

UNIVERSAL ROOT MYTHS

Introduction

Since ancient times there has been a powerful desire to define myth, legend and fable, to separate the apocryphal story and unlikely tale from true description. Enormous effort has gone into demonstrating that myths are the symbolic clothing covering fundamental truths, and just as forcefully that it is instead the transposition of cosmic forces to beings possessed of intention. It has also been claimed that myths are based on transformations in which vaguely historical characters are elevated to the status of heroes or gods. Much theoretical work has gone into uncovering the objective realities underlying these deformations of reason, and research has been carried out to discover the profound psychological conflict embedded in those projections. So it is that all this labor has ended up being useful, at least in as much as it has helped us to understand, almost as if in a laboratory, how new myths struggle to take the place of old ones.

We can even observe that even scientific theories can become detached from the ambit of science, and begin to develop without any proof, and when this happens it is because they have been established at the level of a social belief. They have acquired the image's plastic force that is so important as a reference and so decisive in orienting conduct. And in that new image that irrupts we can see the avatars of old myths rejuvenated by the modification of a landscape that is not only geographical but also social; a landscape to which a response must be given by the demands of the times.

Yet we in the scientific theories could observe that when they are taken off from the environment that is their own and they begin to fly without demonstration he/she/it/you is because they have already settled to level of social belief and they have collected the plastic force of the as important image as reference and so decisive in order to guide conducts. And in that new image that [irrupts] could see the changes of old myths rejuvenated by the modification of the social landscape to which you/he/she/it should give answer for demand of the times.

The system of vital tensions in which a people is submerged is translated as an image, but this is not enough to provide a full explanation unless we think in simplistic terms of stimulus and response. It is necessary to comprehend that in every culture, group and individual there exists a memory, an historical accumulation on the basis of which the world in which one lives is interpreted. That interpretation is what configures, for us, the landscape which, in perceiving, we take as external. A landscape, that we grasp according to the vital tensions proper to this historical moment, or which, though they arose long ago now residually form part of the interpretative scheme of present reality. It is only when we discover in a given peoples their fundamental historical tensions that we are approaching the understanding of their ideals, their apprehensions and hopes. These do not exist in their horizon as cold ideas but rather as dynamic images that push behavior in one direction or another. Of course, in the measure that ideas are more closely related with the landscape in question, those specific ideas will be accepted with greater ease than others. As much as love or hate, those ideas will be experienced in the full flavor of commitment and truth because their internal register is unquestionable for the one who lives that experience, even when, objectively, it is not justified.

Consider as an example how the fears of certain peoples have been translated into images of a mythical future in which everything will collapse: the gods will fall, the heavens, the rainbow and all that has been constructed will collapse; the air will become unbreathable

and the waters poisonous; the great tree of the world, responsible for universal equilibrium, will die and with it the animals and human beings. In critical moments, those peoples have translated these tensions in troubling images of contamination and a world that is being undermined. But this is the very thing that has impelled them, in their best moments, to "build" solidly in numerous fields. Other peoples have been formed in the painful register of abandonment and exclusion from lost paradises, and that is the very same thing that has pushed them to tirelessly improve and to learn in the attempt to reach the centre of knowledge. Some peoples seem marked by the guilt of having killed their gods and others feel affected by a multifaceted and changing vision, but that has led one to seek redemption for themselves through action and the other to the reflective search for a permanent and transcendental truth.

These fragmentary observations do not explain the extraordinary richness of human behaviour and in proposing them we do not wish to transmit stereotypes. We simply want to amplify the vision that is normally held of myths and the psychosocial function that they serve. But today isolated cultures are disappearing and with them their mythic heritage. Profound changes can be observed in the members of all the communities of the Earth under the impact, not only of information and technology, but also of social habits, customs, values, images and behaviors originating from all over the planet. For the citizen of today's world this relocation will not lessen anxiety, or hopes; the proposals for solutions that take expression in more or less scientific theories or formulations have at their center ancient and unknown myths.

For us, to approach the great myths has meant to again give value to all peoples but from a rather special point of view, that is, from the optic of trying to comprehend their basic beliefs. In this work, we have not touched upon the beautiful stories and legends that describe the deeds of the demigods and extraordinary mortals. We have circumscribed our work, limiting it to the myths in which the nucleus is occupied by the gods, even though humankind may play an important role in the plot. As far as possible, we have not dealt with questions of particular cults, considering that practical and daily religion should not be confused with the plastic images of poetic mythology.

On the other hand, we have tried to take as our reference the original texts of each mythology, an approach that has left us with a number of problems. In passing, we can say that the mythological richness of the Cretan and Mycenaean civilizations have been subsumed in one generic chapter – "Greco-Roman myths" – precisely because we could not count on the original texts of those cultures. The same thing occurred with African myths, Oceanic and, to some degree, American myths. In any case, the advances being made by anthropologists and specialists in comparative mythology take us to consider a future work based on the new developments in these fields.

The title of this book, *Universal Root Myths*, demands clarification. We have considered as a "root" myth every myth that, passing from people to people, has nonetheless conserved in its central argument a certain timelessness. That is, it has a certain characteristic that was maintained over time, even when modifications have been produced in the characters names, their attributes and even to the landscape in which the action takes place. The central argument, which we also call the "nucleus of ideation", also undergoes changes but at a relatively slower speed than those other, what we may call, secondary elements. So it is that just as we have not taken into account the variation of the secondary system of representation, neither have we tried to determine a precise moment in which the myth arose.

To proceed in any other fashion would be pointless since obviously the origin of a myth cannot be specified in any exact way.

In any event it is the documents and the other vestiges of history that give evidence of the existence of myth, in any case those that fall within a more or less specific date. On the other hand, the construction of myth is not something that appears to belong to any single author, but to successive generations of authors and commentators basing themselves in material that is itself unstable and dynamic. The discoveries made by archeology, anthropology and philology, in support of comparative mythology, demonstrate that certain myths that we considered as the original to a particular culture often pertain to earlier cultures or to contemporary cultures which influenced them.

Following from all this, we have not paid any special attention to arranging the myths in chronological order, but rather according to the importance that they seem to have acquired for a particular culture. Even when this culture might have come after another in which the same nucleus of ideation was already acting. On the other hand, it should be clear, that the present work makes no attempt to be a compilation, a comparison, nor to reflect a system of classification based on predetermined categories.

Rather, it is a matter of putting into evidence the enduring nuclei of ideation that are active in different latitudes and historical moments. To this one could object that the transformation of cultural context must cause its core expressions and meanings to vary as well. But it is precisely because of this that we have dealt here with myths that have had a greater importance in one culture and moment, even when they have existed in others but without carrying out a relevant psychosocial function.

As for those myths that occur in apparently disconnected points yet have important similarities between them, only thorough investigation can determine whether in fact such a historical disconnection really existed. In this field, research is advancing rapidly and today it can no longer be claimed that, for example, the cultures of America are totally alien to those of Asia. It could be said that the Bering Strait migrations occurred at a time, more than 20,000 years ago, when the peoples of Asia did not have developed myths and that these only took shape after the tribes settled. But, even if that is the case, certainly the pre-mythic situation was similar for both these peoples and perhaps it is in this situation that models can be found there that maintain some common patterns, even if they develop unequally in their respective cultural situations. Whatever the case may actually be, it is a discussion that is far from over and it would be premature to support any of the hypotheses that we find fighting it out today. As for what concerns us here the originality of the myth is of little consequence, but rather, as we have mentioned above, the importance that it has in a given culture.

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This is the rapture of those beings not understood in their deepest nature, great powers that made all that is known and even what is unknown.

This is the rhapsody of the external nature of the gods, of the action seen and sung by human beings who could locate themselves in the watchtower of the sacred.

This is what appeared as a sign fixed in eternal time, capable of altering the order, the laws and poor good sense. That which the mortals wanted this the gods made; this is that which the gods spoke through human beings.

I. Sumerian-Akkadian Myths

Gilgamesh (Lord Kullab's Poem)

Gilgamesh and the creation of his double.

He who knew all and who understood the root of things. He who saw everything and learned everything. Who knew the countries of the world... great was his glory. Great is your glory, divine Gilgamesh!

He built the walls of Uruk. He undertook a long voyage and knew all that occurred before the flood. Upon returning he recorded all his feats on a stele. Because the great gods created him, two-thirds of his body are divine and one-third human.

