing a female warrior. Up to the twenties all female roles were played by men. Tenors were chosen for these roles, like the warrior Bradamante for example, but they did not have to modify their voices; the *Maggio* was never a pantomime. The same costumes were used for all representations, regardless of their real historical consistency with the subject, as long as they conveyed the *impression* of a hero.

Non-realism

The *Maggio* was completely outside of the need for *verismo* that ruled the theatre in the realistic drama of the nineteenth century. There are no decorations on the set, other than the specific props that might be needed such as, for example, a few branches to symbolise a forest or a log to represent a fire. The non-realism of the scene urges the spectator to displace from the literal to the immanent. Most of the reactions the *Maggio* produces in the audience are achieved through the interaction of symbolically charged elements.

The use of the space, the tunes, the objects on the scene are units of significance on which people construct, because able to draw from a common background, a shared system of situations, stereo-types, constructions of the imagination. These cross references succeed in activating webs of meaning. The *Maggio*'s plain declaration of no pretences to be realistic in any aspect causes the spectator to activate the performance.

This lack of realism also serves another function. It projects a space of the absurd, a cacophonic world, so anachronistic and so full of deliberately dissonant elements, that it actually provides a perfect example of a fantastic world where anything could happen. The sun glasses worn by the king in the *Maggio* are just as "surprising" as the "surprising pair of dirty white boots, size ten at least, very narrow and pointed", described by Beckett in his stage directions for *Krapp's Last Tape* (Beckett 1973: 9). The word "surprising" with the value

Beckett confers on it, expresses the *Maggi*. The cacophony of incongruous elements surprises the audience, by keeping them on a permanent level of challenging abstraction, without allowing them to settle into a reassuring mimesis. There is discussion within the spectator's mind. As Kelsall states (1985: 21) in relation to *Krapp's Last Tape*:

> The scene draws attention to its theatricality […] so that its action will not be confined by probabilities of everyday life, but may use the language of the stage itself to express whatever it is that will follow. Surprise has stirred curiosity. The images are full of latent suggestions. (Kelsall 1985: 21)

The language

Non-mimesis is achieved also through the use of language. The language of the *Maggi* projects the imagination of the audience in an undefined space (as if the non-defined dimension was the only possible setting for dealing with emotions). The compulsory quatrain acted as a constraint which actually caused the writers to find extremely imaginative ways, even if often grammatically incorrect, to use their language and re-elaborate it in marvellously cacophonic schemes which produced a powerful effect on the listener. This is understandable if we think that all interviewees declared that the individuals who had "the rhetoric", the people who had the ability to find the words that "convince", were highly regarded within the community; they were called upon for advice for example. As a consequence of this receptivity to the word, especially the word with the right sound, it can be argued that the "stranger" words of the *Maggio* had an effect on the audience. Some people admitted that the words in those verses were special because they were "nothing like the way we speak". These words convey a sense of the exotic. The spectator is affected simultaneously by the juxtaposition of the two values of the concept of exotic: that of the marvellous and exciting and that of the distant and unknown. The exotic language sets the action on a higher social level, but one where similar emotions are felt, with the result of sublimating all the emotions of those who sit there. It allows the audience to give a higher dignity to their own feelings, because these are shared with the heroes moving in front of

them in beautiful brocades. That the language did have this effect was confirmed by some conversations with Giacobbe, who liked to spend time and attention on the choice of words and agreed that different words – and therefore different sounds, assonances and rhymes – did produce an emotional effect on people. Giacobbe still rhymed at the age of 89 and he was often unhappy with his rhymes and went back over them to think of a better word. The sense of estrangement produced by words was well sensed by these poets.

The language of the *Maggi* projects into a distant and unknown dimension too. This happens because this language is hybrid and undefined, it is wrong and cacophonic; it relies on accumulation. It does not represent the language of the kings and knights, but a language that no one speaks, something other than the usual language. It is a made-up, pretend language, used only for specially connoted occasions; the audience recognised in this language the language of fiction, the language indissolubly connected in their memory with moments of recreation (weddings, dances), mocking, guising.

