

THE WATERS AND WATER SYMBOLISM

60. WATER AND THE SEEDS OF THINGS

To state the case in brief, water symbolizes the whole of potentiality; it is *fons et origo*, the source of all possible existence. "Water, thou art the source of all things and of all existence!" says one Indian text,¹ summing up the long Vedic tradition. Waters are the foundations of the whole world;² they are the essence of plant life,³ the elixir of immortality⁴ like the *amṛta*;⁵ they ensure long life and creative energy, they are the principle of all healing, and so on.⁶ "May the waters bring us well-being!" the Vedic priest used to pray.⁷ "The waters are indeed healers; the waters drive away and cure all illnesses!"⁸

Principle of what is formless and potential, basis of every cosmic manifestation, container of all seeds, water symbolizes the primal substance from which all forms come and to which they will return either by their own regression or in a cataclysm. It existed at the beginning and returns at the end of every cosmic or historic cycle; it will always exist, though never alone, for water is always germinative, containing the potentiality of all forms in their unbroken unity. In cosmogony, in myth, ritual and iconography, water fills the same function in whatever type of cultural pattern we find it; it *precedes* all forms and *upholds* all creation. Immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed. Every contact with water

¹ *Bhaviṣyottara-purāna*, 31, 14.

² *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, vi, 8, 2, 2; xii, 5, 2, 14.

³ *Śat.-Br.*, iii, 6, 1, 7.

⁴ *Śat.-Br.*, iv, 4, 3, 15, etc.


⁵ *Śat.-Br.*, i, 9, 3, 7; xi, 5, 4, 5.

⁶ *RV*, i, 23, 19 ff.; x, 19, 1 ff.; etc.

⁷ *AV*, ii, 3, 6.

⁸ *AV*, vi, 91, 3.

implies regeneration: first, because dissolution is succeeded by a "new birth", and then because immersion fertilizes, increases the potential of life and of creation. In initiation rituals, water confers a "new birth", in magic rituals it heals, and in funeral rites it assures rebirth after death. Because it incorporates in itself all potentiality, water becomes a symbol of life ("living water"). Rich in seeds, it fertilizes earth, animals and women. It contains in itself all possibilities, it is supremely fluid, it sustains the development of all things, and is therefore either compared or even directly assimilated with the moon. Its rhythms are fitted to the same pattern as the moon's; they govern the periodic appearance and disappearance of all forms, they give a cyclic form to the development of things everywhere.

Then, too, since prehistoric times, water, moon and woman were seen as forming the orbit of fertility both for man and for the universe. Water used to be represented, on Neolithic vases (of what is called the Walterniemburg-Bernburg civilization) by the sign  which is also the oldest Egyptian hieroglyph for flowing water.¹ Even in Paleolithic times, the spiral was a symbol of water and lunar fertility; when inscribed on a feminine idol, it united all these centres of life and fertility.² In the mythology of the American Indians, the hieroglyphic for water—a vase full of water into which a drop from a cloud is falling—is always associated with moon images.³ The spiral, the snail (a lunar emblem), woman, water, fish, all belong essentially to the same symbolism of fertility, which applies to every level of nature.

In any analysis, there is always a danger of breaking apart or reducing to separate elements what was a single unity, a cosmos, in the minds that produced it. The same symbol may indicate or evoke a whole series of realities, which only profane experience would see as separate and autonomous. The many different symbolic values given to a single emblem or word in primitive languages continually show us that, to the mind that conceived it, the world appeared as an organic

¹ Kuhn, Epilogue to Hentze, *Mythes et symboles lunaires*, p. 244.

² Kuhn, p. 248.

³ Cf. the reproductions of Sahagun, Codex Nuttal, etc., in Leo Wiener's volume, *Mayan and Mexican Origins*, Cambridge, 1926, pp. 49 ff., 84 ff.

whole. In Sumerian, *a* means "water", but also "sperm, conception, generation". In Mesopotamian carvings, for instance, the symbolic fish and water are emblems of fertility. Even to-day, among primitive peoples—not always in ordinary experience, but regularly in mythology—water is identified with semen. On Wakuta Island, there is a myth which describes a girl losing her virginity because she allowed rain to touch her body; and the most important myth on the Trobriand Islands tells how Bolutukwa, the mother of the hero Tudava, lost her virginity when a few drops of water fell from a stalactite.¹ The Pima Indians of New Mexico have a similar myth; a very beautiful woman (Mother Earth) was made pregnant by a drop of water that fell from a cloud.²

61. WATER COSMOGONIES

Though separate in time and space, these things none the less make up a cosmological whole. At every level of existence, water is a source of life and growth. Indian mythology has a great many variations of the theme of the primeval waters on which Nārāyaṇa floated, with the cosmic tree rising from his navel. In Puranic tradition, the tree is replaced by the lotus from whose centre Brahma (*abjaja*, "born of the lotus") was born.³ One by one other gods appear—Varuṇa, Prajāpati, Puruṣa or Brahman (Svayambhū), Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu; they represent the different variants of the same cosmogonic myth—but the waters remain in them all. Later on, aquatic cosmogony became a common motif in iconography and the decorative arts: the plant or the tree rising from the mouth or the navel of a Yakṣa (a personification of fecund life), from the throat of a sea monster (*makara*), of a snail or of a "flowing vase"—but never directly from any symbol representing the earth.⁴ For, as we have seen, water precedes and upholds all creation, all that is firmly established, every cosmic manifestation.

The waters on which Nārāyaṇa floated, carefree and happy, symbolize the state of rest and formlessness, the cosmic night.

¹ B. Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, London, 1935, p. 155.

² Russell, "The Pima Indians", *Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, xxvi, 1903-4 (Washington, 1908), p. 239.

³ Cf. references in Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Washington, 1928, vol. ii, p. 24.

⁴ Coomaraswamy, p. 13.

Even Nārāyaṇa is asleep. And from his navel, that is, from a "centre" (cf. § 145), the first cosmic form comes to life: the lotus, the tree, a symbol of the life-giving but unawakened sap, of life which has not yet attained consciousness. All creation is born of a single source and is supported by it. In other versions, Viṣṇu, in his third reincarnation (as a giant boar), goes down to the depths of the primeval waters, and draws the earth up from the abyss.¹ This myth, Oceanian in structure and form, is also preserved in European folklore (cf. the Bibliography).