When he had battled against every country he returned to Uruk, his homeland. But the people murmured with hate because Gilgamesh took the best youth for his exploits and governed with an iron-fist. Because of this the people took their complaints to the gods and the gods took them to Anu. Anu carried them To Aruru and said these wordsⁱ

"You, Aruru, who created humanity, create now a copy of Gilgamesh so that when these two meet they will fight between themselves and leave our city in peace." The goddess Aruru, hearing this request, concentrated within herself, moistened her hands, and taking some clay she formed valiant Enkidu. The hero was born with his body covered in hair like the barley of the fields.ⁱⁱ He knew nothing of men or their countries, his mind was closed. Like a savage beast he lived on the plants of the field and drank at the watering holes with the herds".

In time, a hunter discovered Enkidu and his face constricted in fear. He went to his father and told him of the prowess of this wild man. And so the old man sent his son to Uruk to beseech Gilgamesh for help. When Gilgamesh heard the story from the lips of the hunter he recommended that he take a beautiful temple-girl with him, a daughter of pleasure and, that he leave her within reach of the intruder. "In that way, when he sees the the young woman, he will be taken with her and he will forget his animals and his animals will not recognize him." So, the King spoke, and so the hunter did. After three days he arrived to the meeting place and there he waited. One day and then another passed until the animals came to the spring to drink. Among them was the intruder and the intruder saw the temple-girl reclining there. And when she stood up and came towards him, Enkidu was trapped by her beauty. Seven days he spent with her until he decided to return to his beasts but the gazelles and the herds of the desert fled from him. Enkidu had lost his strength and could not run, but his intelligence opened, and he began to think and feel like a man.

He sat down again beside the woman and she said to him: "Why do you live with animals like a savage? Come, I will take you to Uruk, to the sanctuary of Anu and the goddess Ishtar, to Gilgamesh whom no one can defeat." This pleased Enkidu because his heart yearned for a friend, and so he let the young woman lead him to the fertile fields, to the place of stables and the shepherds.

But he suckled the milk of wild beasts and did not know bread or wine until the girl gave them to him to try. The sacred slave anointed him with oil, a barber shaved his body and he was dressed like a young king. Taking up his lance in order to fight the wild animals he freed the shepherds from their fears allowing them to sleep without fear. It happened then that an emissary arrived requesting Enkidu's help in ending the injustices of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk. Filled with fury Enkidu promised to change the order of things.

But, Gilgamesh had seen the savage in his dreams and had comprehended that it was in combat that they would understand each other. So it was that when his opponent blocked his path, he threw himself upon him with the force of a charging bull. The people gathered around watching the ferocious battle, and praising Enkidu who so resembled the king. Before the house of the Assembly they fought. They shattered the doors to splinters. They demolished the walls, but when the king managed to throw Enkidu to the ground, Enkidu was appeased and began praising Gilgamesh. So the two embraced and their friendship was sealed.

The Cedar Forest.

Gilgamesh had a dream and Enkidu said: "This is the meaning of your dream. It is your fate to be king but not to be immortal. So deal justly with your servants, deal justly before the eyes of the god Samash. You should use your power to liberate and not to oppress". Gilgamesh thought about his life and realized that he had not fulfilled his destiny. Because of this he said to Enkidu: "I should the country of Life where grow the cedars and their inscribe my name on a stele where is whritten the names of those who deserve glory."

Enkidu was saddened because as child of the mountain, knew the roads that led to the forest. He thought: "it is ten thousand leagues in any direction from the gates of the forest to its center. In its heart lives Humbaba (whose name means "Enormity"). His breath is fire and when he roars it is like a tempest. But Gilgamesh had decided to go to the forest to end the evil of the world, the evil of Humbaba. And as he was decided, Enkidu got ready to guide him but not without first explaining the dangers. "A great warrior who never sleeps – he said, guards the entrance. Only the gods are immortal and man cannot achieve immortality, and cannot battle against Humbaba.

Gilgamesh commended himself to Samash, the sun-god, and asked him for help in his undertaking. And Gilgamesh remembered all the bodies of the men that he had seen floating in the river as he gazed down from the walls of Uruk. The bodies of enemies and friends, of acquaintances and strangers. And so he thought upon his own end and, taking two goats to the temple, a white one with no marks and another brown one, he said to Samash:

"without hope a man dies and I have my task to accomplish. It is a long road to the sealed enclosure of Jumbaba, why, Samash did you fill my heart with the hope of of this undertaking if it could not be realized?" And Samash the compassionate accepted Gilgamesh's offerings and his tears celebrating it with a solmen pact.

They gave the orders to the artisans to forge his weapons and the masters brought the javelins and the swords, the bows and axes. The weapons of each one weighed ten times thirty shekels and the armour, another ninety. Then the heroes set out and in one day they walked fifty leagues. In three days they covered as much terrain as travellers do in a month

and three weeks. Even before reaching the gates of the forest they had to cross seven mountains. At the end of the journey, there they found the gate it was seventy cubits high and forty-two wide. So beautiful, so dazzling was this door that they did not destroy it. Instead Enkidu rushed forth, pushing with his bare hands until it opened wide. Then they descended until they arrived at the foot of the green mountain.

Dumbstruck they stood motionless and contemplated the mountain of cedars, the verdant mountainside where the mansion of the gods stood. Forty hours they spent in ecstasy looking at the forest and seeing the magnificent path, the one that Humbaba traversed to reach his dwelling...

Before night fell Gilgamesh dug a well and scattered fine meal asking the mountain for good dreams. Seated on his heels, his head on his knees, Gilgamesh dreamed and Enkidu interpreted the auspicious dreams. The following night Gilgamesh asked for favourable dreams for Enkidu, but the dreams that the mountain delivered were ominous. Then Gilgamesh did not awake and with effort Enkidu managed to stand him up. Mounting their horses they rode over the land wearing their armour as if it were only the flimsiest of garments. They reached the immense cedars and Gilgamesh seizing the axe in his hands felled the cedar!

Humbaba left his mansion and cast the eye of death on Gilgamesh. But the sun-god, Samash, raised terrible hurricanes against Humbaba: the cyclone, and the whirlwind. The eight tempests he hurled against Humbaba so that he could neither advance nor retreat while Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut the cedars to enter his dominion. So it was that Humbaba presented himself meek and fearful before the heroes promising them great honors. Gilgamesh put aside his weapons, and was about to assent, when Enkidu interrupted: "Do not listen to him! No my friend, evil speaks from his mouth. He must die by our hands!" And thanks to the warning of his friend, Gilgamesh pulled himself together. Taking the axe and unsheathing his sword, he wounded Humbaba in the neck. Enkidu also fell upon Humbaba and struck the second blow. Then, on the third attack, Humbaba fell dead. Silent and dead. And so they separated his head from his body. In that moment, chaos was unleashed because he who lay there was the Guardian of the Cedar Forest. Enkidu felled the trees of the forest, all the way to the banks of the Euphrates he pulled them up by their roots.

Then, removing the head from the shroud they showed it to the gods. When Enlil, god of the storms, saw the lifeless body of Humbaba he was furious and took from these profaners the power and the glory that he been Humbaba's and gave them to the lion, the barbarian and the desert. Then the two friends left the forest of the cedars.

Gilgamesh washed his body, throwing his bloodied clothes far away and even incinerated those that were unstained. With the royal crown shining on his head, the goddess Ishtar looked upon him with desire. But Gilgamesh rejected her because she had lost all of her husbands and had, through love, reduced them to abject servitude. And so Gilgamesh said: "You are a ruin that offers no shelter from the tempest, you are a backdoor that does not keep out the storm, you the jewels of the palaces that have been plundered by thieves, you are the poison hidden in the meal. You are a foundation made of soft stone, you are an amulet incapable of protecting from danger, you are a sandal that trips its owner and makes him stumble".

The Celestial Bull, the Death of Enkidu and the Descent to Hell.

Furious, the princess Ishtar went to her father Anu and threatened to break the doors of Hell to unleash an army of the dead more numerous than that of the living. She shouted: "If you do not set the Celestial Bull upon Gilgamesh, I will." Anu agreed with her, in exchange for the fertility of the fields for seven years. And immediately he created the Celestial Bull that fell to earth. In the first attack, the beast killed three hundred men. In the second, hundreds more fell. In the third, it charged Enkidu but he held it by the horns.

While the beast spat bloody foam from its mouth, Enkidu almost fainting managed to scream: "Gilgamesh, we have promised to the gods to leave enduring names, sink your sword in the body of our enemy!" Then Gilgamesh attacked and killed the Celestial Bull driving his piercing sword between the horns and the nape of its neck. Immediately the friends removed the still beating heart and offered it to Samash. But from the highest wall of Uruk, the goddess Ishtar uttered a curse on Gilgamesh. Hearing the princess Enkidu could not control his fury and sealed his fate by ripping up the genitals of the Celestial Bull and throwing them at the divine face.