A fictional language, a language that is not spoken in real life, projects a fictional world, a world that cannot exist – a world which is the counterpart of the daily world. It becomes another undefined space, which allows the spectator to achieve emotional distance from the familiar feelings he is re-living through the characters and exorcises those very feelings by expressing them in a mock-language. The spectator plays with his or her fears and sorrows, plays with the idea that evil might not exist, that all sorrows might be fiction.

Facilitating this process of abstraction is the fact that most of the wrong words and verbal forms the authors liked to use (because of their sound and because they took a fancy to using them as markers of their own specialised and special language) became part of the codified language of the *Maggio*. Therefore these words started having the effect of fixed formulas on the public, who recognised them immediately and were instantly reminded of their abstract meaning, their meta-meaning. The spectator does not need to pay attention to these words, since they function on a level of spontaneous associations. These words act like a familiar tune arousing existing memories.

The participation of the spectators

The story relies as well on the participation of the spectators, in order to be fully understood. It is true that the spectators are very likely to know the text by heart, but even if presented with new texts, they know what is going to happen. The story is bound to reproduce the people's idea of a story worth watching, following their logic of morality, religion, romance, liberation

There is "an implicit knowledge on the part of the audience" (Foley 1991: 42) and this is what sustains the *Maggio*. Foley sums up his thinking on this topic in the following way (1995: 42): "If we are a competent audience, in short, such virtually proverbial nuggets activate networks of immanent meaning to which they are linked by performance fiat and traditional practice, and as co-creators of the action before us we invest [these nuggets] with the resonance they metonymically command." Long before Foley phrased this concept, Tranquillo Turrini, author of *Maggi*, said that the "*Maggio* could not be sung in Milan or Modena, because the *Maggio*", in order to be fully enjoyed, needed "*un pubblico competente*", literally a competent audience! (Magrini 1992: 8).

The slow monotonous chant of the *Maggio* succeeds in drawing the attention to the words themselves, without distracting with melodies, facilitating clear enunciation. The ability to declaim words clearly is essential for a *maggiarino*, because people need to understand the text in order to participate in the performance. Good enunciation was often a way of judging the single *maggiarino*, as well as the *compagnia del Maggio*.

The battles represented a powerful release of tension for the audience and an exercise of human strength and stamina for the *maggiarini*, providing young men with an outlet, which was ideal to channel all their strength. Toschi states that the young men had sometimes to be separated. Wine circulated abundantly during the performance and the audience participated actively; commenting both on the *maggiarini* and on the story was allowed and expected during the play. Comments, added to the fight, enraged some of the combatants on more than one occasion (Phone conv. 2005.1). This element of virility is echoed in some remarks made by the interviewees when the *Maggio* was discussed as a community event. Giacobbe's wife, Maria, admitted that the way her husband sang made her fall in love with him. It was only after she had heard him

singing, and could observe him moving in the circle of the *Maggio*, that she noticed him and felt something for him. The stage was an arena where women could observe these young men displaying their physical strength and the power of their voices.

Even some of the people who did not particularly like the Maggio – often because it was sung – would stick around, admitting they took pleasure in checking on the right functioning of the *machine Maggio*. Altogether there were many ways of taking part in the *Maggio*. Some people would go just to listen to the *maggiarino* they liked; they would stay for the main *ottava*, have a glass of wine and then leave, publicly declaring that they did not like all the rest. Others would also leave the performance for some reason – if they did not like the way it was sung for example.

The audience felt entitled to judge. They were an expert audience. They knew the story, the tunes and the rules of the *Maggio* and therefore felt they had a right to discuss and criticise every new production of the *Maggio* and the quality of the *maggiarini*, because the *Maggio* belonged to them. The texts of the *Maggio* were tailored on the people of those mountains.

The explicit sign of the implicit knowledge of the audience is the actual open scene where everything is constantly in sight, nothing is hidden. The play is sustained by this eye contact. It helps maintain the connection, not only because the spectators can always keep their eyes on the hero, but also because at any moment they are in control of everything else. The line that connects them is never broken.