The Babylonian creation story also tells of a watery chaos, a primordial ocean, *apsu* and *tiamat*; the first personified the ocean of fresh water on which the earth was later to float, and *tiamat* was the salty and bitter sea inhabited by monsters. *Enuma Elish*, the creation poem, begins thus:

When the heavens on high were not yet named,
And the earth beneath was not yet called a name,
And the primordial Apsu, who gave them birth
And Mummu, and Tiamat, the mother of them all,
Mingled all their waters into one . . .²

The tradition of the primeval waters, whence all the worlds were born, can be found in a great many different versions in ancient and "primitive" creation beliefs. I refer my readers to the *Natursagen* of Dähnhardt,³ and, for further bibliographical suggestions, to the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* by Stith Thompson.⁴

62. WATER AS UNIVERSAL MOTHER

Since water is the source of all things, in which all potentialities are contained, and in which all seeds thrive, it is easy to see why there are myths and legends which make it the origin of the human race, or of some section of it. On the south coast of Java there is a *segara anakkan*, a "children's sea". The Karaja Indians in Brazil recall a mythological time when "they still lived in the water". Juan de Torquemada, describ-

¹ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, i, 1, 3, 5; *Satapatha-Br.*, xiv, i, 2, 11; cf. *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ayodhya-Khaṇḍa, CX, 4; *Mahābhārata*, Vana-Prāṇa, cxlii, 28-62, cclxxii, 49-55; *Bhagavata Purāna*, iii, 13; etc.

² i, 1-5.

³ i, 1-89.

⁴ Vol. i, pp. 121 ff.

ing the baptismal washing of newborn babies in Mexico, recorded some of the formulæ in which children were consecrated to the goddess Chalchihuitlycue Chalchiuhtlatonac, who was looked on as their real mother.

Before immersing a child in the water, they said: "Take this water, for the goddess [of the waters] Chalchihuitlycue Chalchiuhtlatonac is thy mother. May this bath cleanse thee of the sins and blemishes thou hast from thy parents. . . ." Then, touching the mouth, breast and head of the child with water, they added: "Receive, child, thy mother, Chalchihuitlycue, the goddess of the waters."¹ The ancient Karelians, the Mordvinians, the Estonians, the Cheremisses and other Finno-Ugrian peoples believed in a Water-Mother to whom women prayed for children.² Sterile Tatar women used to kneel and pray by a pool.³ The creative forces of water are at their height in mud, *limus*. Illegitimate children were likened to the plants that grew in pools, and were pushed down into the mud at the edge of the pool, that inexhaustible source of life; they were thus ritually reintegrated into the impure life whence they came, like the coarse grass and the rushes that grow in swamps. Tacitus said of the Germans: "Ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude, iniecta insuper crate mergunt."⁴ Water nourishes life, rain fertilizes as does the *semen virile*. In the erotic symbolism of the creation, the sky embraces and fertilizes the earth with rain. The same symbolism is found universally. Germany is full of *Kinderbrunnen*, *Kinderteichen*, *Bubenquellen*.⁵ In Oxfordshire, Child's Well is a fountain thought to make sterile women fertile.⁶ Many beliefs of this sort have become entangled with the notion of "Mother Earth" and with the erotic symbolism of fountains. But, underlying these beliefs, and indeed all myths about human descent from the earth, vegetation, and stones, we find the same fundamental idea: Life, that is, *reality*, is somewhere concentrated in one cosmic substance

¹ Nyberg, *Kind und Erde*, Helsinki, 1931, pp. 113 ff.

² Holmberg-Harva, *Die Wassergottheiten der finnisch-ugrischen Völker*. Helsinki, 1913, pp. 120, 126, 138, etc.

³ Nyberg, p. 59.

⁴ *Germania*, 12.

⁵ Dieterich, *Mutter Erde*, 3rd ed., Berlin, 1925, pp. 19, 126.

⁶ McKenzie, *Infancy of Medicine*, London, 1927, p. 240.

from which all living forms proceed, either by direct descent or by symbolic participation. Water animals, particularly fish (which also serve as erotic symbols) and sea monsters, become emblems of the sacred because they stand for *absolute reality*, concentrated in water.

63. THE "WATER OF LIFE"

Symbol of creation, harbour of all seeds, water becomes the supreme magic and medicinal substance; it heals, it restores youth, it ensures eternal life. The prototype of all water is the "living water" which came to be seen as existing somewhere in the sky—just as there is a heavenly *soma*, a white *haoma* in the heavens, and so on. Living water, the fountains of youth, the Water of Life, and the rest, are all mythological formulæ for the same metaphysical and religious reality: life, strength and eternity are contained in water. This water is not, of course, accessible to everybody in every way. It is guarded by monsters. It is to be found in places which are hard to get to, and belongs to some sort of demons or divinities. To reach the source of "living water" and get possession of it involves a series of consecrations and "testings", just as does the search for the "Tree of Life" (§ 108, 145). The "ageless river" (*vijara-nadi*) runs beside the miraculous tree spoken of in the *Kausitaki Upaniṣad*.¹ And, in the Apocalypse,² the two symbols are also side by side: "And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life."³

"Living Water" restores youth and bestows eternal life; and, by a gradual process which will become clearer in the course of this book, *all* water comes to be considered powerful for fertility or healing. Even in modern times, sick children have been dipped three times in the well of Saint Mandron, in Cornwall.⁴ In France there are a considerable number of healing rivers⁵ and fountains.⁶ There are also certain rivers

¹ 1, 3.

² xxii, 1-2.

³ Cf. Ezech. xlvii.

⁴ McKenzie, pp. 238 ff.

⁵ Sébillot, *Le Folklore de France*, Paris, 1905, vol. ii, pp. 327-87.

⁶ Sébillot, pp. 256-91.

with a beneficent influence on love.¹ And yet other waters are esteemed in popular medicine.² In India illnesses are cast into the water.³ The Finno-Ugrians think that some illnesses are the result of profaning or polluting flowing water.⁴ And to conclude this brief glance at the wonderful powers of water, I would remind you of the "new water" used in most spells and popular medicaments. "New water", that is, the water in a new vase, not profaned by everyday use, contains all the values for creating and fostering life of the primeval Water. It heals, because in a sense it remakes creation. We shall be seeing later how magic acts are a repetition of the creation of the world, for they are projected into the mythological time when the worlds were made, and they merely repeat the things that were done then, *ab origine*. With the use of "new" water in popular medicine, what is being sought is the magic regeneration of the patient by contact with primordial substance; the water absorbs his disease because of its power of taking to itself and dissolving all forms.