When the day arrived, Enkidu awoke from a dream that had troubled his sleep. In this dream the gods Anu, Enlil, Samash and Ea held council together. The gods argued about the death of Humbaba and the Celestial Bull and in the end they decreed that of the two friends, Enkidu had to die. After the dream he awoke and recounted what he had seen. He went back to dreaming and this is what he related:

"The musical instruments of Gilgamesh fell in a great enclosure. Gilgamesh searched for them but could not reach the depths where they had fallen. With his hands he looked for the harp and the flute; with his feet he tried to touch them. Seated in front of the enclosure that connects to the subterranean worlds Gilgamesh cried bitterly requesting that somebody return their instruments from the depths of the hells. Then Enkidu said: "I will go down to seek for your flute. Immediately the pit that leads to the hells opened and Enkidu descended. Time passed and a saddened Gilgamesh requested: "let Enkidu return and speak with me!" The spirit of Enkidu flew from the depths like an arrow and the two siblings spoke: "You who know the subterranean world tell me have you seen those who have died in the fury of battle and those who have died abandoned in the fields... Those who died in battle are sustained by their parents, but those whose body are abandoned in the fields have no peace in the hells. I have also seen those who wander, whose spirit is not remembered; they are always restlessly prowling about feeding on the waste that that people have abandoned." The two siblings fell silent."ⁱⁱⁱ

Enkidu fell ill and died. Then Gilgamesh said: "To suffer, life has no other meaning than death! Will I also die like Enkidu? I must seek Utnapishtim, the one they call 'The Distant' so that he may explain how he became immortal. First I will mourn, then I will dress in the skin of a lion, and invoking Sin I will go on my way."

Gilgamesh walked all the roads until he arrived at the mountains, to the very doors of the Sun. There he stopped in front of the scorpion men, the terrible guardian of the doors of the Sun. He asked to speak to Utnapishtim: "I wish to question him about death and about life." Then, the Scorpion Men tried to dissuade him from this enterprise. They said "None who enter the mountain return to the light of day". Nonetheless Gilgamesh persisted in asking that they open the door of the mountain until finally it was done. He walked in deep darkness for many hours until, in the distance he saw a dawning light and finally upon arriving there he found himself standing before the Sun. Blinded by the splendor he managed to see an

immense garden. He walked by paths the the gods travel until finally he came upon a tree with branches of lapis lázuli and from those branches hung the fruit of the ruby.

Dressed in the skin of a lion and eating the flesh of animals, Gilgamesh wandered through the garden, not knowing which way to go, and so when Samash saw him, he took mercy on him and said: "When the gods made man they reserved immortality for themselves. The life that you are searching for you will never find."^{iv} But Gilgamesh reached the shore, and the ferryman of The Distant. They sailed on until they saw land but Utnapishtim, who had seen them arriving, met them and asked for explanations from the passenger in his boat. Gilgamesh gave his name and explained the meaning of the crossing.

The Universal Flood

And Utnapishtim said: "I will tell you a great secret. Once on the banks of the Euphrates stood an ancient city, sovereign and wealthy, it was called Shurruk. The people multiplied and everything could be found in abundance. But Enlil was bothered by the endless clamour, and called to the other gods saying that it was no longer possible to sleep and demanding that a great flood be unleashed to put an end to this excess. Then in a dream, Ea revealed Enlil's plan to me. "Demolish your house and save your life, build a covered boat, it must be of equal width and length. On the boat you will then take the seed of every living thing. If others ask you about your work, say that you have decided to go live in the gulf." My young children brought pitch and the older ones all that was needed.

I constructed the roof of the ship and under it the floor I built seven decks and divided each one into nine enclosures. Finally, I rolled the heavy construction over thick tree trunks until entering the water where it floated with two thirds of it underwater. On the seventh day the boat was completed and loaded with everything the necessary. My family, relatives and artisans loaded into the boat and later I had them load in animals both domestic and wild. When that evening the hour arrived Enlil sent the Rider of the Storm.

I entered the boat and sealed it up with pitch and tar and as everything was prepared I gave the tiller to Puzur-Amurri the steersman. Nergal loosed the floodgates of the waters below and, thundering, the gods razed fields and mountains. The judges of the hells, the Annunaki, cast away their torches and day became night. The tempest grew worse day by day and it seemed to gather fury as it went. On the seventh day the flood stopped and the sea grew calm. I opened the hatchway and the light of the sun fell full on my face. I searched in vain, all was sea. I cried for the men and the living beings newly turned to clay.

Finally, the boat came to a stop on the summit of Mount Nisir. I loosed a dove and a swallow and finding no resting place on the Earth it returned. After many days I freed a crow which cawing did not return. Later the gods met in council and reproached Enlil for having meted out so heavy a punishment on the creatures. And so Enlil came to our boat and making my wife and me kneel he touched our foreheads as he said: "You were mortal, but now you and your wife will live forever, here at the mouth of the rivers and you will be known like The Distant. As for you, Gilgamesh, why would the gods grant you immortality"

The Return.

Utnapishtim set a test for Gilgamesh. He had to go for six days and seven nights without sleep. But as soon as the hero sat back on his haunches the mist of sleep like soft wool fell upon him. "Look at him, look at the one who seeks immortality!" said The Distant to his wife. Awaking, Gilgamesh complained bitterly about the failure. "Where will I go? Death is on all roads." Disappointed Utnapishtim ordered the boatman to take the man back but he was not without pity for he decreed that the clothing which Gilgamesh wore would never get old, so that once he was back in his country they would shine splendidly for mortal eyes. Upon leaving, The Distant whispered: "There is at the bottom of the waters is a thorny plant [Licio espinoso] that can wound your hands, but if your hands can grasp it and keep hold of it, you will be immortal!"

Gilgamesh tied heavy rocks to his legs and plunged into the water. He grabbed the plant and started to return to the surface while saying to himself: "With this I will give my people to eat and also I will regain my youth." He then walked hours and hours in the darkness of the mountain until reaching again the gate of the world. He saw a fountain and after all those labours he decided to bathe, but a serpent coming from the depths of the pool snatched the plant away and submerged itself out of Gilgamesh's reach.

And so the mortal returned with empty hands, and an empty heart. Thus it was that he returned to strong-walled Uruk. And so the decree of the gods had been fulfilled. With the bread of tribute for the Guardian of the Door, with the bread we asked of the serpent-god, Lord of the Tree of Life. With the bread we gave thanks to Dumuzi the shepherd who makes the earth fertile!⁵

He who knew everything and who understood the root of things. He who saw everything and taught everything. Who knew the countries of the world... Great was his glory!

He, who built the walls of Uruk, who undertook a long voyage and who knew all that occurred before the Flood, upon returning recorded his feats on a mighty stele.

II. ASSYRO-BABYLONIAN MYTHS.

*Enuma Elish (Poem of Creation)*¹

The original chaos.

When the sky above nor the earth below had yet been named, from the Abyss and Impetuosity the waters mixed. Neither the gods, nor the salt marshes, nor the rushes existed. In that chaos two serpents were begotten who, for a long time grew in size, making room for the horizon of the sea and the horizon of the earth. They separated the spaces, they were the limits of the heavens and the earth. The great gods were born from those limits, and they grouped together in different parts of what was the world. And these divinities continued multiplying, and in this way they disturbed the great formers of the original chaos.

And so the Apsu of the abyss went to his wife Tiamat, mother of the oceanic waters, and said: "I cannot support the goings-on of the gods. Their merrymaking won't let me sleep, they stir by themselves as we have not determined any destiny."

The gods and Marduk.

Thus Apsu spoke to Tiamat the resplendent. He spoke in such a way that Tiamat, furious, began to shout: "We will destroy those rebels and then at last we will be able to sleep." So she screamed as she shook in rage. And so it was that one of the gods, Ea, came to know of their destructive designs. And so he laid a spell upon the waters. With that Apsu (as was his wish) fell into a deep sleep, and so was enchained. Ea killed him, tore at his body and built his dwelling upon it. There he lived with his wife Damkina and from their union was born Marduk.

Ea's heart was exalted upon seeing the perfection of his son completed by his twin heads divine. The voice of the child was a blazing flame, his four eyes seeing all and his four ears hearing all. His enormous body and his incomprehensible limbs were bathed in a radiance that was strongest when the lightning swirled around him.

The war of the gods.

