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Notes on myth and ritual in Southeast Asia

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NOTES ON MYTH AND RITUAL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

On ne comprendra l'Inde qu'en précisant sa place non seulement parmi plusieurs civilisations fort anciennes, mais aussi en fonction d'une plus primitive humanité.

Paul Masson-Oursel

Niet de psychologie, maar de waardeleer, of liever de een en de ander funderen de cultuurwetenschappen.

H. J. Pos

We don't need a formal definition for a better understanding of the idea of culture, yet it may be useful to keep in mind G.P. Murdock's remark that true universals of culture are not identities in habit, but rather similarities of classification¹ and that first of all it is a people's language which, by its very function, is continually and systematically symbolizing cultural motives, by this unique human capacity promoting mutual understanding of a special order called "culture".²

The wellknown anthropologist Cora Du Bois once correctly formulated the contents of a culture as including not only society but all the value systems and the emotional repercussions on people of living together in whatever phase of history or part of the world.³

Now, talking about myth and rituals, we should continually keep in mind that these categories of a people's religion are actual instances of those universal classifications of culture in the sense of Murdock's; moreover we realise the fact, stressed in their own manner by diverse philosophers as Cassirer; Jung or Pos, that the categories mentioned are the actual result of a rather unconscious but fundamentally human typological function (semantics).

Let us first realise what may be the special functions of myth within a culture.

¹ G. P. Murdock: *Social structure* (1949) p. 82 ff.; idem: *The common denominator of culture* (in Linton: *The science of man in the world crisis* (1945) p. 125).

² Cf. H. J. Pos: *Taal, Mens en Cultuur* (1957); J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong: *Ethnolinguistiek* (in *Bijdr. T.L.V.* 1951 p. 161 ff.).

³ Cora Du Bois: *Social forces in Southeast Asia* (1949) p. 12.

It has been said ⁴ that even among the students of cultural anthropology we are still far from a communis opinio on the exact meaning of the term.

In his address of 1925 to Sir James Frazer, Malinowski explained the function of myth as being to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events "... Myth is, he continues, therefore an indispensable ingredient of all culture. It may be called a people's pragmatic charter".⁵

So mythical tradition may indeed indicate some historical essentials but, as J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong once incidentally remarked ⁶, myth is, generally speaking "the contents of belief". This remark of professor de Josselin de Jong is certainly not to be seen as an arbitrary note, but he was evidently claiming a positive category of experience, that is to say a spontaneous truth, acquired not by means of (naïve) philosophy, as this author had indeed put it already in his former oration of 1935.⁷ The exalted tale is indeed both a faith and a program. Cosmic order (heaven, earth and the four cardinal points) may in some cases (for instance with the Zuni Indians as well as with Asian cultures) adjust human organization and therefore have its semantic functions.

Modern anthropologists however are trying to enlarge the concept by including historical or heroic data of a mere secular value into it. Thus professor G. W. Locher, in an article called "Myth in a changing world", stressed the thesis that myth not only simultaneously determines present, past and future, but also that certain ideals of modern society too exert their influence on myths.⁸ Now some emotional or political events may indeed be recorded by a story, but we doubt if any memorable actuality shares the same denominator with myth proper, unless one adulterates the principle of myth. By their glamour historical events may find persisting approval, and of course, because of their apparent magic powers, the dead heroes deserve due distinction at the semi-religious feast, but these commemorations are in principle lacking that unique mystic fervour and the awe-inspiring magic of the earliest "beginnings". We therefore agree with the more classic definition of myth, as for instance set forth by a scholar in a congress for

⁴ G. W. Locher: *Myth in a changing world* (Bijdr. T.L.V. 1956 p. 169).

⁵ B. Malinowski: *Myth in primitive psychology* (1926) p. 125.

⁶ J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong: *Studies in Indonesian culture I* (Oirata) p. 158.

⁷ Idem: *De Maleische Archipel als ethnol. studieveld* (1935) p. 12.