64. THE SYMBOLISM OF IMMERSION

Purification by water has the same effects: in water everything is "dissolved", every "form" is broken up, everything that has happened ceases to exist; nothing that was before remains after immersion in water, not an outline, not a "sign", not an "event". Immersion is the equivalent, at the human level, of death, and at the cosmic level, of the cataclysm (the Flood) which periodically dissolves the world into the primeval ocean. Breaking up all forms, doing away with all the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth; for what is immersed in it "dies", and, rising again from the water, is like a child without any sin or any past, able to receive a new revelation and begin a new and *real* life. As Ezechiel wrote:⁵ "I will pour upon you clean water and you shall be cleansed." And the prophet Zacharias⁶

¹ Sébillot, pp. 230 ff.

² Sébillot, pp. 460-6.

³ Rönnow, *Trita Aptya, eine vedische Gottheit*, Uppsala, 1927, pp. 36-7.

⁴ Manninen, *Die dämonistischen Krankheiten in finnischen Volksaberglauben*, Helsinki, 1922, pp. 81 ff.

⁵ xxxvi. 25.

⁶ xiii. 1.

saw in spirit how "in that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman".

Water purifies and regenerates because it nullifies the past, and restores—even if only for a moment—the integrity of the dawn of things. The Iranian water divinity, Ardivisura Anahita, is called "the holy one who multiplies flocks . . . goods . . . riches . . . land . . . who purifies the seed of all men . . . the womb of all women . . . who gives them milk when they need it . . .", etc.¹ Ablution purifies man from crime,² from the unlucky presence of the dead,³ from madness (the fountain of Clitor, of Arcadia),⁴ destroying sins as well as stopping the process of mental or physical decay. It was done before all the major religious acts, to prepare man for his entry into the economy of the sacred. There were ablutions before going into temples⁵ and before sacrifices.⁶

The same ritual of regeneration by water explains why in antiquity statues of divinities were immersed. The ceremony of the sacred bath was generally performed in the cult of the Great Goddesses of fertility and agriculture. The goddess's flagging powers were thus strengthened, ensuring a good harvest (immersion as a magic rite was supposed to produce rain) and a rich increase in goods. The "bath" of the Phrygian mother, Cybele, took place on the 27th of March (*Hilaria*). The statue was immersed either in a river (at Pessinus, Cybele was bathed in the Gallos), or a pool (as at Ancyra, Magnesia and elsewhere).⁷ Aphrodite was bathed at Paphos⁸ and Pausanias describes the *loutrophoroi* of the goddess at Sicyon.⁹ In the third century A.D., Callimachus¹⁰ extols the bath of the goddess Athene. This ritual is very common in the cults of Cretan and

¹ *Yasna*, 65.

² *Aeneid*, ii, 717-20.

³ Euripides, *Alcestis*, 96-104.

⁴ Vitruvius, *De Architect.*, 8; Saintyves, *Corpus du folklore des eaux en France et dans les colonies françaises*, Paris, 1934, p. 115.

⁵ Justin, *Apolog.* I, 57, 1.

⁶ *Aeneid*, iv, 634-40; Macrobius, *Sat.*, iii, 1, etc.

⁷ Cf. Graillot, *Le Culte de Cybèle*, Athens, 1912, pp. 288, 251, n.4, etc.

⁸ *Odyssey*, viii, 363-6.

⁹ ii, 10, 4.

¹⁰ *Hymn.*, v, 1-17, 43-54.

Phoenician goddesses,¹ and among certain Germanic tribes.² Dipping a crucifix or a statue of Our Lady in water to end a drought and produce rain was a thing done by Catholics from the thirteenth century onwards, and went on, despite ecclesiastical opposition, into the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries.³

65. BAPTISM

This immemorial and ecumenical symbolism of immersion in water as an instrument of purification and regeneration was adopted by Christianity and given still richer religious meaning. St. John's baptism was directed not to healing the infirmities of the flesh, but the redemption of the soul, the forgiveness of sin. John the Baptist preached "the baptism of penance for the remission of sins",⁴ but he added: "I indeed baptize you with water; but there shall come one mightier than I . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."⁵ In Christianity, Baptism becomes the chief instrument of spiritual regeneration, for immersion in the water of Baptism is equivalent to being buried with Christ. "Know you not," wrote St. Paul,⁶ "that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized in his death?" Man dies symbolically with immersion, and is reborn, purified, renewed; just as Christ rose from the tomb. "For we are buried together with him by baptism into death; that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."⁷

Of the tremendous number of patristic texts interpreting the symbolism of Baptism, I shall record only two here: the first is concerned with the redemptive significance of the water, the second with the baptismal symbolism of death and rebirth. Tertullian⁸ gives a long dissertation on the extraordinary

¹ Picard, *Ephèse et César*, Paris, 1922, p. 318.

² Hertha; cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, 40.

³ Cf. Saintyves, pp. 212 ff., 215 ff.

⁴ Luke iii. 3.

⁵ Luke iii. 16.

⁶ Rom. vi. 3.

⁷ Rom. vi. 4 ff.

⁸ *De Bapt.*, iii-v.

powers of water, an element in the creation of the world which was sanctified from the first by God's presence. For water was the first "seat of the divine Spirit, who gave it preference over all the other elements. . . . The water was the first to be commanded to bring forth living creatures. . . . Water was the first to produce what has life, so as to prevent our being astonished when one day it came to give birth to life in baptism. In forming man himself, God used water to complete his work. It is true that the earth gave the substance, but earth would have been of no use for this work had it not been moist and sodden. . . . Why should not that which produces life from the earth also give the life of heaven? . . . Therefore all natural water, because of the ancient privilege with which it was honoured from the first, gains the power of sanctifying in the sacrament, as long as God is invoked to that effect. As soon as the words are said the Holy Ghost, coming down from heaven, rests upon the waters which he sanctifies with his fruitfulness; the waters thus sanctified are in turn filled with the power of sanctifying. . . . What used of old to heal the body now heals the soul; what gave health in time gains salvation in eternity. . . ."