Maintaining a link with the real world

Among all the different worlds the *Maggio* is able to project in the audience's minds there is one it does not wish to evoke at all – the perfect world. The *Maggio* performance is designed not to allow the creation of a parallel dimension into which the spectator might wish to escape. This is because the *Maggio*'s aim was to provide a model to make sense of this world, the world the people lived in, to give order and sense to their struggles, by weaving these in a plot supposed to give them shape, order, logic. After all, play is often meant to find ways to cope with the world we live in and not to create a new perfect world as an alternative to this.

The buffoon and the *Capo Maggio* are the two presences on stage

that serve as reminders that all is fiction and enable the audience to avoid slipping into too much expectation of mimesis. They allow the audience to feel in control of the situation, just as one wants to keep control of life. This attitude explains why, while the stories of the *Maggio* were popular in cinemas, *Maggio* performance never reached the cities, where the preoccupation in the theatres was facilitating the suspension of disbelief by hiding all the elements that could have betrayed the fictional character of the events represented.

Sometime there is a buffoon (*buffone*) to meet this need to keep one's feet on the ground. He is the one who breaks the tension during particularly touching moments, who openly criticises on the stage, who introduces the ridiculous element, who ridicules the characters, who covers the actor's mistakes by saying something funny. The fool was sometimes "employed as a sort of whipping-boy" (Welsford 1935: 74-5), and in Frassinoro the people threw things at him during the performance: apples, tomatoes. He picked them all up, put them in his basket and went away, hiding what was consigned to him, material and immaterial. What the buffoon put in his basket was symbolic of the evil influences, misfortunes and disgraces the people wanted to get rid of; let the fool hide everything: The buffoon of the *Maggio* speaks a caricature of the language of the people, something like the attempt of a poor peasant to imitate the register of a nobleman. With the language of common sense, he suspends the suspension of disbelief. As a consequence, his words act like the closing lines of fairytales, which, with an often coarse register, aim to bring about a return to reality.

Supervising the young men and the actions is a unique kind of prompter, the *Capo Maggio*, a man in plain clothes who acts also as a director. He prompts the beginning of each quatrain and follows the *maggiarini* for the duration of the performance, always among them, like a referee on a football pitch. He prompts them, invites them to leave or enter the scene, tells them how to move and how to suffer. He is always visible to the audience, so much so that after a while he becomes part of the background and one does not see him any more, as if he had moved into the blind spot of the spectator's eye. This happens because the spectator somehow becomes the *Capo Maggio*, again satisfying the need to keep visual control of things.

With all these rules and interruptions to the mimesis, the *Maggio* appears as a game, an attempt to create and solve a challenging

tension within the mind, in order to entertain it. Huizinga comments (1946: 8):

> It is this element of tension and solution that governs all solitary games of skill and application such as puzzles, jig-saw, mosaic-making, patience, target-shooting, and the more play bears character of competition the more fervent it will be.

The character of competition in the *Maggio* is given by the rules and constraints on which its structure relies. All year round, men and women sang the *Maggio* to accompany their work, and by the time the day of the performance came, they all knew the verses by heart, and so a considerable part of the fun resided in identifying with the *Capo Maggio* and with the buffoon, prompting and spotting mistakes. In this way, when the buffoon intervenes to mock the hero for a mistake, he speaks the spectator's mind and somehow brings the spectator on the stage, making him a character just like all the others.

It does not come as a surprise, then, that the people never felt the need to eliminate the *Capo Maggio*, or to hide him. While he might seem a disturbing element to new audiences – because his presence prevents the total suspension of disbelief – he was actually the embodiment of the attitude of the original audiences.

BEING A *MAGGIARINO*

If the *Maggio* tradition was sometimes passed on within the family, this was not always the case. Becoming a *maggiarino* was a choice dictated by passion, not by family ties; Giacobbe was the first in his family to become one. In one interview about tales, he said to me: "If I had studied the stories instead of the *Maggio*, I would have thousands to tell you." By saying "studying" he meant paying attention – paying attention to all the elements that made up the singing of the *Maggio*. He said he chose to concentrate on the *Maggi* because "I was attracted by them, but, had I wanted, I could have picked up the stories about Baghdad," i.e. fairytales on the model of the Arabian Nights that his uncle used to tell. (Video 2004.3). Therefore becoming a *maggiarino* was a matter of choice.