While Marduk grew and gave order to the world, some of the gods approached Tiamat and made recriminations about her lack of valour, saying: "They killed your consort and you did nothing and now we also cannot find rest. Become our avenging force and we will walk beside you and we will go to battle." In a rage she created the serpent-monsters with poisonous claws; the storm-monsters; the scorpion-men; the demon-lions; the centaurs and the flying dragons. Eleven invincible monsters Tiamat created, and then she elevated Kingu above her other gods and made him chief of her army.²

She entrusted Kingu with command over her troops and their arms and raised him to his seat in the assembly: "I have cast a spell giving you power to command the gods. You are my spouse and the Anunnaki will exalt your name. I give you now the tablets of Fate and the and I fasten them around your neck. Nothing will change in this mandate and your word will prevail."³

But Ea, upon discovering their perverse designs sought help once again from the other gods and proclaimed: "Tiamat, who begat us, abhors us. She has gathered the terrible Anunnaki around her and set them against us. She has pitted half the gods against the other half. How can we make her desist? I ask that the Igigi gather in council and resolve this." And so the many generations of the Igigi gathered together, but none among them could resolve the matter. When, after a time, neither emissaries nor valiant heroes could change Tiamat's plans, Anshar the elder stood up and called for Marduk. And so Ea went to his son and requested that he aid the gods. But Marduk answered that if he did as they asked he must be made chief among them. Thus spoke Marduk, and went before the council.

The gods filled their bellies with sweet wine and ceremonial bread. Impassioned they began to shout for Marduk. They decreed his fate naming him avenger. Between rites and incantations they erected a throne and sat him in it and made him preside over them. They placed a garment in front of Marduk and said: "whether to create or destroy your word will be supreme. You will but open your mouth and it will be done." In front of eyes of the assembly Marduk spoke and the garment vanished. Again he spoke some words and the radiant garment reappeared. Having tested his power, the gods said: "you are the king. Take the scepter and the palu, take up the incomparable weapon and destroy our enemies with it. Take the blood of Tiamat and spill it in the secret places." ⁴

The Lord made a bow and hung it with his quiver at his side. He made a net to trap Tiamat. He raised the mace and placed the lightning bolt before him and filled his body with flames. Then he set the winds so that not even the least piece of Tiamat could escape, and raising the hurricane and torrential storms, he mounted the storm-chariot. To this he yoked his chariot to the four horses of terrible names and like a lightning bolt flew straight to Tiamat. In her hand she held a plant that gave forth poison, but the Lord drew near so as to search within her and perceive the intentions of the Anunnaki and of Kingu.⁵

- Is it because you think yourself so important that you elevate yourself above me like the supreme god?, roared Tiamat, furious.

- It is you who have elevated yourself so high and you who have elevated Kingu and given him rank that was not his by right. You hate your children and wish evil upon them. Stand up now and let us meet in combat! – so responded Marduk, while the gods sharpened their weapons.

Tiamat conjured and recited her spells, and the gods went forth to battle. Then the Lord threw his net and the terrible Tiamat opened her enormous mouth. At that moment, he let loose the hurricanes that penetrated into her and then he released the arrow that came to lodge in her belly. He took then her dark entrails leaving her without life. The horrible army disbanded and in the confusion, the sharp weapons were destroyed. Caught tight in the net, the prisoners were cast down into the subterranean cells. The Tablets of Destiny to which arrogant Kingu held no rightful claim he stripped from him and then imprisoned Kingu along with the Anunnaki. And in this way, the eleven creatures that Tiamat had created were converted into statues so that the triumph of Marduk would never be forgotten.

The creation of the world.

He reinforced the prison of his enemies, he took the Tablets of Destiny and with his seal he sealed them and placed them on his own chest. Then the Lord turned again to the body of Tiamat and with his merciless mace he crushed her skull. He separated the channels of her blood, so that the hurricane might take it to secret places. Seeing the monstrous flesh, he

conceived artistic thoughts. He cut her cadaver lengthwise as if it were a fish, raising one of its pieces up to the sky. He locked it into place and set a guardian over it to stop the waters from exiting. Then, crossing through the spaces he inspected the regions thereof and, measuring the abyss, he established his dwelling upon it. In this way he created the heavens and the earth and established their limits. And then he created houses for the gods, and lit them them with stars.

He created the Year, and set the figures that designated its 12 months⁶. These he divided into the days. To the sides he reinforced the left and right bolts, putting the zenith between them. He gave Samash⁷ the job of dividing day and night and placed the brilliant star of his bow⁸ for all to see. He charged Nebiru⁹ with the division of the two celestial sections into north and south. He entrusted Sin to illuminate the darkness, ordering the days and the nights. Thus spoke the Lord: "Every single month you must take up your crown. For six days you will wear the horns and on the seventh the half-crown. To the fourteen days when Samash reaches the horizon you will diminish the crown along with the decreasing light. So you will go you approaching and taking distance from the sun but the twenty-ninth day will once again put him in opposition." ¹⁰

Later, turning again toward Tiamat, he took her saliva and with it formed the clouds. With her head he produced the hills and with her eyes he made the Tigris and the Éuphrates flow. Finally, from her paps he created the great mountains and dug deep holes so that the wells might give water. Finally, Marduk made the ground solid raising their luxurious habitation and their temple, offering them to the gods so that they might lodge there when they assembled in order to set the destinies of the world. The he said that these constructions should be called Babylon, meaning "the dwelling of the great gods." ¹¹

The creation of the human being.

Upon finishing his work, the Lord was exalted by the gods, and so in acknowledgement he said to them: "Although all the gods are to be revered equally, I will divide them into two groups so that they may govern the upper and lower regions.¹² With blood I will knead and form man so that he will keep alive our worship and cult. In this way the gods will be cared for." But impartial Ea responded: "Let only one of the two siblings perish in order to give their blood to humanity. The assembly of gods should decide who bear this misfortune."¹³

Marduk had the captive Anunnaki brought forth and asked them, under oath, who was responsible for the insurrection, promising life to whoever told the truth. And so the gods accused Kingu. They immediately brought forth the prisoner Reproaching him they bound him and they proceeded to take from his blood from which they would form mankind. Ea made them set free the other captive gods and imposed service and the devotion toward the gods on humanity. However, this work was incomprehensible.¹⁴ And in this way the Lord freed the gods and divided them – three hundred above and three hundred below – making them the guardians of the world. Grateful, the Anunnaki built a sanctuary and raised the summit of the Esagila. Then they erected a stepped tower and within it they established a new dwelling for Marduk.¹⁵

When the assembly of the great gods had gathered they praised Marduk and bowing to the ground they spoke an incantation that put the life of humanity in danger. They swore by water and oil to make dangerous the life of man.¹⁶ Then they said: "Let the 'black heads' expect salvation from us for although Marduk can be called by fifty names, he is the lord."¹⁷

And the stars shone and all the beings created by the gods were filled with joy. Humanity also recognized itself in the Lord. For that, let there be a remembering of all that occurred. May the children learn this teaching from their fathers. May the wise study the meaning of The song of Marduk who vanquished Tiamat and achieved kingship.¹⁸

III. EGYPTIAN MYTHS

Ptah and creation.¹

There was only an endless sea, lifeless and absolutely silent. Then Ptah arrived with the forms of the abyss, depths and distances, solitudes and forces. Through them, Ptah saw and heard, smelled and perceived existence in his heart. But what he perceived he had previously conceived within himself. In this way he took the form of Atum and, devouring his own seed, gave birth to wind and moisture which he expelled from his mouth creating Nut, the sky, and Geb, the earth. Atum, the non-existent, was a manifestation of Ptah. And so, the nine fundamental forms and the universe with all the beings were inexistence before he conceived them within himself and created them with a single word. After having created everything from his mouth, he rested. For this, until the end of time you will be invoked: "Immense being, creator of worlds. You who call to life those who are unborn but who are within you. You who call to life those who have died but are within you."²

All the forms of the gods are but forms of Ptah and is it only because of human limitations that they adore him under many names. His names change and are forgotten; new gods follow the old ones, but beyond all of this Ptah remains. He created the sky as a *conductor and he surrounded the earth with the sea. To appease the dead he created Tartarus. He fixed Ra's course through the skies from horizon to horizon, and made it so that man would have his time and his dominion. He did the same for each pharaoh and each kingdom.

Ra, on his way through the skies, reshaping what had been established and calming the discontented gods. He loved creation, and gave love to the animals so that they would be happy battling against the chaos that threatened their lives. He determined the seasons and set limits to the night and the day. He gave the Nile a rhythm making it flood the land and then withdraw so that everyone might live from the fruit of its waters. He vanquished the forces of darkness and being the one who brought the light, he was called Amon-Ra by those who believed that Amon was born from an egg which, breaking in a flash, gave rise to the stars and other celestial lights.

But the genealogy of the gods begins with Atum who is the father-mother of the gods. He begat Shu (the wind) and Tefnut (moisture) and from these, Nut (the sky) and Geb (the earth) were born. These brothers united and begat Osiris, Seth, Neftis and Isis. This is the divine Ennead from which everything derives.