The Old Man dies by being immersed in water, and gives birth to a new, regenerate being. This symbolism is perfectly expressed by John Chrysostom¹ who, speaking of the many different meanings symbolized in Baptism, writes: "It represents death and burial, life and resurrection. . . . When we plunge our head into water as into a tomb, the old man is immersed, wholly buried; when we come out of the water, the new man appears at that moment." All that one may call the "prehistory" of Baptism sought the same object—death and resurrection, though at different religious levels from that of Christianity. There can be no question here of "influences" or of "horrowings", for such symbols are archetypal and universal; they show man's position in the universe, while at the same time evaluating his position in regard to his god (to absolute *reality*), and to history. The symbolism of water is the product of an intuition of the cosmos as a unity, and of man as a specific mode of being in the cosmos.

¹ *Homil. in Joh.*, xxv, 2; Saintryves, p. 149.

66. THE THIRST OF THE DEAD

The funereal use of water is explained by the same elements that give it its function in the creation of the universe, in magic and in medicine; water "appeases the thirst of the dead man", it dissolves him, it links him together with the seeds of things; water "kills the dead", finally destroying their human status¹ that hell may reduce them to a sort of larval state, thus leaving their capacity for suffering unimpaired. In none of the various conceptions of death, do the dead die completely: they are given an elementary form of existence; it is a regression, rather than a total extinction. While waiting to return into the cosmic round (transmigration), or to be finally delivered, the souls of the dead *suffer* and that suffering is generally expressed as a *thirst*.

Dives, in the fires of hell, asks Abraham: "Have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame."² An inscription found on an Orphic tablet (at Eleutherne) reads: "I burn, and am consumed with thirst . . ." During the ceremony of the Hydrophoria, water was poured into crevasses (*chasmata*) for the dead, and at the time of the Anthe-steria, just before the spring rains, the Greeks believed that the dead were thirsty.³ The thought that the souls of the dead suffered from thirst was particularly frightening to those peoples to whom heat and drought were a constant menace (in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt), and it was chiefly among them that libations were made for the dead, and the happiness of the after-life was represented as a cool

¹ This notion was also held in philosophical speculation. "For souls, death is to become water," said Heraclitus (fr. 68). That is why "the dry soul is the wisest and the best" (fr. 74). The fear that moisture would "dissolve" the souls separated from their bodies, make them grow again and send them out once again into the round of the lower forms of life, was common in Greek soteriology. One Orphic fragment (Clement, *Strom.*, vi, 2, 17, 1; Kern, p. 226) says that "for the soul, water is death", and Porphyry (*De Antro Nympharum*, 10-11) explains the leaning of the souls of the dead towards moisture by their desire for reincarnation. Later on the germinative function of water was depreciated, because the happiest lot after death came to be considered to be not reintegration into the cosmic round, but escaping from the world of organic forms into the empyrean, into the heavens. That is why such importance came to be given to the solar path of "dryness".

² Luke xvi. 24.

³ See references in Gernet, *Génie grec*, Paris, 1932, p. 262; Schuhl, *La formation de la pensée grecque*, Paris, 1934, pp. 119, n. 2, 210, n. 2.

place.¹ The sufferings of the after-life were expressed in terms as concrete as those describing every other human experience and primitive theory; the "thirst of the dead", and the "flames" of the Asian hells were replaced in the Nordic mind by terms expressing a cooler temperature (cold, frost, frozen swamps, etc.).²

But thirst and cold both express suffering, drama, agitation. The dead cannot always remain in the same state, a state that is merely a tragic defacement of their human one. Libations are intended to "satisfy" them, that is, to abolish their sufferings, and regenerate them by total "dissolution" in water. In Egypt, the dead are sometimes identified with Osiris, and thus may hope for an "agricultural destiny", their bodies germinating like seeds. On a burial stele now in the British Museum, the dead man addresses a prayer to Ra "that his body may grow as a seed".³ But libations are not always to be taken in an "agricultural" sense; their object is not always "the germination of the dead man", his transformation into a "seed" and a *neophytos* (neophyte="new plant") but, primarily, his "appeasement", that is, the extinction of what remains of his human condition, his complete immersion in the "waters", so that he may achieve a new birth. The "agricultural destiny" that funeral libations sometimes include, is only one consequence of that final abolition of the human condition; it is a new mode of manifestation, rendered possible by the power water has not only to dissolve but also to germinate life.

67. MIRACULOUS AND ORACULAR SPRINGS

There are a great number of cults and rites connected with various springs, streams and rivers throughout history to correspond to these many different values given to water. All these cults are primarily based on the sacredness of water as such, as an element in the creation of the universe, but also on the local epiphany, on the manifestation of a sacred presence in some particular watercourse or spring. Such local epiphanies are independent of the religious structure superimposed

¹ Cf. Parrot, *Le "Refrigerium" dans l'au-delà*, Paris, 1937, *passim*; Eliade, *CZ*, 1938, i, pp. 203ff.

² Cf. Eliade, *Insula lui Euthanasius*, p. 95; *CZ*, i, p. 205.

³ Parrot, p. 103, n. 3; *CZ*, i, p. 206, with further references.

on them. Water flows, it is "living", it moves: it inspires, it heals, it prophesies. By their very nature, spring and river display power, life, perpetual renewal; they *are* and they are *alive*. Thus they have a certain autonomy, and their worship persists in spite of other epiphanies and other religious revolutions. Each continues always to reveal the sacred force that is peculiarly its own, and at the same time shares in the prerogatives of water as such.

The cult of water—and particularly of springs held to be curative, hot springs, salt springs and so on—displays a striking continuity. No religious revolution has ever put a stop to it; fed by popular devotion, the cult of water came to be tolerated even by Christianity, after the fruitless persecuting of it in the Middle Ages. (The reaction began in the fourth century with St. Cyril of Jerusalem.¹ Ecclesiastical prohibitions were made over and over again from the Second Council of Arles—443 or 452—until the Council of Trèves in 1227. In addition, a considerable number of polemics, pastoral letters and other documents mark out for us the struggle made by the Church against the cult of water.²) In some cases the cult seems to have lasted from the Neolithic age until the present day. In the hot spring of Grisy (in the commune of Saint-Symphorien-de-Marmagne) for instance, Neolithic and Roman "ex-votos" can be found.³ Similar traces of Neolithic worship (silexes broken to show they were ex-votos) were found in the spring now called Saint-Sauveur (Compiègne Forest)⁴. Rooted in prehistory, the cult was passed down to the Gauls, and later the Roman Gauls, whence it was taken up and assimilated by Christianity. At Saint Moritz, until quite lately, there still stood ancient remains dating from the worship of the Bronze Age.⁵ In the commune of Bertinoro (Province of Forli) religious remains from the Bronze Age are to be found near a modern well of chloro-saline water.⁶ In England springs near some of the prehistoric barrows and megalithic monu-

¹ *Catech.*, xix, 8.