The aspiring *maggiarino* was likely to have been inspired by the particular style of one of the older *maggiarini*. The way the

maggiarino stood and circulated within the stage area, the movements used to facilitate the reception of the verbal message, the particular way of singing the quatrains and the tunes adopted for the *ottave*: all these elements made up the style. Young learners would choose the *maggiairno* that most inspired them and then they would try and imitate him. Giacobbe said he learnt the way he sang his quatrains from a man he particularly admired because he, more than the others, had an evocative way of moving on the stage and his gestures conveyed the impression of the character. (I do believe, though, that Giacobbe's style was very much influenced by the strong impact cinema actors had had on him.)

The memorisation of the words took place within the performance context. The *Maggio* was not learned from the written script. Giacobbe said the memorisation of the verses could not possibly be disjoined from that of the gestures accompanying them. He said he was able to pick up the verses very easily if he could, while playing them back in his mind, match them with facial expressions and gestures and associate them with different intensities of voice. Part of his way to memorise the lines consisted of plunging himself into the character so as to feel what the character felt. "I would figure myself that I was in love and then I was in love, that I was angry and then I was angry. I would go after the emotion with my gesture, to give it a tone. And I would remember the lines, because I was angry." (Video 2004.3). He was sure to remember the verses, because those lines were exactly the words that anyone would have said, had they been in the same situation as the hero of the Maggio! This was his explanation. To put it another way, those lines were a direct transcription of emotions; they were charged with so much meaning that they actually represented the character's essence.

This ability to reach down to the essence of the *Maggio* contributed to the creation of a special *maggiarino*. They were not all the same, at least as far back as the interviewees can remember. The *maggiarini* were not masks; each of them was expected to have his own voice and ways, so much so that some people, as stated before, would go to the performance just to hear their favourite maggiarino. The *maggiarino* had a social role too, of which he was somehow aware. He made everyone dream and weep. The pathos he conveyed on the scene through his recitation was extremely important for the people, in Giacobbe's days.

THE *MAGGIARINI AND THE COMMUNITY*.

There is something very special about the people I interviewed in Frassinoro; they were incredibly prepared and prone to talk about feelings and emotions. I realised that this attitude was mostly due to the tradition of the *Maggio*, through which they lived many strong emotions. Most of the people I interviewed told me that the *Maggio* made them relive many of their feelings, often feelings that had been accumulating during the year, without their being able to face them. Being all together, in a circle, going through the same emotions, made them feel they were suddenly sharing the burden they had been carrying. "Because," said Maria Biondini, "we also had disgraces. Our lives were adventures. Our life, those are *Maggi* too. I always say that if we had all written our journal at the end of each day, we would have come up with such (scripts for the) *Maggi*!"

The *maggiarini* provided the people with a vehicle through which they could experience and fight their emotions, distance themselves from them, achieving freedom and liberation. They almost functioned as scapegoats, delegated to feel all the sorrows and pains of the community in the place of the community and to be the vehicles that would transfer those feelings onto a distant place in space and time, away from the present. In his being able to identify with the character Giacobbe saw a mission. He felt he owed this to the audience: "Had I not felt I was Montei, had I not felt that that one was in love, how could I have *made them* live those feelings?" (Video 2004.3).

Passionista, in Frassinoro, is "he who loves the *Maggio* and cultivates its tradition". (The word would not be correct in standard Italian, but it is most appropriate and evocative, in that it effectively conveys the meaning of someone whose job is being passionate about something!)

The people wanted the *maggiarini* to be expressive in their emotions. Nowadays some revivals have brought back old ways of singing the *Maggio*, the static ways described by D'Ancona. The lack of pathos belongs to an era which was not that of the people I interviewed. One interviewee, talking about Giacobbe said:

> You should have seen him, when he was angry, when his beloved told him she did not want him anymore! How he shouted and stamped his feet and suffered! Had you seen how

> much attention everyone paid, you couldn't hear a fly flying! You should have seen him!