⁸ G. W. Locher: *Myth in a changing world*. (Bijdr. T.L.V. 1956 p. 169 ff.)

the history of religions at Amsterdam, professor H. C. Puech, that "par essence, la mythe est atemporel, antihistorique. Il se joue dans un temps primordial ou exemplaire, en dehors du temps concret de l'histoire, qu'il régularise et valorise en s'y actualisant et réactualisant par répétitions".⁹

Myth is indeed "a people's pragmatic charter" (Malinowski), and apparently this fundamental collective aim is to be held responsible for the fact that "in the primitive as well as in the cultural community law and order are linked up with myth", as the Swedish dr Petzäll has put it.¹⁰

In primitive communities, this concept of law and order includes the blessings of useful crops given by the mythical ancestors, more particularly an abundance of rice or maize. Likewise, the ancestors are believed to have instituted for once and for all the social hierarchy and the particular functions of the clans.

Thus professor Onvlee, in an interesting paper on the subject¹¹, recalled how on the island of Sumba (and the same applies to other regions as well) it is customary to recite the history of the ancestors, of the mythical ancestors ("*marapu*"¹²), a history which is alleged to expound the events of the hoary past, on various important occasions involving the community in its aspect of a totality. As such might be mentioned the construction of a *marapu*-house, i.e. the building which, with these people, serves a special purpose in socio-religious life (the gathering of an abundant crop or the passing-away of a prominent member of society etc.). In all these cases the narrators respectfully refer to "the beginnings", i.e. the inception of the principles of the very culture "which should be preserved as the most valuable treasure".¹³ A remarkable facet of this ceremony is that the recital actually takes the form of an interchange of question-and-answer by two persons

⁹ H. C. Puech: Temps, histoire et mythe dans le Christianisme des premiers siècles (Proceedings 7th Congress History of Religion, Amsterdam 1950, p. 47).

¹⁰ Ake Petzäll: The limitation of power (in Feestbundel prof. H. J. Pos (1948) p. 191).

¹¹ L. Onvlee: „Wij Mensen" (inaug. lecture, Amsterdam 1956), p. 18.

¹² P. J. Lambooy: Het begrip „marapoe" in den godsdienst van Oost-Soemba (Bijdr. T.L.V. 1937 p. 425 sq.); see also F. A. E. van Wouden: Locale groepen en dubbele afstamming in Kodi, West Sumba (Bijdr. T.L.V. 1956 p. 212 f.). D. K. Wielenga: Soemba, p. 61, 64 and Alfr. Bühler: Bemerkungen zur Kulturgeschichte Sumbas (in „Südseestudien", Basel 1951, p. 59 ff.).

¹³ We meet the holy recital of „the beginnings" among pagan tribes everywhere. This universality has first been stressed by K. Th. Preuss: „Die Erzählung von Mythen als Kulthandlung" in his pamphlet: Der religiöse Gehalt der Mythen (1933). Cfr also Ernst Cassirer: Philosophie der symbolischen Formen II, p. 133 f.

constituting as it were each other's counterpart, since they are singled out from two groups with a mutual exogamous connubial relationship. So these two spokesmen in those critical moments represent the total group together with the dead, and consequently the recital of the tribal myth (which should at the same time also be conceived as cosmogonical) will benefit the group as a whole.

Basic ideas similar to those of the Sumbanese underlie the totemistic systems of the Australian aborigines. To Durkheim we owe an exposition of the way the "magical epoch" (*alcheringa*: dreamtime) with its "héros civilisateurs" is constructed in ritual performances.¹⁴

The arch-mythical concept, so to say, of "the beginnings" of Australian tribes is complemented as well by the eschatological belief in the deified ancestors' blessings. "Dreamtime" indeed is a mode of expression with Australian aborigines speaking about primeval time: the ideas of "dream" and "myth" are (also etymologically) synonymous to them. This bare fact may, I should think, attract the serious attention of psychoanalysts. It is also a surprising fact that from quite another quarter the intrinsic relation of primeval age, dreams and myth (and also modern poetry) has been conclusively argued by a young Dutch scholar in his thesis at the University of Amsterdam.¹⁵

As for the contents of Australian myths, these frequently allude — as Durkheim definitely proved in his standard-work — to the well-known perpetual hostility ("hostilité constitutionnelle", p. 419) of component (totemistic) moieties. "In the beginning", as the phrase always has it, there are the two totemistic creatures (frequently famous birds) continually combating one another.