² Cf. Saintyves, *Corpus*, pp. 163 ff.

³ Vaillat, *Le Culte des sources dans la Gaule antique*, pp. 97-8.

⁴ Vaillat, p. 99.

⁵ Pettazzoni, *La religione primitiva in Sardegna*, Piacenza, 1912, p. 102.

⁶ Pettazzoni, pp. 102-3.

ments are held by the local inhabitants to be miraculous or beneficent.¹ And finally I think I should recall the ritual that took place at the lake of Saint Andéol (in the Aubrac Mountains) described by Saint Gregory of Tours (A.D. 544-95). The men came in their carts and feasted for three days by the lakeside, bringing as offerings linen, fragments of clothing, woollen thread, cheese, cakes and so on. On the fourth day there was a ritual storm with rain (clearly it was a primitive rite to induce rain). A priest, Parthenius, having in vain tried to convince the peasants to give up this pagan ceremonial, built a church to which the men eventually brought the offerings intended for the lake. However, the custom of throwing cakes and worn-out things into the lake remained alive till the nineteenth century; pilgrims continued to throw shirts and trousers into the lake, though they did not really know what their object was in doing so.²

We find an excellent example of continuity, in spite of the many changes in the religious framework surrounding the cult of water, in Pettazzoni's monograph on primitive religion in Sardinia. The early Sardinians worshipped springs, offering sacrifice to them and building sanctuaries beside them dedicated to Sarder Pater.³ Beside the temples and the water, there took place ordeals, a religious phenomenon characteristic of the whole Atlanto-Mediterranean area.⁴ Traces of these ordeals by water can still be seen in Sardinian beliefs and folklore. We also find the cult of water in Sicilian prehistory.⁵ At Lilybaeum (Marsala) the Greek Sybil was superimposed on a primitive local cult centring around a cave flooded with water; the early Sicilians went there for ordeals or for prophetic retreats; during the time of the Greek colonization the Sybil held sway and prophesied, and in Christian times it became the scene of a devotion to Saint John the Baptist, to whom, in the sixteenth century, a church was built in the old cave

¹ Pettazzoni.

² Cf. Saintyves, pp. 189-95.

³ Pettazzoni, pp. 29 ff., 58.

⁴ In Lusitania, they still adored a local god, Tongoenabiagus, in Roman times; he seems to have been the god "of the water course by which one swears oaths" (Vasconcellos, *Religiões de Lusitania*, Lisbon, 1905, vol. ii, pp. 239 ff.).

⁵ Pettazzoni, pp. 101 ff.

which is even to-day the object of pilgrimage for its miraculous waters.¹

Oracles were often situated near water. Near the temple of Amphirais, at Oropos, those who were cured by the oracle threw a coin into the water.² The *pythia* prepared by drinking water from the Kassotis fountain. At Colophon, the prophet drank the water from a sacred spring which was in the grotto.³ At Claros, the priest went down into the cave, drank some water from a mysterious fountain (*hausta fontis arcani aqua*) and replied in verse to any question he was asked (*super rebus quas quis mente concepit*).⁴ That prophetic power emanates from water is a primitive intuition which we find in a great part of the world. The ocean, for instance, was called by the Babylonians "the home of wisdom". Oannes, the mythical Babylonian character half man, half fish, rose from the Persian Gulf and revealed to man culture, writing and astrology.⁵

68. WATER EIPHANIES AND DIVINITIES

The cult of water—rivers, springs and lakes—existed in Greece before the Indo-European invasions. Traces of this primitive cult were preserved up till the decline of Hellenism. Pausanias⁶ could still examine and describe the ceremony that took place at the Hagno spring, on the side of Mount Lykaïos, in Arcadia; the priest of the god Lykaïos came there when there was a severe drought; he sacrificed a branch of oak and let it drop into the spring. The rite was an ancient one and part of the whole pattern of "rain magic". Indeed, declares Pausanias, after the ceremony, a light breath like a cloud rose from the water, and it soon began to rain. We find there no religious personification; the power is in the spring itself, and that power, set in motion by the proper rite, governs the rain.

Homer speaks of the cult of rivers. The Trojans offered sacrifices of animals to the Scamander and threw living horses

¹ Pettazzoni, p. 101.

² Pausanias, i, 34, 4.

³ Iamblichus, *De Myst.*, iii, 11.

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, ii, 54; on the subject of the Oracle of Claros, cf. Picard, *Ephèse et Claros*, pp. 112 ff.

⁵ Texts quoted in Jeremias, *Handbuch der altorientalischen Geisteskultur*, Berlin, 1929, pp. 39-40.

⁶ viii, 38, 3-4.

into its waters; Peleus sacrificed fifty sheep into the springs of Spercheios. The Scamander had its priests; an enclosure and an altar were consecrated at Spercheios. Horses and oxen were sacrificed to Poseidon and the divinities of the sea.¹ Other Indo-European peoples also offered sacrifice to rivers; for instance the Cimbri (who sacrificed to the Rhône), the Franks, Germans, Slavs and others.² Hesiod³ mentions the sacrifices celebrated when crossing a river. (This rite has numerous parallels in ethnology; the Masai, in West Africa, throw in a handful of grass whenever they cross a river; the Baganda, of central Africa, bring some coffee beans as an offering when they cross water, and so on.)⁴ The Hellenic river gods were sometimes in the likeness of men; for instance, the Scamander fought against Achilles.⁵ But for the most part they were represented as bulls.⁶ The most famous river god of all was the Achelous. Homer even held him to be a great god, the divinity of all rivers, seas and springs. We have read of Achelous' struggles with Heracles; his cult was carried on in Athens, Oropos, Megara, and a great many other cities. Various interpretations have been given of its name, but it seems likely that the etymology is simply "water".⁷

It would not assist our purpose to quote all the water mythology of the Greeks. It is vast and not at all clearly defined. Innumerable mythological figures appear in endless succession, all with the same theme—that water divinities are born of water. Some of those figures attained importance in myth or legend, as for instance Thetis, the sea nymph, or Proteus, Glaucos, Nereus, Triton—all Neptunian divinities still displaying in their appearance their connection with water, having the bodies of sea monsters, or the tails of fishes, or something of the sort. They live and govern in the depths of the sea. Like the element from which they are only imperfectly and never finally detached, these divinities are odd and

¹ Cf. references and bibliography in Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, Munich, 1941, vol. i, p. 220, n. 3.