The interviewee went on to say:

> Nowadays, they have a way of singing …, it's all the same. Because the *Maggio* is an opera, and as far as I am concerned an opera must be expressive. I, because I know the *Maggio*, give it the expression (in my mind, when I see it nowadays), but one who does not know them (the *Maggi*) will find them ridiculous.[2]

"*Ci dò l'espressione*," I give it the expression. It is a wonderful way of putting things, which also rephrases Foley's words as to the webs of meaning activated between teller/singer and competent audience. But at the times Giacobbe sang, the audience did not want to have to give it the expression in their minds, they wanted to see those emotions played out and displayed.

The *maggiarino* was a sort of community mock king. It is interesting to notice that the *maggiarino*, after having died with a long *ottava di morte*, gets up and goes back to his pavilion. Somehow this mirrors the ritual deaths and resurrections of the slaughtered mock kings.

> There are traces in many parts of the world of an ancient custom of periodically slaying the priest/king for the good of the whole community, which has been gradually modified by the substitution of a mock-king for the real ruler, and of a dramatic for an actual death. (Welsford 1935: 68).

It is likely that people felt relieved by this clumsy stage "resurrection", and that they benefited from being reminded once more that it was fiction, that things were going to start again, and again.

This function of deputed vehicle of emotions somehow continued all year round. The *maggiarini* were constantly reminded of their function in the community, because most of them were called by their fictional names also outside the time and space of the performance; they were still Tristano, Isotta, Nadir, Montei etc. The two identities were superimposed in the minds of the people. Maria Biondini,

Giacobbe's wife, in order to explain how important the role of the *maggiarino* was, told me that on the day of their wedding the usual gang of young men in the village surprised them with a mock ritual (*arpar*, lit. shelter) which was normally reserved for the couple in which one member came from outside the village. The special role of Giacobbe allowed an exception to the rule, as if he also had represented some in-between person.

The *Maggio* was woven into the lives of the community.

This is possibly why, when watching the *Maggio*, one feels it is a play without an audience. It looks like a *dress rehearsal*, where everything is done as if the public were there, but where the whole company is actually acting for themselves only.

University of Edinburgh

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to the memory of Giacobbe Biondini, a most intelligent and inspiring man and a friend. I will always be grateful to him for all he told me, taught me and shared with me.

I should like to express my thanks and appreciation also to all those I interviewed in the village of Frassinoro, in particular to Maria Biondini and to Mario and Anna Bernardi. My gratitude goes especially to Marco Piacentini, director of the present *Compagnia del Maggio di Frassinoro*, for his most precious help, advice and support. I would also like to thank Professor Jo Ann Cavallo, from Columbia University, who kindly provided me with copies of her articles and dvd.

Notes

1 The interviewees, a group of eleven, were all between 80 and 104 years of age and had lived in the village all their lives, apart from the times in which they were away for seasonal labour. This study relies in particular on the conversations with Giacobbe and Maria Biondini and Mario Bernardi. Between 2002 and 2005 I recorded 18 video tapes, 9 audio tapes and two minidiscs which are in my possession and which are

identified in the text by year and number. For this article I also rely on one phone conversation, which is also identified by year and number in the text, and on many unrecorded conversations with Marco Piacentini.

2 This interview took place on the phone on 13.02.2005. I would like to keep the informant anonymous, since the information regards a personal opinion. Though I tried to write down everything almost word by word, some of this report is the product of rephrasing. The sense of the message, though, is in no way emphasised by me; it is faithful to what the interviewee said.

References

Barsotti, A. (1983). *Il Teatro dei Maggi in Toscana: drammaturgia, ideologia, spettacolo nella tradizione popolare*. Firenze: Lucarini Editore.

Beckett , S. (ed. 1973). *Krapp's Last Tape and Embers*. London: Faber and Faber.

Cavallo, J. A. (2004). Where Have All the Brave Knights Gone? Sicilian Puppet Theatre and the Tuscan-Emilian Epic *Maggio*. *Italian Culture* 19 no. 2 (delayed issue of 2001).

---- (2003). *Il Maggio Emiliano: Ricordi, Riflessioni, Brani.* Dvd.

Compagnia del Maggio di Frassinoro, (1996). *Il Presente e l'Avvenire d'Italia. Maggio di Domenico Cerretti*. Video-recording of the performance.

D'Ancona, A. (1971). *Origini del teatro italiano.* Roma: Bardi.