Analogous concepts are to be found with several Papuan tribes in New Guinea¹⁶ and elsewhere in Melanesia too; but also in Southeast Asia and with American Indians, the dichotomy being notably a recurrent feature of community organization. We therefore agree with Murdock acknowledging that this primary partition may indeed be called a world-wide symptom.¹⁷ Apparently the notion of complementary contrast lies at the base of any cosmogonical speculation, actual

¹⁴ E. Durkheim: *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1925); see also R. M. Berndt: *Kunapipi* (1951) Ch. IV and Phyllis M. Keberry in *Oceania*, vol. VIII (1938) p. 265 f.

¹⁵ H. S. Visscher: *Dromen in de moderne Nederlandse poëzie* (1953).

¹⁶ G. J. Held: *De Papoea cultuurimprovisator* (1951) p. 28, 138, 140 f.

¹⁷ G. P. Murdock: *Social structure* (1949) p. 90; P. E. de Josselin de Jong: *Enige richtingen in de hedendaagse culturele anthropologie* (inaug. lecture 1957) p. 5 f.

tribal dichotomy serving as palpable exemplary model.¹⁸ One may venture to hold that in so far as human society is a product of mere nature, it participates with its symmetries and primal arithmetics, and Myth, being a people's pragmatic charter, has only the figuration reproduced.

Now, one may object with good reason, that talking about structural dualism in archaic society, we are actually abstracting cultural reality. We really are confronted with a great variety of concrete attitudes and often trivial activities as well, outside any cosmic dualism. So the British ethnologist R. W. Firth once observed that what we are wont to class with a collective noun as "custom", indeed comprises a number of different types of rule. "We can see in primitive societies, professor Firth argued, rules of the same order as those which we distinguish as manners, ethics, morals, law and religion, granted that our own distinctions are not always very consciously and clearly made".¹⁹ But, elaborating the argument of Murdock's about similarities of classifications, we find that with these peoples abstracts as ethics, religion (worship) and law do not, as for us, form categorical tenets, but three aspects of one given order.

The first of these aspects, ethics, we had best circumscribe as social conduct, controlled by myth or ancestral desire, which should be followed from generation to generation.

The second aspect, religion (worship), in this connotation signifies the caution in approaching supernatural power and, by it, the ritual representations of this original order.

The third aspect, law, is the implied suitable behaviour with its sanctions. Together these three aspects are called, in Indonesia, by the single term "adat".²⁰

The configuration of this implied duty (the adat) tends to express its vitality through periodical symbolical rituals under the leadership of special functionaries (priests or leaders) and the regularity obtains both in ceremonies of marriage (not infrequently between cross-cousins), in the unilateral intercourse of clans with mutual connubial relationships, and in the initiation-ceremonies through which a new generation becomes entitled to its recognized status in society; but also in birth and death with its cares, in the inauguration of a new settlement, in the

¹⁸ See F. A. E. van Wouden: *Sociale structuurtypen in de Grote Oost* (thesis 1935) p. 132.

¹⁹ R. W. Firth: *Human Types* (1950) p. 130.

²⁰ H. Schärer: *Die Gottesidee der Ngadju-Dajak in Süd-Borneo* (1946) p. 84, 110 ff.

observance of the required precautions during the critical stages of the agrarian cycle etc.

In all these cases the central idea of ritual must be conceived as a means of promoting social welfare in general and fertility in particular. It is first of all by ritual performances that trivial life is readily connected with the sacred or the magic, providing the community with the intrinsic virtues desired.²¹ Professor Mircea Eliade some years ago accentuated the universal validity of the implied cosmogonical idea of "la régénération du temps", observed in the ancient Babylonian New-Year festival (the *akitu*) as well as in contemporary rites, in his book "Le mythe de l'éternel retour".²² The author availed himself of the widely-scattered literature on this subject, and in a recent article he sets forth the practical application of cosmogonic myths in the "magical" healing-practices obtaining among primitive peoples.²³ An important item appearing from the text of these "curing songs" is, in the author's opinion, the invariable incorporation into the cosmogonical myth of the 'mythical account' of the origin of curative methods, creation being conceived as a victory in combat. In the Babylonian myth, creation is said to have been re-enacted in the dramatization of the original combat of Marduk and a monster. The ultimate victory of the God of Light over primeval chaos (symbolized in the monster) was visualized in a contest of two groups of performers, representing the categories of "good" and "evil".²⁴ These essentials, I dare say, lie on the threshold of Semitic and even Christian mystery as well, finally aiming at the terminal victory of the Soul, or the heavenly Powers. In the realm of the great arts, poetry and architecture too, we may observe a magical tendency, as the Dutch poet Jan Engelman once expressed it, of aiming at the high symbols, fostered by nature.²⁵