Death and Resurrection of Osiris.

The parents of Osiris saw that he was strong and kind, and so they entrusted him with the governing the fertile territories and caring for the life of plants, animals and human beings. To his brother, Seth, they gave the wide desert and foreign lands. Everything wild and strong, the herds and wild beasts, were under his care. Osiris and Isis together were resplendent lovers. But the fog of envy disturbed Seth, and having devised a plot to kill his brother with the help of seventy-two members of his retinue he invited everyone to a feast. That night, Osiris and the conspirators arrived. Seth displayed a magnificent sarcophagus and promised it to the one whom it fit best. And so the guests went in and out of it, until it was Osiris' turn. As soon as he entered it they lowered the lid and nailed it shut. They had trapped,

Osiris and now they took him to the Nile and threw him in its waters intending that he would sink to its depths. But the sarcophagus floated and drifted away from Egypt until reaching the sea. A long time then passed until, one day, the coffin reached Phoenicia³ and the waves deposited it at the foot of a tree. The tree grew to a gigantic height, enveloping the sarcophagus in its trunk. The king of this place, admiring the incredible specimen, called for it to be felled and the great trunk brought to his palace where it might serve as a central column. Meanwhile, Isis had a revelation of what had happened and went to Phoenicia. There, she entered the service of the Queen so she might be near the body of her husband. But the Queen, understood that, in reality her servant was Isis, and so the Queen gave her the trunk to do with as she pleased. Isis, splitting apart the wood covering, pulled the coffin out and returned to Egypt bearing her load. By this time, however, Seth was aware of what had happened and, fearing that Isis would revive her husband, he stole the body. Quickly Seth bent himself to cutting the body into fourteen parts and scattered them throughout the land but hearing what had occurred Isis undertook a pilgrimage to recover the pieces of the cadaver.

After the death of Osiris, darkness reigned for a long time. No one was taking care of the animals, plants, or the human beings. Strife and death replaced harmony forever.

When Isis had recovered the different parts of the body, she bound them together tightly with bandages, and began her incantations.⁴ She then built an enormous furnace, a sacred pyramid⁵, and placed the mummy in its depths. Drawing the mummy close, she breathed into it. She blew into it like a potter does to increase the heat of the fire of life...

He awoke, knew the mortal dream, and wanted to keep his green face of the plant world.⁶ He wanted to keep the white crown and his plumage to remember clearly which lands of the Nile were his.⁷ He also took the whip and crook to separate and reconcile, as shepherds do with their curved staff.⁸ Standing erect, Osiris saw death around him, and so he left his double, his Ka,⁹ entrusting the care of his body to it so that no one would desecrate his body again. He took the cross of life, the Ankh¹⁰ of the resurrection, and with it in his Ba¹¹ he went to save and protect all those who, alone and terrified, enter Amenti.¹² For them he went to live in the west, awaiting the helpless exiles from the kingdom of life. Thanks to his sacrifice, nature arises again every time and human beings, created by the divine potter,¹³ are more than just animated clay. Since then, the god is invoked in many ways. Since then, the last breath is a song of hope.

"Good Osiris!" Send Thoth¹⁴ so that he may guide us to the sacred sycamore¹⁵, to the tree of life, to the door of the Lady of the West¹⁶; let him lead us away from the fourteen mansions surrounded by stupor and anguish, where the perverse suffer terrible punishment. Send Thoth, the wise ibis, the infallible scribe of human deeds, recorded in the papyrus of indelible memory. Good Osiris! In you the victorious awaits his resurrection, after the judgement in which his actions are weighed by Anubis, the just jackal.¹⁷ Good Osiris! Let our Ba board the celestial ship, separated from the Ka, and let the Ka remain as custodian of the amulets¹⁸ in our tomb. And then we shall sail towards the regions of splendor of the new day."

Horus, the divine avenger.¹⁹

After Isis helped resurrect Osiris, she gave birth to their son. Taking the newborn she hid him in the reedbeds of the Nile to protect him from the fury of Seth, Min²⁰ and assailants from the desert. He was the radiant child in the lotus flower, who with his eyes in every corner of

the earth, was revered as a falcon. As Horus Haredontes, he would be the avenger of his father, when the time came. He is Horus, god of all the lands, son of love and of resurrection.

The child grew and his mother prepared him to reclaim the territory that Seth had usurped, venturing to the land of the Nile when he only had a right to the deserts and foreign lands. When Osiris made his journey to the west, to the lands of Amenti over which he now reigned he had left Isis with the mandate to regain all of the Nile for his son. And so the litigants met before the assembly of the Ennead. Horus said: "A despicable fratricide, relying on blind force unconsecrated by the gods, usurped the rights bequeathed to me by my father ..." But his speech was cut short by Seth's irate cries scorning the request as that of a child incapable of exercising such demands. And so, drawing their weapons, they fought in single combat, one against the other, they overturned mountains, and frightened the waters from their riverbeds. The dispute lasted eighty long years until Seth tore out Horus' eyes, and Horus pulverized* Seth's vital organs. The great fury only ended when they both fell to the ground in a faint. Thoth then healed their wounds and reestablished the fragile peace that the neglected world demanded.

They stood before the gods and sought a verdict. Ra, who was always helped by Seth in his struggle against the deadly Apophis,²¹ tipped the balance against Horus, but Isis bravely defended her son. In the end the gods restored the child's rights, but Ra stormed out of the assembly, murmuring angrily. And thus the gods were divided in number and power, and there was no end in sight for the dispute. Then Isis, using her wiles caused Seth to give a speech in which he ended up undermining his own claim to the throne, and because of that error Seth was removed from the lands to which he had laid claim. Ra however, then demanded a new trial where all these issues could finally be decided.

Each one now transformed into a mighty hippopotamus and began to fight anew. From the water's edge, Isis loosed a harpoon that by mistake hit Horus, who throwing himself upon his mother, tore off her head.²² As a replacement, the gods gave Isis the head of a cow and, entering the fray again, her harpoon finally hit Seth. Roaring, he left the waters. So a new trial was devised, one that would keep the other gods out of the conflict. They would both have to sail ships made of rock. Seth carved his from a rock and sank, while Horus simply displayed his. Everyone agreed that it conformed to the specifications since he had ingenuously made his out of wood covered in stucco. Horus sailed and claimed victory, but Seth, transforming once again into a hippopotamus, sank him. And then, alone on the beach, Horus was overcome by his righteous anger. He struck Seth with his mace and bound him hand and foot. Like this, he dragged him to the tribunal and the waiting gods. And it was only when faced with the threat of Seth being executed before the entire assembly that Ra agreed that Horus was right. Delighted, the gods crowned the child-falcon supreme lord. As Horus stepped on the neck of the vanquished, Seth, promising solemn obedience, proclaimed the battle ended and left for his desert kingdom, there to live forever among foreigners. Thoth wisely organized the new responsibilities and Horus helped Ra to destroy the treacherous serpent Apophis who until then had menaced Ra's radiant ship. With the blood of that ancient beast the skies are sometimes coloured red, and sailing in his celestial ship, Ra draws away from the eases the surge of waves that move towards the west.

The antimyth of Amenophis IV.²³

There was a kind and wise pharaoh who understood the origin of Ptah and the changing of his names. He reestablished the principles when he saw how certain men pretending to be the voice of the gods oppressed other men. One morning he saw how a vassal was tried in the temple for not paying tribute to the gods, that is for not paying the priests. And so he left Thebes for On²⁴ and there he asked the wisest theologians what true justice consisted of. This was their answer: "Amenhotep, your liver is good as are the intentions that arise from it, and the kindest truth will bring evil upon you and upon our people. As a man you will be the most just. As king you will be the ruin... but your example will not be forgotten and many centuries after you are gone, what is seen as madness today (soon) will be recognized." Returning to Thebes he looked at his wife as one studies the dawn, he saw her beauty and for her and for his people he sang a beautiful hymn. The poet's piety made Nefertiti weep; she knew his glory and his tragic future. In a faltering voice she acclaimed him as the true son of the Sun. "Akhenaton!", she said, and then fell silent. In that moment, accepting the just but impossible his destiny came into play. So for a moment a world bearing the the weight of millennia tottered; this was the rebellion of Akenaton and the brief respite of the children of the Nile. Thus was overturned the power of those who made the gods speak, not with the gods intentions but with their own.