Devlin, D. (1989). *Mask and Scene: an introduction to world view of theatre.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Foley, J. M. (1991). *Immanent Art. From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

---- (1995). *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Fontana, S. (1964). *Il Maggio*. Florence: Olschki.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Antonio Gramsci. Selections from Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

----, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1985). *Antonio Gramsci. Selections from Cultural Writings*. London: Laurence and Wishart.

Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture*. London : Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Kelsall, M. (1985). *Studying Drama*. London: Edward Arnold.

Magrini, T. (1992). *Il Maggio Drammatico: Una tradizione di teatro in musica.* Bologna: Analisi.

Niles, J. (1999). *Homo Narrans*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Piacentini, M. (1998). *Il Dialetto di Frassinoro*. Modena.

---- (2000). "Tradizione e innovazione". Paper presented at the conference "La Tradizione del Maggio. La gente, la passione, l'orgoglio." Organised by the *Centro Studi e Documentazione sul Maggio drammatico* of Villa Minozzo.

Tollari, G. (1994). *Pietra su Pietra dagl'Intimi Ricordi : la Via Crucis Vivente di Frassinoro.* Roma: EPR.

Toschi, P. (1976). *Le Origini del Teatro Italiano.* Torino: Boringhieri.

Welsford, E. (1935). *The Fool: his Social and Literary History*. London: Faber and Faber.

Reviews

Svetlana M.Tolstaya, *Polesskij narodnyj kalendar* [*The Polessian Folk Calendar*]. Moscow: Indrik, 2005. ISBN 5-85759-300-X. 600 pp.

In the Soviet times, folk culture was regarded as ideologically alien and studies in Slavonic ethnology and popular religion were, if not forbidden, definitely not in favour. Now, after the decay of the USSR, the idea of Russian (Slavonic) identity incorporates the idea of tradition and cultural heritage**,** and Russia is experiencing a real boom in publishing books and encyclopedias in folklore and ethnology.

The monograph by Svetlana Tolstaya has a very special place among the publications in modern Russia. It comprises pioneering ethnolinguistic works which were separately published from 1984 onwards and have now been revised for this edition. At the time of first publication these essays inspired many students and scholars to collect and research folk calendar and cosmic views in various Slavonic regions, which paved the way for the vigorous achievements of the present day.

All the articles resulted from a series of ethnolinguistic expeditions to the Ukrainian and Byelorussian Polessje – one of the most archaic zones in the Slavonic world (see the article by Nikita I.Tolstoy in this volume). The fieldwork took place in the period between 1974 and 1986, when 34 villages were thoroughly studied on the basis of a detailed questionnaire which is presented in the book (pp. 573-588). The author also investigated many other published and archive sources, so that the number of the Polessian villages she is taking into account mounts up to 200.

In the Introduction Svetlana Tolstaya states that the folk calendar lies at the heart of traditional culture as a whole. This idea is illustrated by the evidence for the interrelationship of the calendar with cosmic views and all the spheres of human life.

The book is divided into two parts. The first considers calendric terminology while the second shows the rituals of the year in the ethnocultural context.

The Polessian folk calendar is presented through a dictionary of terminology with shorter or longer contexts surrounding the name of the day or period. In this way a picture is built up of the circle of the

ritual year and the most typical customary practices with their geographical distribution throughout Polessje. As an aid, there are several indexes, listing holidays in their chronological order, calendric formulae and proverbs and fragments of ritual songs. A special article in Part I is dedicated to the analysis of Polessian calendar manuscripts copied from people's notebooks in the villages during fieldwork. The calendars vary significantly in the quantity of holidays and give many cases of folk etymology for the name of a saint or of the celebration. Another genre of written calendars which is preserved in Polessje from the past (reflected in medieval manuscripts) consists of the lists of bad, or evil, days in the year (usually two or three days per month), when it is not recommended to start an activity or to plant vegetables and when the babies born are considered very unlucky. The other two articles explore the anthroponyms (personal names) and the semantic model of family relations in the Polessian folk calendar.