The urgency of a correct behaviour according to the desire of the ancestors (of the clans involved) culminates in jurisdiction. In this connection it might be of importance to refer to a lecture, held by professor Ter Haar in the German concentration-camp Buchenwald.²⁶

²¹ G. J. Held: *Magie, hekserij en toverij* (1950) p. 23.

²² Mircea Eliade: *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Archétypes et répétition, 3e ed. 1949).

²³ Mircea Eliade: *Kosmogonische Mythen und magische Heilungen* (Paideuma Vol. VI. 1956). See also C. Lévi Strauss: *L'efficacité symbolique* (Revue de l'histoire des religions. 68, 1949).

²⁴ E. Cassirer: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen II* (Das mythische Denken) (1925) p. 123.

²⁵ Jan Engelman: *Nawerking van Stefan George* („De Tijd", 4 Oct. 1952).

²⁶ B. Ter Haar: *Symbolisch wegen en de weegschaal als symbool* (Gedenkboek rechtsw. hoger onderwijs in Indonesië 1924-1949) p. 123 f.

This scholar was discussing there the symbolic meaning of scales, both with primitive peoples and with the Ancients. He arrived at the conclusion that for the groups concerned the scales must have been a workable medium in the manifestation and representation of the cosmic order, and, moreover, an instrument in the factual enforcement of harmony. Some years after, Gudmund Björk, with correct arguments, suggested the scales originally were an instrument for divining purposes.²⁷

It will be clear that within this category of thought, social order implies a conduct "kata kosmon". In these circumstances there is hardly room for an autonomous legal system based on the principles (conceived by Roman law) of reason and juridical accountability or responsibility. But in ancient Rome also the evolution of legal science and jurisdiction was initiated as a formal holy law by the priests, the "pontifices", who are described as the experts on and guardians (ut caveant!) of the sacral calendar. Only when during the last quarter-century before Christ a Plebeian (Tiberius Coruncanius) holds the high office of pontifex maximus, this sacral code is secularized by the admission of "responsa". The process of private litigation as an individualistic conflict of interests disengaging itself from the archaic cosmic conception of any deviation from the appropriate behaviour is only slow and never quite completed. It is the basic myth — and not explicit reason — which prescribes the correct behaviour of members of the group. "L'idée d'ordre n'est que le symbole des attentes", Marcel Mauss asserts²⁸, and, "l'ensemble des idées morales et juridiques correspond au système des attentes collectives".²⁹

So we are confronted with a mutual activity: myth is reflecting the system of original social order, whereas, on the other hand, as long as the myth of that particular community is still experienced, it inculcates the implied behaviour as a sacred duty: contents of belief! 'Tout y est voulu par le rythme cosmique, par le démiurge, par les constellations ou par la volonté de Dieu', Eliade remarked.³⁰

The emotional element in these archaic systems is furnished by the indeed tragical responses of the claims of deified ancestors; and first and foremost by the universal phenomenon of the holy sacrifice.

George Gusdorf, in a thesis submitted to the University of Paris,

²⁷ G. Björk: *Die Schicksalswaage* (Eranos, 1945 p. 58 f.).

²⁸ Marcel Mauss: *Sociologie et anthropologie* (1950) p. 307.

²⁹ Idem: *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1947) p. 111.

³⁰ Mircea Eliade: *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* p. 199.

has tried to penetrate into the psychological background of the „sacrifice”; he arrives at the conclusion that “le sacrifice tend à compenser une aberration ou bien il introduit volontairement un déséquilibre qui rend le sacrifiant créancier de l'ordre du monde”.³¹

Translated into anthropological terms: the sacrificer dares, by his very libations, to challenge fate; the adequate response will be the regeneration of the community which is duly represented by the priestly official.