² Cf. Saintyves, p. 160.

³ *Works and Days*, 737 ff.

⁴ Cf. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament*, vol. ii, pp. 417 ff.

⁵ *Iliad*, xxi, 124 ff.

⁶ References in Nilsson, p. 221, n. 10.

⁷ Nilsson, vol. i, p. 222.

capricious; they do good and evil with equal carelessness, and, like the sea, they generally do evil. More than any other gods they live outside time and history. Closely bound up with the origin of the world, they only participate occasionally in what passes there. Their life is perhaps less divine than that of the other gods, but it is more regular and more closely connected with the element they represent.

69. NYMPHS

What Greek could boast that he knew the names of *all* the nymphs? They were the divinities of all flowing waters, of all springs and of all fountains. They needed hardly to be created by the Hellenic imagination; rather they were there, in the water, from the beginning of the world; all the Greeks had to give them was their human form and their name. They were created by the living, flowing water, by its magic, by the power emanating from it, by its babbling. The Greeks detached them as far as possible from the element to which they belonged. Once detached, personified, and invested with all the powers of water, they became subjects of legend, they were brought into epics, were petitioned to work wonders. They were usually the mothers of the local heroes.¹ As minor divinities of certain places, they were well known to men and they were the object of worship and received sacrifices. The most famous are the sisters of Thetis, the Nereids, or, as Hesiod still called them,² the Oceanides, the perfect Neptunian nymphs. Most of the others are divinities of springs. But they also dwell in caves where there is water. The "nymphs' cave" became a commonplace in Hellenist literature, and the most "literary", that is profane, formula, the furthest from the primitive religious sense, from the pattern of water-cosmic-cave-happiness-Fertility-Wisdom. The nymphs, once personified, entered into men's lives. They were divinities of birth (water=fertility) and *kourotrophoi*; they brought children up, and taught them to become heroes.³ Nearly all the Greek heroes were brought up either by nymphs or by centaurs—that is, by superhuman beings who shared in nature's powers and could direct them.

¹ Nilsson, vol. i, pp. 227 ff.

² *Theog.*, 364.

³ Cf. for instance, Euripides, *Helen.*, 624 ff.

Heroic initiations were never a thing of the family; nor were they generally "civic", for they took place not in the city but in the forests, and woodlands.

That is why we find, alongside the veneration for nymphs (as for other spirits of nature), a fear of them. Nymphs often stole children; or, on other occasions, they would kill them out of jealousy. We find written on the tomb of one five-year-old girl: "I was lovable because I was good, and it was not death that bore me off but the Naiads."¹ Nymphs were also dangerous in another way; anyone who saw them in the heat of midday became mentally deranged. The middle of the day was the moment when the nymphs manifested themselves. Whoever saw them became seized with a nympholeptic mania; like Tiresias, who saw Pallas and Chariclo, or Actaeon, who came upon Artemis with her nymphs. That is why it was advisable, at midday, not to go near fountains or springs, or the shadow of certain trees. Later superstition had it that a prophetic madness would seize anyone who saw a form emerging from the water: *speciem quamdam e fonte, id est effigiem Nymphæ* (Festus). The prophetic quality of water remains in all these beliefs, though with inevitable adulterations and mythological embroideries. What persists above all is the ambivalent feeling of fear and attraction to water which at once destroys (for the "fascination" of the nymphs brings madness, the destruction of the personality) and germinates, which at once kills and assists birth.

70 POSEIDON, ÆGIR, ETC.

But above Achelous, Thetis and all the other minor water divinities is Poseidon. The sea, when it is angry, loses its feminine qualities of undulating seductiveness and lazy pleasure—and its mythological personification acquires a markedly masculine outline. When the universe was divided among the sons of Kronos, Poseidon was given power over the ocean. Homer knew him as the god of the seas; his palace was at the bottom of the Ocean, and his symbol was the trident (originally the teeth of the sea monsters). If Persson is right in reading the Mycenaean inscription of Asima as *Poseidafonos*, then the god's name can be traced right back to the Mycenaean

¹ *CIG*, 6291.

period.¹ Poseidon was also the god of earthquakes, which the Greeks held to be due to erosion by water. The furious waves breaking wildly on the shore were reminiscent of seismic tremors. Like the ocean itself, Poseidon was untamed, unhappy, faithless. The picture of him in myth has no moral qualities; he was too near the Neptunian origin to know any law apart from his own mode of existence. Poseidon reveals a certain cosmic condition: waters pre-existed creation, and rhythmically swallow it up once more; thus, the perfect autonomy of the sea, indifferent to gods, men and history, rocking itself in its own flowing, unconscious both of the seeds it bears and of the "forms" it possesses potentially, and which, indeed, it dissolves periodically.

In Scandinavian mythology, Ægir (*eagor*, "the sea") personifies the limitless ocean. His wife is the perfidious Ran (*ræna*, "to plunder") who takes her net over the whole sea, drawing whatever she meets down to her dwelling beneath it. Drowned men go to Ran, men thrown into the sea are sacrificed to her. Ægir and Ran have nine daughters, each representing one aspect of the ocean, one moment of the epiphany of the sea: Kolga (the untamed sea), Bylgja (the swell), Hrafn (the despoiler), Drafn (the waves seizing and dragging things along with them) and so on. At the bottom of the ocean there stands the magnificent palace of Ægir, where all the gods sometimes gather. There, for instance, took place the famous banquet round the vast cauldron which Thor stole from the giant Ymir (another spirit of the ocean)—a miraculous cauldron in which the drink used to make and stir itself; there Loki came to disturb the good will the gods bore each other (cf. *Lokasenna*) by calumniating them all together with their goddess-wives (he was finally punished by being bound to a rock at the bottom of the sea).

The miraculous cauldron of Ymir finds parallels in other Indo-Aryan mythologies.² It was used for making ambrosia, the drink of the gods. What particularly interests us here is the telling detail that most of the magic and mythological cauldrons were found at the bottom of the sea or of lakes.³

¹ Nilsson, vol. i, p. 416.

² Cf. Dumézil's *Le Festin d'immortalité*.

³ A. C. Brown, quoted by Krappe, *La Genèse des Mythes*, Paris, 1938, p. 209.