Amenhotep launched the struggle against the bureaucrats and priests that dominated the empire and the lords of the Upper Nile allied themselves with the ranks of the persecuted. The people began occupying positions that had been previously forbidden to them and reclaiming power that had been taken from them. The granaries were opened and goods were distributed but the enemies of the new world took up arms and raised the spectre of hunger. With the death of Akhenaten they scattered all his deeds to the wind – they wanted to wipe out his memory forever. Aton, however, preserved his word.

This was the poem that started the fire...²⁵

The whole earth surrenders to your work... likewise every road opens at your rising. You make the offspring take form in women, and create the seed in men. You make the son live in the womb of his mother, soothing him so that he crieth not; you art a nurse in the womb, giving the breath of life to that which you have created. When he drops from the womb on the day of his birth, he opens his mouth to speak and from you he recieves his sustenance. You give breath to the young bird in the egg. You help him so that he may crack the shell, newborn he chirps and walks on his two feet. How many are your works! Your face is unknown, oh only god outside of whom none exists. When you were alone you created the Earth as you desired with men, and beasts and every forest animal, and all that is on the earth and all that walk on their feet, and all that are in the sky and all that fly on their wings. And the foreign lands of Syria and Nubia and the land of Egypt. You have set each man in his place, you have provided their necessities; provided each one with their bread, and measured the duration of their lives. You have made us different from the foriegn people; their tongues are different in the words they speak, and likewise their characters and their skins; you have differentiated the foreign towns. And you have made the Nile in the Tuat and you bring it where you will so as to give life to the people, to your creation. O you, lord of all of them, you toil for them, oh, Aten of the day, great in dignity! And all the foreign and distant countries, you also bring them life. You have set a Nile in the heavens that descends for them and that like a sea makes waves on the mounts and bathes their lands and their fields. How perfect is your council. Oh lord of eternity. The Nile in the heavens is your gift to those who dwell in foreign lands, and for all the creatures of the desert that go upon their feet. But the Nile comes from

the Tuat for the land of Egypt. It is your rays that nourish every plant when you [esplendes] they live and grow for you. You rise up in your splendor and they live and grow for you. You make the seasons so that everything you have created may develop; the winter so that they may refresh themselves, the summer so they may taste you. You have made the distant sky so you might shine there and gaze down upon everything, you, alone that shine in your form of living Atón, rising, shining, departing and returning. You, alone take on millions of forms: cities, towns, fields, roads, rivers, every eye sees you before it. You are Aten of the day. Even when you depart and each eye you have created sleeps and no longer sees you, and no longer sees that which you have created still you are in my heart. The earth is your creation and it lays in your hand. If you shine she lives and if you set she dies. Life is only the duration that you set, for life is in you.

IV. HEBREW MYTHS

The tree of Knowledge and the tree of Life.

"...Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food; and in the midst of the garden, he set the tree of life and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil... And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall certainly die."¹

And so it was that Adam and Eve lived in Eden, where a river flowed out to water the garden, and from there it divided into four streams. The name of the stream that flowed around the land of Havila where there is gold, was Pishon. The second one, which encircled the land of Cush was Gihon. The name of the third, hidden and shaded, that flowed to the east of Assyria, was Hiddekel and the fourth of good and murmuring words, was Euphrates. And Eden overflowed with plants and animals, and our parents were the namers of all the living things there. But how could they give a name to the tree of life nor that of the knowledge of good and evil if they did not know them, if they did not even approach them? So it was that they yearned for the knowledge that they did not have and did not even know how to attain.

One night, disturbed by this question, Eve fell asleep and sleeping she dreamed. In her dream, she saw the tree of knowledge shining in the darkness. As she approached the tree there suddenly appeared before her a fearless winged figure. Though beautiful to look upon, in the darkness she could not see its face—perhaps it was that of Adam. Its dew dampened hair exhaled a fragrance that filled one with love. And Eve wanted to see. The figure gesturing toward the tree, said: "Oh beautiful plant heavy with fruit! Is there no one who will lighten your burden and taste your sweetness? Is knowledge so scorned? Is it envy or perhaps an unjust prohibition that forbids your being touched? Let him forbid it who will! No longer will anyone deprive me of what you offer. If not for this, why are you here?" Having spoken, it did not hesitate any longer, but with trembling hand plucked the fruit and tasted it.

In her dream the audacity of the winged figure left Eve frozen with a glacial horror, but immediately it exclaimed: "Oh divine fruit, you alone are sweet, and so much sweeter plucked in this way; forbidden, apparently set aside for the gods alone and yet being capable of converting men into gods! And why should they not be so? Good is increased the more it is shared, and in this its author, far from losing, acquires more praise. Approach fortunate creature, beautiful and angelic Eve; share this fruit with me!"²

Eve awoke in a start and recounted her dream to her companion. Adam then asked himself: "Does not God speak through dreams? If during the day he prohibits and by night he invites, how with my meagre knowledge shall I know to which incitement I should respond? We should acquire this knowledge so as to direct our destinies since God Jehovah created us but did not say how we should make our own selves." Then he told Eve his plan to take the fruit and run with it to the tree of life in order to become immune to the poison of knowledge. So it was that they waited until the God Jehovah strolled through the garden in the cool of the afternoon and when he had passed by they went to the tree. Seeing a snake moving through the branches towards the fruit, they thought that its venom must derive from that food. And because of that they doubted and while they doubted, time passed and the God Jehovah began his return to the garden.

Then, they thought they heard the snake whispering: "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."³ The snake was not lying, but wanted to stop them from eating from the other tree, the tree of life.⁴ 4) As it was already very late, Adam and Eve tasted the fruit and the eyes of both of them were opened, but when they wanted to reach the tree of immortality, the God Jehovah blocked the way, making it impossible for them to fulfill their plan.

Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and what if he now reaches out his hand and takes also from the tree of life, eats, and lives forever? Therefore the Lord God drove him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He cast out the man; and to the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning so as to guard the way to the tree of life."⁵

Adam and Eve left Eden but their gaze was always turned toward Paradise, whose presence was only revealed by the smoke of the sword of fire during the day and its radiance during the night. And they did not return because they could not, but, because they believed it pleased him they began to offer the God Jehovah sacrifices of fire and smoke. And with time many peoples came to think that the gods liked the high mountains and the volcanoes because these are the bridges between the Earth and the Heavens. And so when the time came, it was from the fire, from the mountain, that the God Jehovah delivered the Law for which humankind searched so that they might sort out their Destiny.⁶

Abraham and obedience.

Many generations passed from the time of the patriarchs to that of the Flood. And it was after the deluge that Jehovah set the rainbow in the sky to seal his pact with men that all seed would continue to multiply. And still later Terah took his son Abram and his daughter-in-law Sarai from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan. Then, Abram and Sarai went down to Egypt but after a time they returned to Hebron. The livestock and goods of Abram had grown but his heart was filled with sadness because at his age he still had no offspring.

Abram was already old when he conceived a child with his servant Hagar. But his wife Sarai and Hagar had a falling out and Hagar left for the desert taking with her the cause of her affliction. Then, an angel appeared and told her: "You have conceived and upon giving birth you will name your son Ismael because Jehovah has heard your prayers. Ismael, therefore, will mean 'God hears' and his descendants will be many and his people will live in the deserts worshipping God not by what the eye sees, but rather by what the ear hears. And thus they will pray to God and God will hear them." Much later Sarai in her old age finally became pregnant, and although Abram was father of all of them and cared for them all as his own children Sarai's descendants and those of Hagar continued the dispute that had begun with their mothers

Then God said: "From now on your name will not be Abram but Abraham, because you will be father of a multitude and Sarai will be named Sarah, like a princess of nations. As for your son with Sarah, you will name him Isaac." There came a time when God put Abraham to the test. "Abraham!" He called to him. And Abraham replied, "Here I am." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering on one of the hills that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took with him two of his men with and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the sacrifice, and set out to the place of which God had spoken. On the third day

Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to his men, "Stay here with the ass; while I and the boy will go over there to worship and then we will return to you." Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on the shoulder of his son Isaac, he himself carried the fire and the knife, then the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "What is it my son?" He said, "We have both the fire and the wood, but where is the young animal for the sacrifice?" Abraham said, "God will provide himself with a young creature for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son; but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. And so it was that Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide".⁷

Perhaps the anguish of this terrible test remained present in Abraham's heart until his death. And thus, again and again, he told himself: "Jehovah repudiates human sacrifice and, even more, the sacrifice of one's own son. If he orders a sacrifice I must not obey it because it would mean disobeying his prohibition. But to reject what he commands is also to sin against him. Must I obey something that my god rejects? Yes, if he demands it. But my dull-witted reason struggles moreover with the heart of an old man who loves that impossible thing that Jehovah gave him of so late in life. Is this test the consequence of the laughter that filled me when I was told that my son would be born?⁸ Is it not the laughter that Sarah stifled when she heard that prophecy?⁹ For some reason Jehovah gave the name 'Isaac' which means 'laughter'. My wife and I were already old when we were told that we would have this child and we could not believe that such a thing was possible. Does Jehovah play with his creatures as a child plays with sand? Or is it that, knowing his anger and his punishment, we overlook the fact that he also tests and teaches us with divine mockery?"¹⁰