By orthodox Brahmanic conceptions too ritual sacrifice is, before all things, regarded as a tremendous creative act. The French expert on Indian philosophy, Paul Masson-Oursel, summarised: “Le sacrifice comporte des actes symboliques ayant valeur de magie; la nature lui obéit parce que l'ordre des choses coïncide avec les lois strictes du rite”. “Aussi le monde est-il, à la lettre, un sacrifice; celui, par exemple, dont le géant cosmique, Puruṣa, est à la fois l'auteur et l'objet”.³²

It must be clear that the sacrifice in its most powerful form indeed is a symbolical response to imminent disaster, its intrinsic meaning being the creative and ever appealing drama of the soul. The great ceremonial caution exhibited during the course of this most sacred ritual has been fully explained by the French authors Hubert and Mauss in their eminent study of the subject. We are indeed confronted with a great battle of magic, and in this connection we might consider the great myth of ancient India, projecting the mighty buffalo as a demoniac exponent of the vital forces of the earth fighting against the heavenly powers of the lightning Ruler “Himalaya”.³³

We know the custom of buffalo-offerings when disaster has to be averted prevailing in ancient China down to the times of the Sung dynasty, whereas with the Tibeto-Burmese (and likewise in present-day Laos and other regions) this cult is still predominant.

Mrs. Inez de Beauclair of the Nanking (Taiwan) Institute of Ethnology, a leading authority on the subject, kindly brought to my notice that similar buffalo-offerings are still a prevalent practice with the Miao people, where the main purpose seems to be connected with ancestors worship (a cult which probably has developed from original fertility

³¹ George Gusdorf: *L'expérience humaine du sacrifice* (Paris, 1948) p. 265; see also Henri Brocher: *Le mythe du Héros et la mentalité primitive* (1932) Ch. VI: La substitution.

³² P. Masson-Oursel: *La philosophie en Orient* (1938) p. 84.

³³ Heinrich Zimmer: *Mythen und Symbole in Indischer Kunst und Kultur* (Zürich 1951) p. 213 ff.

rituals). Sometimes, she told me, spectacular processions and buffalo fights (which do not fail to suggest the duel of moieties) precede the slaying. Mrs. de Beauclair explicitly stated that ceremonies are organized overnight to invite the ancestors. On these occasions the long ceremonial drums are installed in the main room containing the fireplace. The beating of these drums is governed by a special rule (rhythms being a means of summoning the ancestors).

In Laos the facts have especially been studied by the Swedish ethnologist K. G. Izikowitz. With the Lamet tribes, who had his special attention in this region, ancestor-worship and fertility rituals are also intimately connected. The author explicitly states that the animal most often sacrificed to the ancestors (or house-spirits) is the buffalo.³⁴ The bronze drums are a characteristic of the Lamet culture too.

As for the Lawa and related tribes in the northern mountains of Thailand (Siam) we find analogous customs; the ceremonial drums too are in use with these people.³⁵

As for Burma, Lévi-Strauss mentions ("Structures élémentaires" p. 139) the custom prevailing with the Kachin.

Buffalo offering, and buffalo fights as well are not uncommon in Indonesia too! We meet the custom in Sumatra (Batak, Pasemah, Lampong, Abung), South Borneo (Ngadju-Dajak), Celebes (Toradja), Bali, Timor, Sumba, Central Flores (Ngada, Naga, Riung) etc.

As for the Toba-Batak group in Northern Sumatra, the particular method of slaughtering buffaloes, with the ceremonial beating of the drums that again goes with it, has been exhaustively described by V. E. Korn³⁶, who apparently was correctly informed about facts by native chiefs in the district. Structurally the rituals are closely related with the present clan-organization ("marga" and "bius") as the Dutch colonial administrator W. K. H. Ypes explained by a detailed study in 1932.³⁷

We cannot in this connection go into details, but we shall have to confine ourselves to remarking that this important sacrifice in some cases has the meaning of a rejuvenation festival. Through the intentional death of the powerful animal, cosmic order is to be renovated. The system followed in the apportioning of the meat from the sacrificial body seems to be connected with the number of the participating clans which together make up "the world of humans". In short, on the oc-

³⁴ K. G. Izikowitz: Lamet (Hill peasants in French Indochina) p. 326 sq.