The traditional city of the magic cauldron in Ireland, Murias, gets its name from *muir*, the sea. There is magic power in water; cauldrons, kettles, chalices, are all receptacles of this magic force which is often symbolized by some divine liquor such as ambrosia or "living water"; they confer immortality or eternal youth, or they change whoever owns them into a hero or a god, etc.

71. WATER ANIMALS AND EMBLEMS

Dragons, snakes, shell-fish, dolphins, fish and so on are the emblems of water; hidden in the depths of the ocean, they are infused with the sacred power of the abyss; lying quietly in lakes or swimming across rivers, they bring rain, moisture, and floods, thus governing the fertility of the world. Dragons dwell in the clouds and in lakes; they have charge of thunderbolts; they pour down water from the skies, making both fields and women fruitful. We shall be reverting later to the many-sided symbolism of dragons, snakes, shells and such; in the present paragraph I shall merely glance at it, limiting myself to the Chinese and South-East Asian cultures. Dragons and snakes,¹ according to Tchouang Tseu, symbolize rhythmic life,² for the dragon stands for the spirit of water, whose harmonious fluctuations feed life and make all civilization possible. The dragon Ying gathers all the waters together and orders the rain, for he is himself the principle of moisture.³ "When a drought grows acute, they make an image of the dragon Ying and it starts to rain."⁴

In early Chinese writings you often find a linking of dragon, thunderbolt and fertility.⁵ "The beast of the thunder has the body of a dragon and a human head."⁶ A girl can become pregnant from a dragon's saliva.⁷ Fu-hsi, one of the founders

¹ The Chinese have never made a very clear distinction between the snake and the mythical creature (cf. Granet, *Danses et Légendes de la Chine ancienne*, Paris, 1926, vol. ii, p. 554).

² Cf. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 135.

³ Granet, *Danses*, vol. i, p. 353-6, n.

⁴ Granet, *Danses*, p. 361; cf. Frazer, *The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings*, London, 1936, vol. i, p. 297, on the subject of Chinese rain rituals using effigies of dragons.

⁵ Cf. Granet, *Danses*, vol. i, pp. 344-50; vol. ii, p. 555; Karlgren, "Some Fecundity Symbols in Ancient China", *BMAS*, p. 37, etc.

⁶ Granet, *Danses*, vol. ii, p. 510.

⁷ Karlgren, p. 37.

of Chinese civilization, was born in a pool associated with dragons.¹ "The father [of Kao-Chu] was called T'ai-kong; his mother was called the venerable Liou. The venerable Liou was one day resting beside a large pool and she dreamt that she met with a god; at that moment there was thunder, lightning, and great darkness; T'ai-kong went to see what was happening and he saw a scaly dragon on top of his wife; as a result she became pregnant and gave birth to Kao-Chu."²

In China the dragon—an emblem of sky and water—was constantly associated with the Emperor, who represented the rhythms of the cosmos and conferred fecundity on the earth. When the rhythms were disturbed when the life of nature or of society became troubled, the Emperor knew what he must do to regenerate his creative power and re-establish order. A king of the Hsia dynasty, to guarantee the development of his kingdom, ate dragons.³ Thus you always find dragons appearing as guardians of the rhythms of life whenever the power by which the Hsia dynasty ruled was growing weak, or undergoing a rebirth.⁴ At death, or even sometimes while still alive, the Emperor returned to heaven; so, for instance, Huang-ti, the Yellow Sovereign, was taken up to heaven by a bearded dragon, with his wives and councillors, seventy people in all.⁵

In Chinese mythology, which is that of a people living away from the sea, the dragon, emblem of water, has always got more definite sky powers than he has elsewhere. The fertility of water becomes centred in the clouds, in the world above. But the pattern fecundity-water-kingship (or holiness) is more closely adhered to in the South-East Asian mythologies in which the ocean is seen as the foundation of all reality and the giver of all powers. J. Przyluski has analyzed a great many Australasian and Indonesian legends and folk tales which all present one special feature: the hero owes his extraordinary status (of "king" or "saint") to the fact that he was born of a water animal. In Annam, the first mythological king holds

¹ Chavannes, *Les Mémoires historiques de Sse-Ma-Tsien*, Paris, 1897, vol. i, pp. 3 ff.

² Chavannes, vol. ii, p. 325.

³ Granet, *Chinese Civilization*, London, 1930, pp. 181-2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Chavannes, vol. iii, pt. ii, pp. 488-9.

the title of *long quan*, "the dragon king". In Indonesia, according to Tchao-Jou-Koua, the kings of San-fo-ts'i bore the title, *long tsin*, "spirit, sperm of *naga*".¹ Nagi was a female water spirit who filled the same role in Australasia as the dragon in China. In her sea form, or as a "princess smelling of fish", Nagi mated with a brahman and founded a dynasty (the Indonesian version, also found in Champa, Pegu, Siam, etc.). According to one Palaung legend, the *nagi* Thusandi loved the prince Thuriya, son of the Sun;² three sons were born of their union: one became Emperor of China, one King of the Palaung, the third king in Pagan. *Sedjarat Malayou* tells us that King Souran went down to the bottom of the sea in a glass case, and as those who dwelt there received him well, he married the king's daughter. Three sons were born of this marriage and the eldest became King of Palembang.

In southern India it is believed that one of the ancestors of the Pallava dynasty married a Nagi, and received from her the insignia of kingship. The *nagi* motif comes into Buddhist legends, and can even be found in northern India, in Uddyana and Kashmir. The kings of Chota-Nagpur were also descended from a *nāga* (spirit of a snake) called Pundarika: this latter, it is said, had evil-smelling breath, a detail reminiscent of the "princess smelling of fish". According to a tradition preserved in southern India, the sage Āgastya was born with Vasiṣṭha in a vase of water, from the union of the gods Mitra and Varuṇa with the *apsaras* Urvasi. That is why he was called Kumbhasambhava (born of Kumbhamata, the vase-goddess) and Pitābdhī (swallower of the ocean). Āgastya married the daughter of the Ocean.³ The *Devy-Upaniṣad* tells how the gods asked the Great Goddess (*devi*) who she was

¹ Cf. Przyluski, "La Princesse à l'odeur de poisson et la *nāgi* dans les traditions de l'Asie orientale", *EA*, Paris, 1925, vol. ii, p. 276.