The man who fought against a god.¹¹

The same night rose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the gorge, and with them everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him in the hollow of his thigh as he wrestled with him, so that Jacob's hip was dislocated. Then the man said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to Jacob, "What is your name?" And he answered, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel¹² for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "pray tell me your name." But he replied, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel¹³, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is spared." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.¹⁴ Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew that runs in the hollow of the thigh, because he had struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.¹⁵

Moses and the divine Law.¹⁶

And so it happened that long ago, the children of Israel settled in Egypt and there they grew in number and power. Joyfully they celebrated the changes introduced by a wise pharaoh who wanted equality for all peoples, but the good king died in the midst of a great uproar that his enemies had unleashed. Now instead of their peaceful existence the Israelites found persecution and humiliation. When the children of Israel decided to leave those lands, the new pharaoh would not allow it. In those dark years, many Egyptians who were loyal to the just king were assassinated, others were imprisoned or condemned to a life of labor in the quarries. It so happened that among these was a youth who, as a child, had been rescued from the waters of the Nile by the women of the good pharaoh. He had been educated in the court, and though he learned the language of Israel he always spoke it with difficulty.

Moses, "he who was rescued from the waters", fled from the quarry and took refuge in the house of a priest in the land of Midian. The priest was also one of those persecuted because of his loyalty to the just king and so he received Moses who had sought refuge there. When Moses told him the story of his rescue from the waters he reflected that it resembled very much the legends of Osiris and Sargon (who also was thus saved in Babylon, as was related by those who came with Abraham from Ur of Chaldea). It was here that Moses took as his wife the daughter of the priest. And, one day, while herding the sheep of his father-in-law, he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flames of a burning bush; he looked and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed by the fire. Then Moses said to himself, "I must turn aside and go to look at this wonderful sight, and see why the bush is not burned up?" When the Lord saw that Moses had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And Moses answered, "Here I am." Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for you are standing on holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your forefathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am that I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, *I am* has sent me to you." And God said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations."¹⁷

And so Moses returned to Egypt and he was met by Aaron of the priestly tribe of Levi, who had already had dreams in which Moses received the divine mandate. Aaron helped Moses to spread the word among the Israelites and, reaching the pharaoh, he ordered him saying: "Let my people leave Egypt." But this the Pharaoh was reluctant to do, and so Aaron, who was a priest, performed great wonders with his staff before the eyes of all those assembled there. Then Pharaoh called on his sages and priests and they also showed their power, and Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then, Jehovah, through Moses and Aaron, changed the water of the river to blood and the fish died and the frogs also left the river and invaded

everything, but Pharaoh did not heed these signs. And so, plagues of lice and, flies, cattle plagues and plagues of ulcers, plagues of hail and locusts all these battered man and beast. But Pharaoh did not want to free the children of Israel, saying that the river on occasion produced disasters of this kind when in torrential flood it dragged red mud down from the the upper Nile. torrent of the river that was flooding and dragging the red mud of the upper Nile. Then a great darkness descended and remained for three days. But the sages of the Pharaoh explained that it was but clouds of water rising from the flooded river and were darkening the sky...

So it was that Jehovah ordered Moses to warn Pharaoh that if he did not free the people of Israel the firstborn of Egypt would die. But Pharaoh did not listen and that night the angel of the Lord killed the children of the Egyptians. The Israelites had marked their doors with the blood of the paschal lamb as a sign to protect them from the angel of death, and from then on they called that month the first month of the year. Only then did Pharaoh allowed the people of Israel, and all the persecuted Egyptians, to leave. The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides their dependants. And with them also went a large company of every kind of people...¹⁸

The people crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, because in the area where Amenhotep had ordered a canal the waters were held back both to the right and to the left. It was here that Pharaoh dispatched his soldiers to destroy those who were fleeing, but the army and the heavy chariots all fell. And so the persecutors were killed by the water that came upon them. Once more Jehovah had saved Moses from the waters and with him saved the multitude that had gone out from Egypt.¹⁹

And the bitter waters²⁰ were sweetened by the tree that Moses put in them. And Jehovah gave the people What-is-this to eat.²¹ And with that the people were sustained and did not die in the desert, and in this way they reached sacred Mount Sinai.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain shook with great shaking. As the blast of the trumpet grew ever louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in a peal of thunder. Then the Lord descended upon the top of Mount Sinai, and the Lord summoned Moses to the mountain-top, and Moses went up.²²

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance."²³

And so, God Jehovah gave men the Law that they had sought since the time of their first fathers. On two stone tablets God engraved the ten Commandments that men had to observe in order to draw near to him. And he also gave them laws that would serve to shape them over the course of their History. Thus did Moses guide Israel to the land promised by the Lord. And from the fields of Moab he climbed Mount Nebo, to the summit of the Pisga, opposite Jericho. And then Moses saw. And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over into it.." Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows his burial place to this day...²⁴

Never since has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to work in the

land of Egypt, against Pharoah and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.²⁵

V. CHINESE MYTHS

The Central Void...¹

Emptiness always was, an emptiness that can never be filled. Emptiness that was previous to the world. The Tao is the emptiness that existed before the gods²

Thirty spokes converge towards the hub of one wheel, but it is the void in the centre that makes the wheel useful.³ Clay is molded to make a pot, but it is the space that does not contain clay that makes it useful. We make doors and windows in a house, but it is the empty space that makes the room useful. And so, things come from existence but their utility comes non-existence.

All was void and Pangu slept within that which was united, that which was called "infinite depth".⁴ And then he awoke. Immediately he broke the egg that enclosed him with his axe, shattering it into myriad pieces. The lightest and heaviest pieces flew off in different directions. To impede their rejoining, Pangu placed himself in the empty centre, like a column that gave balance to all creation, he made solid the earth and the sky. Later he rested and once again fell asleep until his body had given forth all the numerous beings.⁵ From one eye came the sun and from the other the moon. From his blood rivers and lakes were formed, and animals from his skin, while his hair became the plants and his bones the minerals.

In those earliest times, gigantic and monstrous gods lived on earth. The upper half of the god mother Nüwa was very beautiful but her lower half was like that of a dragon. After travelling and visited every place she finally discovered that there were no beings more beautiful or intelligent than the giants. And so she went to the Yellow River where she molded the first human beings out of clay. She made them similar to herself but instead of the tail of a dragon she gave them legs so that they would walk erect. Finding them amusing, she decided to make many. To do this she took a bullrush and let drops of mud fall from it. Upon touching the ground these drops became women and men. In this way, when they began to reproduce on their own, the celestial mother turned to creating other beings.

When Fu Shi, the goddesses' companion, saw that the humans could learn he taught them to make fire by rubbing sticks together. Then he gave them rope and showed them how to protect themselves from hunger and inclement weather. Finally, he gave them the art of the hexagrams which he called I Ching. This became known in time as the Book of Transformations and means of divination.

One day it happened that the immortals began to argue amongst themselves until they began a war that put the whole Universe in danger. Floods and catastrophes ravaged the earth until at last, the god of fire prevailed over the waters. Still the giants wanted to fight against the power of the eternal, but the gods, in their unspeakable anger, cut off their heads, and cast them into the dark abysses.

***The Dragon and the Phoenix.*⁶**

When the waters were not yet controlled and the overflowing rivers were inundating the fields, the mother goddess gave birth to beneficent offspring who began to give order to the chaos of the times. The brilliant dragons sailed through the waters and the sky as they brought under control, the rivers, and lakes, the sea and the clouds. On high they roared, as with tiger paw and eagle talon they tore the curtains that crackled before the enormous raging

winds, freeing the rains. They gave the rivers their courses, contained the lakes and gave depths to the seas. They made the caverns from which water gushes forth and they made the subterranean channels through which the water flows over great distances to later spring suddenly to the surface, unhindered by the scorching sun. They traced the lines that run through the mountains, and that allow the energy of the earth to flow balancing the health of that gigantic body. And more often than not they had to struggle with problems caused by gods and men, busy with their irresponsible strivings. Smoke would pour out from between their jaws, a life-giving and humid mist – a creator of unreal worlds. With their scaly serpentine bodies they would cut through the storms and divide the typhoons. Against their powerful horns, and their sharp teeth, no obstacle could endure, no entanglement* could stand. And they were much given to appearing to the mortals. Sometimes in dreams, sometimes in grottos, sometimes at the shores of lakes—precisely those places where it was their custom to hide their crystal dwellings, whose beautiful gardens were adorned with sparkling fruits and the most precious stones.