³⁵ Alfr. Steinmann und Sanidh Rangsit: Denkmalen und Opferstätten der Lawa (Zeitschr. f. Ethnol., vol. 71 (1939) p. 163 ff.).

³⁶ V. E. Korn: Batakse offerande (Bijdr. T.V.L. 1953 pp. 32-51 and 97-127).

³⁷ W. K. H. Ypes: Bijdrage tot de kennis van stamverwantschap etc. (1932).

casion of these festivities the Batak story of creation is dramatized as a tribal myth; we are indeed confronted with the most striking drama.

No wonder the sacrificial pole also has its proper symbolic function in almost all cases of the sort, in linking up heaven and earth.³⁸

Indeed this pole is in some cases supposed to be the very dwelling room for the venerated ancestors³⁹ in the same way as the holy waringin (beringan)-tree and the central pillar (the "Lord"-pillar) of any sanctuary are.

The wellknown missionary A. C. Kruyt amply informed us about the great annual feasts of several Toradja tribes in Central Celebes, which in many cases had to be celebrated within the village temple (originally the community-house), where the bloody offering (the head of a prisoner or a buffalo-head) was placed.⁴⁰

But neighbouring Toradja tribes would construct an even more realistic configuration of the cosmic theatre, putting up a platform within the mighty waringin-tree; the participants gathered on this elevated floor, wearing yellow-coloured clothes (the symbol of the sun). Manifold symbols of plenty, such as crops and dishes with food had to be placed here and there in the roof of foliage. In the summit of the tree the image of the sun itself was shaped as a giant hoop, which at the critical moment had to be dropped to the foot of the tree where the buffaloes beneath were waiting to be sacrificed. Similar rituals are reported from the Riung tribes in Flores by P. P. Arndt.⁴¹

For the almost hysterical ritual performances in former times with the Ngadju-Dajak we only refer to the information given by H. Schärer.⁴²

In East Celebes we find analogous ideas with the Loinang-people and with the inhabitants of the Banggai-archipelago. As these tribes had no buffaloes, they used a pig as a victim to be offered to the dead ancestors (pilgot) who are supposed to dwell in the main pillar of the family-house.⁴³ It has been explicitly asserted that whenever a kinsman dies, his soul will join the dead in that same pillar. Together they will guard the ancestral "adat" not to be violated by the living.

³⁸ H. Bergema: *De boom des levens in schrift en historie* p. 539 ff.; H. Schärer l.c. passim.

³⁹ H. Bader: *Die Reifefeiern bei den Ngadu (Central Flores)* p. 114.

⁴⁰ A. C. Kruyt: *Het stamfeest op Midden-Celebes* (T.B.G. 1935 p. 559 ff.).

⁴¹ P. P. Arndt: *Aus der Mythologie und Religion der Riunger* (T.B.G. 1935 p. 389 j°. 393).

⁴² H. Schärer l.c. p. 154 ff.

⁴³ A. C. Kruyt: *De pilgot der Banggaiers en hun priesters* (Mensch en Maatschappij, VIII p. 118).

We already mentioned the importance of the symbolic function of the sacrificial pole in linking up heaven and earth.

Now, let us, for this purpose, turn to Central India, where the stupa, with its architectural details, has experienced the most remarkable evolutions which, far from being subject to formal decoration only, have their own determined symbolical or religious meaning. One may be in doubt, however, about the particular meaning of the ever-present mast, erected in the centre of the top of the building, and which seems already to be an essential part of the most primitive, undecorated little stupa's in Chittagong.⁴⁴

Scholars as Gisbert Combaz⁴⁵ and others are probably wrong in saying that this mast (the *yupa*) stand for the holy Bodhi-tree, at the foot of which Buddha got his final ethical inspiration.