Part II consists of essays on some calendric beliefs, such as the motif of the sun dancing (playing, moving) on major festivals such as Christmas, Annunciation, the Nativity of St John the Baptist and some others. An exploration of the ritual use of the candles lit on certain big Christian holidays and a study of the custom of welcoming supernatural beings to the Christmas feast (written together with Ljudmila Vinogradova) demonstrate the richness of symbolic activity during the year. The author gives a detailed description of the folk perception of the days of the week, showing the mixture of Christian and pagan elements in the evaluation of time in Polessje. Last but not least is a study of the traces of apocryphal tradition concerning the famous "Tale of 12 Fridays" in songs, beliefs and calendric rites in the Polessian region. (Irina Sedakova)

Michael Dames, *Merlin and Wales, a Magician's Landscape*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2002. ISBN 0-500-51079-2. 192 pp.

Studying the landscape in which a mythological figure is said to have lived can be a useful starting point in understanding myths about that figure. Additionally, it can help us to remain grounded, literally and

figuratively, in at least part of the daily reality of those who transmitted and transformed the myths over time.

Michael Dames has used landscape as a "jumping off" point for examining mythology to great effect before. His book, *Mythic Ireland*, (London, 1992) used the structure of Ireland's four provinces and the "fifth province", the centre, to examine various themes in what we might term the Irish "mythopoetic histories".

He takes a similar approach here, using a wide range of source material. He etymologically analyses place and personal names associated with the Merlin legend, makes personal observations at locations connected with Merlin and looks at various possible interpretations of symbols and artifacts found in these areas.

At its best, this approach links information drawn from a wide range of disciplines to support interesting possibilities. Dames quotes a 13th century description from Layamon's *Chronicle of Britain*, where Merlin's mother describes his father as being like a tall knight, glistening in gold. Dames goes on to look at a gold "cape" from before 1000 BC found in Wales, speculating that such a garment might have been worn by man "embodying" a deity in the culture of that time. He notes that Elis Gruffudd's 16th century account says that Merlin's father is called "Minckamws", which he derives from words for a golden collar or torque and an "enigmatic" figure. I don't have space to detail the full range of associations Dames comes up with, bringing in both Irish myth and the symbolism of other artifacts, but he puts together an argument which, taken with many others in the book, suggests that both Merlin and his father were divine figures possibly embodied in human oracles. Tolstoy and others have also made this suggestion, but Dames adds further detail and grounds his study in the connection to the landscape mentioned earlier.

His approach doesn't limit myth to narrative, but allows symbol and landscape to take their roles as well. However, he sometimes makes rapid jumps between literature, artifacts and landscape features from disparate time periods, languages and places in a way that feels haphazard. It's like a "Mr. Toad's wild ride" through a mythological landscape – a bit dizzying. You know you have been to many places but sometimes aren't sure where you have ended up. Some of the connections he draws could do with a few more qualifications.

For example, he speaks of Merlin's death in a pool, drawn from an 1893 article by H.L.D. Ward on Merlin and Lailoken. In the next sentence, he speaks of Merlin "drinking deeply on the soul of things,"

and turning into a fish, evidently quoted from Wordsworth. Finally, he goes on to say, "In this guise we may see him, caught in a bronze hanging bowl made in Wales or North Britain around A.D. 600." This bowl was part of the Sutton Hoo burial.

Dames does provide references for all these pieces of information, and I think one of his strengths is the way he approaches all manifestations of myth, from ancient to modern, as valid and worthy of study. However, the links between these disparate times, places and sources is a bit too abrupt for me here and in a few other places.

Mythic Ireland benefited from the natural structure of the provinces and their associations, bringing us in the end to the centre, a satisfying place for the reader to end, structurally and poetically. This book leaves us with a sense of more loose ends, but perhaps that is inevitable when dealing with tales of Merlin. His nature as a shaman, magician, deity and generally liminal creature makes him hard to understand.

Dames is both poetic and passionate about his ideas, qualities many writers could stand to emulate. In the end he calls for us to accompany Merlin some of the way on his journey to unite body and soul and humanity and the natural world, re-awakening Merlin's magical world view. Dames shows that the scholar, too, can take on some of Merlin's role as one who shows a way to more conscious ways of being. (Geo Athena Trevarthen)