² Note the opposition between serpent (fish, sea monster, symbol of water, of darkness, of the unseen) and sun ("son of the sun", or Brahman, etc.; symbol of the seen)—an opposition done away with by a mythical marriage which founded a dynasty, which, in other words, opened a new epoch in history. Whenever one tries to "formulate" divinity, one finds a fusion of opposite principles (cf. Eliade, *Mitul Reintegrării*, p. 52). In the myths of Indonesia and South-East Asia to which I refer above, this *coincidentia oppositorum* signifies the end of a cycle by a return to the primeval unity, followed by the establishment of a "dynasty", or new cycle of history.

³ Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bhāratavarsa or India*, Westminster, 1893, pp. 24, 67-8.

and whence she came, and she answered, among other things: ". . . My birthplace is in the water inside the sea, who knows it obtains the abode of Devi." At the beginning the goddess was the origin of all things: "I produce at first the father of the world."¹

All these traditions show very clearly the sacred importance and consecrating power of water. Both sovereignty and sanctity are the gift of sea spirits; magico-religious power lies at the bottom of the sea and is given to the heroes² by female beings (*nagi*, the "princess smelling of fish", etc.). Serpent genies did not dwell only in the seas and oceans but also in lakes, pools, wells and springs. The worship of serpents and serpent genies in India and elsewhere, in whatever setting we find it, always preserves its magico-religious bond with water.³ Serpents and serpent genies are always found close to water, or in charge of it; there are genies guarding the springs of life, of immortality, of holiness, as well as all the emblems connected with life, fecundity, heroism, immortality and "treasure".

72. DELUGE SYMBOLISM

Almost all the traditions of deluges are bound up with the idea of humanity returning to the water whence it had come, and the establishment of a new era and a new humanity. They display a conception of the universe and its history as something "cyclic": one era is abolished by disaster and a new one opens, ruled by "new men". This conception of cycles is also shown by the convergence of the lunar myths with themes of floods and deluges; for the moon is by far the most important symbol of rhythmic development, of death and resurrection. Just as the phases of the moon govern initiation ceremonies—in which the neophyte "dies" to waken to a new life—so too they are intimately connected with the

¹ The text can be found in Oppert, pp. 425-6; cf. my *Le Yoga: Immortalité et Liberté*, pp. 346 ff.

² Are we justified in explaining the birth of the Greek heroes from nymphs and naiads—water divinities too—by this same formula? Achilles was the son of Thetis, a sea nymph. And note that local heroes were often descended from naiads—Iphition, Sotnios and others. A local hero was often left behind by an earlier, primitive, cult, a pre-Indo-European cult; he was "the master of the place".

³ Cf. for instance, Vogel, "Serpent Worship in Ancient and Modern India," *AOA*, 1924, vol. ii, *passim*.

floods that annihilate the old humanity and set the stage for the appearance of the new. In the mythologies of the area round the Pacific, tribes are generally supposed to have sprung from some mythical moon animal which had escaped a watery disaster.¹ The tribes were descended either from a shipwrecked man whose life was saved, or the lunar animal which caused the flood to happen.

There is no need in this chapter to stress the rhythmic nature of this re-engulfing of all things by water and their periodic emergence—a rhythm which is at the root of all the geographical myths and apocalypses (Atlantis and so on). What I must point out is how widespread and how coherent these Neptunian mythological themes are. Water is in existence before every creation, and periodically water absorbs it all again to dissolve it in itself, purify it, enrich it with new possibilities and regenerate it. Men disappear periodically in a deluge or flood because of their “sins” (in most of the myths of the Pacific area the catastrophe was caused by some ritual misdemeanour). They never perish utterly, but reappear in a new form, return to the same destined path, and await the repetition of the same catastrophe which will again dissolve them in water.

I am not sure that one can call it a pessimistic conception of life. It is rather a resigned view, imposed simply by seeing the pattern made by water, the moon and change. The deluge myth, with all that it implies, shows what human life may be worth to a “mind” other than a human mind; from the “point of view” of water, human life is something fragile that must periodically be engulfed, because it is the fate of all forms to be dissolved in order to reappear. If “forms” are not regenerated by being periodically dissolved in water, they will crumble, exhaust their powers of creativity and finally die away. Mankind would eventually be completely deformed by “wickedness” and “sin”; emptied of its seeds of life and creative powers, humanity would waste away, weakened and sterile. Instead of permitting this slow regression into sub-human forms, the flood effects an instantaneous dissolution in water, in which sins are purified and from which a new, regenerate humanity will be born.

¹ Hentze, *Mythes et Symboles*, pp. 14, 24, etc.

73. SUMMING-UP

Thus all the metaphysical and religious possibilities of water fit together perfectly to make a whole. To the creation of the universe from water there correspond—at the anthropological level—the beliefs according to which men were born of water. To the deluge or disappearance of continents into the water (of which Atlantis is the perfect example)—a cosmic phenomenon which must of necessity be repeated periodically—there correspond at the human level, the “second death” of the soul (burial libations, “moisture” and *leimon* in hell, etc.) and the ritual, initiatory death of baptism. But, whether at the cosmic or the anthropological level, immersion in water does not mean final extinction, but simply a temporary reintegration into the formless, which will be followed by a new creation, a new life or a new man, depending on whether the reintegration in question is cosmic, biological, or redemptive. In form, the “deluge” is comparable to “baptism”; the burial libation, or the frenzy of nympholepsy, to the ritual washing of the newborn, or the ritual bathings of springtime which assure health and fertility. In whatever religious framework it appears, the function of water is shown to be the same; it disintegrates, abolishes forms, “washes away sins”—at once purifying and giving new life. Its work is to precede creation and take it again to itself; it can never get beyond its own mode of existence—can never express itself *in forms*. Water can never pass beyond the condition of the potential, of seeds and hidden powers. Everything that has form is manifested above the waters, is separate from them. On the other hand, as soon as it has separated itself from water, every “form” loses its potentiality, falls under the law of time and of life; it is limited, enters history, shares in the universal law of change, decays, and would cease to be itself altogether were it not regenerated by being periodically immersed in the waters again, did it not again go through the “flood” followed by the “creation of the universe”. Ritual lustrations and purifications with water are performed with the purpose of bringing into the present for a fleeting instant “that time”, that *illud tempus*, when the creation took place; they are a symbolic re-enactment of the birth of the world or of the “new man”. Any use of water with a religious intention brings together the two basic points in the rhythm of the universe: reintegration in water—and creation.

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