The great religions of Asia (leaving out of account the doctrine of Confucius) have always been sustained by the central idea of a cosmic order, and for this reason we are inclined to agree with the remark of Paul Mus in his masterly detailed monography on the Barabudur: "comme l'autel védique, le stupa est une image architecturale du monde".⁴⁶ The author then neatly summarises his view by the formula: "autel = Purusa = stupa = Buddha". Finally his argument opposing Combaz runs that the *yupa* "n'est pas seulement une reminiscence de l'arbre cosmique, c'est le pilier séparant le ciel et la terre, c'est le géant, c'est le Mont, c'est la flèche ou la lance cosmique, en un mot, c'est l'axe du monde, architecturalement suggéré, au centre de la coupole"! ⁴⁷

The *yupa*, according to this suggestion, is the architectural expression of the idea of the vertical dichotomy "earth-heaven" in the same way as the Meru, the waringin-tree, the central pole of a holy building, the *kayon* of the Javanese wayang, the "anisan" (grave-post) of the Asahan people or the sapundu or hampatong of the South-Borneo Dayak and the "belawing" of the Kenja are, each in their own peculiar way. In fact Dr Mus suggests that the *yupa* is virtually the sacrificial pole of the ancient Brahmanic altar.⁴⁸

Now, etymologically the exact meaning of the Sanskrit word "*yupa*"

⁴⁴ C. Lévi Strauss: Le syncrétisme religieux d'un village du territoire de Chittagong (Revue de l'histoire des religions p. 215 f.).

⁴⁵ Gisbert Combaz: L'évolution des stupa en Asie (1933) p. 198 ff.

⁴⁶ Paul Mus: Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême Orient tome XXXIII (1933) p. 613.

⁴⁷ Mus p. 765; cf. also F. D. K. Bosch in Bijdr. T.L.V. 1954 p. 16.

⁴⁸ With choice archaeological arguments professor J. Gonda arrived at similar conclusions in his important study "Aspects of early Viṣṇuism" (1954), especially Ch. X: "The sacrificial post".

is indeed: sacrificial-pole⁴⁹ and extant inscriptions actually point out direct or indirect connection of ancient menhir's (e.g. in East Borneo) with certain Vedic texts regarding sacrificial rituals.⁵⁰

We are not going to enter into further details, but it may be of some interest for our subject proper to refer to the paper already mentioned by Hubert and Mauss, which points out that the original (underlying) Vedic hymn "exprime déjà des diverses fonctions du *yupa*, qui tue les démons, protège les hommes, symbolise la vie, porte l'offrande aux dieux, *était le ciel et la terre*."⁵¹ Principles of this sort, because of their sacred origin, are usually of long standing even with so called primitive populations.

As a conclusion of our contemplations we might state that myth, standing for law and tradition, avails itself of universal symbols, thus fostering that mystic feeling, which is the root of every belief. So the brief definition of de Josselin de Jong seems to suit best: myth is contents of belief.

C. Tj. BERTLING.

⁴⁹ F. D. K. Bosch: *De gouden kiem* (1948) p. 170.

⁵⁰ R. Heine Geldern: *Die Megalithen Südostasiens und ihre Bedeutung* (Anthropos 1928); H. Kern: *Over de Sanskrit-opschriften* ... (Verspr. Geschr. VII, p. 55 ff.); J. Kreemer: *De karbouw* (1956) p. 243; Jacoba Hooykaas (Bijdr. T.V.L. 1957 p. 335).

⁵¹ H. Hubert et M. Mauss: *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* („Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions", Paris 1929, p. 37). In this connection I should like to draw attention to the general remarks of a younger Dutch scholar on the character of symbols: „Le symbole, he says, est une donnée première qui ne se réalise pas par la synthèse, si ingénieuse qu'elle soit, d'une portion d'abstrait et d'une certaine quantité de concret. — Mais le symbole n'admet qu'un seul monde dans lequel tout est absorbé et qui unit tout à tout." — „C'est une mémoire *dramatique* qui dans le présent actualise le passé avec la force et l'évidence du présent." (S. Dresden: „L'artiste et l'absolu" (1941) p. 43, 115). As for the representative function of symbols see also the most instructive remarks of H. Kraemer, *Communicatie (een tijdvraag)* (1957) p. 86.