Immortal Long, the celestial dragon, always placed his activity (his Yang) at the service of the Tao and the Tao recognized this, allowing him to be in all things, from the largest to the smallest, from the great universe to the least particle. Everything that has lived has lived thanks to Long. Nothing has remained immutable save the unnameable Tao; even the Tao silent and nameable is transformed thanks to the activity of Long. And not even those who believe in Heaven and Hell can assure their permanence.⁷

But Long loves Feng, the Phoenix bird who concentrates the seed of things, who contracts that which Long extends. And when Long and Feng are balanced, the Tao shines like a pearl bathed in the purest light. Long does not struggle against Feng, because they love each other; they search for each other making the pearl shine. Because of this, the sages arrange their lives according to the balance between the Dragon and the Phoenix – the images of the sacred principles of the Yang and the Yin. The wise position themselves in the empty place searching for equilibrium. The wise understand that non-action generates action and the action generates non-action. The Tao marks the rhythm and all follow it: the beating hearts of all living things and the waters of the sea, the day and the night, the winter and the summer.

At the end of this age, when the universe will have arrived to its greatest extension, it will contract once again like a falling stone. Everything, even time, will invert, returning to the beginning. The Dragon and the Phoenix will meet again. The Yang and the Yin will interpenetrate; so great will be their attraction that they will absorb everything into the empty seed of the Tao. The Sky above, the earth below; with this the creative and the receptive are determined... with this the changes and transformations are revealed.⁸

But no one can really know how things have been nor how they will be, and if someone did know they could not explain it.

So it is that: To know that you do not know is best; he pretends to know when he does not have an infirm mind. He who recognizes an infirm mind as infirm does not have an infirm mind. The mind of the wise is not infirm mind because they recognize the infirm mind as the infirm mind.⁹

VI. INDIAN MYTHS.

Fire, Torment and Exaltation¹

These are the gods that took so many different forms. The Fire² and the Storm³ gave rise to the creation, but they are nothing without the Exaltation⁴ that inspires to the word of the poet.

Oh Agni, you who gather the gods together⁵, son of two mothers, you who present your many forms to humankind⁶, protect us from those who want to kill us. Oh you, the most useful of the gods⁷, receive our praise you whose words are honey for us⁸. Even Gotama exalts you⁹ who are the fire that illuminates the forests and that gives light in the night, you that roam like a free animal creature that knows no shepherd. You of the blackened face who gives savor to the earth.¹⁰

I proclaim the feats of Indra, lord of the lightning. Slaying the first of the serpents you annihilated the actions of the demons and gave birth to the sun, to the sky, to the dawn. Slaying Vrta, hurling your thunderbolt into his back, he fell like a slaughtered ox, he went bellowing to the ocean and from his orifices was liberated the waters they held; because their original lord and guardian the serpent was no more.¹¹ I invoke Indra he who drinks of Soma, I invoke you so I may prosper in the combat, so I may destroy my enemy and take his goods as booty.¹² I invoke Indra, the storm is the sign of his fury. In you we place our hope, oh juice of the Soma. The daughter of the sun purifies the Soma that flows through the filter formed from the hair of sheep and then the cows whose milk prepares him so that Indra may be intoxicated and strike his enemies, so that he may dispense his generosity.¹³ Soma, lord of the gods who leaps in the vessels through the filters of lambs hair, and the friends jump and shout in their joy and in their Exaltation.¹⁴ Oh red God, we sweeten you, mixing you with milk. The eagle takes you and obtains the power of Indra. You are our aid¹⁵ when your forces awaken like the roaring river¹⁶ you are the most active. Bestow up on the gifts of heaven and of the earth. Oh juice of Soma.¹⁷

Time and the gods.

And so the Canticle of creation tells us: there was neither existence nor non-existence, that bottomless breathed by its own nature. Previous to the gods, he formed everything or perhaps not, perhaps he knows everything but perhaps not.¹⁸ But gods and men have been created and they have their time. Yes, they have their time.

One day of the gods is equal to one year of the mortals. And so one year of the gods is the same as 360 mortal years. Now then, there exist four Ages (Yugas) that form one Great Age (Mahayuga) of 12,000 divine years, corresponding to 4,320,000 mortal years. And so, one thousand of these Great Ages (Kalpa) last 4,320,000 ordinary years or, simply, one day of Brahma. But at the end of the day, the god sleeps and the Universe collapses. Brahma sleeps upon his great serpent, and everything is absorbed back into him. Worlds fall out of orbit and crash into each other; all land liquefies, all liquid evaporates, all vapor is converted to energy and this energy falls within the power of the night of Brahma. And when the god awakens the great lotus opens, light escapes from it and a new day begins. On that day, 14 *beats (Manvantaras) follow one another and in them the gods and worlds are created; fish;

birds; insects; animals and men. Around 71 series of Great Ages follow one another for every 14 beats. Each beat, then, comprises 852,000 divine years or 306,790,000 mortal years, in which divine energy spreads out from its center. And so, the history of humanity today finds itself in a rhythm and within one beat in one of the 71 series of Great Ages. As each Great Age is divided into 4 unequal Ages, it happens that in the first (Krita Yuga) 4,800 divine years or 1,728,000 ordinary years pass; in the second (Treta Yuga), 3,600 or 1,296,000; in the third (Dvapara Yuga), 2,400 or 864,000, and in the fourth (Kali Yuga), 1,200 or 432,000. Consequently, in this entire cycle, the human being must be 4,320,000 years old. But since human beings already find themselves in the Fourth Age, at least 3,888,000 of its years must have already passed since its creation. All beings decay as they move farther from the original creation and without a doubt the human being also follows this tendency.

In the Age of Krita justice is eternal. In that age, the most excellent of the Yugas, everything has already been done (Krita) and nothing is left undone. Duties are not left aside and morality does not decline. Later, with the passage of time, this Yuga falls to a lesser state. In that age there were no gods; there was no buying or selling, no effort needed to be made. The fruit of the earth was obtained simply by desire, both justice and the indifference to the world prevailed. Illness did not exist, neither did the diminishing of the sensory organs with the passing of years; malice did not exist, nor weeping, nor pride nor deceit; neither arguments, hatred, cruelty, fear, affliction, jealousy or envy. In such a way that the supreme Brahma was the transcendental support of these perfect beings. In that era all humans were alike in the object of their faith and in their knowledge. Only one formula (mantra) was used and only one rite. There was only one Veda. But in the following age, in the Treta Yuga, sacrifices began. Justice decreased by one-quarter. Men adhered to the truth and were dedicated to a strict dependence on ceremonies. Sacrifices prevailed, along with the sacred arts and a great variety of rites. People actions depended on tangible ends; now they sought recompense for the rites and for their charity. Austerity and simple generosity no longer mattered. Later still, in the Dvapara Yuga, justice diminished by two quarters. The Vedas quadrupled. Some studied four Vedas, others three, others two and others absolutely none. The writings having been divided in this way, the ceremonies were celebrated in very diverse ways. The people who practiced austerity and charity were filled with passion. Due to the ignorance of the one Veda, the Vedas multiplied. And with the decline of the good few remained loyal to truth. When mankind fell away from the truth destiny brought them attack by many illnesses, desires and calamities, and because of this they suffered many afflictions and were motivated to practice austerity. Others offered sacrifices pursuing heavens blessings and their own pleasures. In this way, through their own iniquity, mankind declined. And in the Kali Yuga, only one quarter part of justice remained. In this dark age, rituals and sacrifices stopped. Many calamities prevailed, illnesses, hardships, and sins like anger. Misery, anxiety, hunger and fear spread. The practices generated by the degradation of the Yugas frustrated humankind's intentions. This is the Kali Yuga that has been in existence to these past centuries.¹⁹

The trifle that is human history would have no meaning if Brahma was not in it. What are the 71 series of Mahayugas in which the human being is created and destroyed but just one of the 14 Manvantaras, and what are all these but one Kalpa, just one day of Brahma? In countless reincarnations, human essence goes on becoming purified. Responding to the universal law of Karma, regressing and advancing according to its actions, it goes on preparing its next life. But in the most profound depths of each human being lies Atman. And

so, when they reach this Atman they discover that they are Brahma. However, this disconcerting equivalence will only become clear on the day in which, renouncing happy contemplation, the compassion of the liberated living-being reaches men, known to the centuries as the Illuminated.²⁰

The word Om calls to the glory of Brahma²¹ who, cause of limitless time and space, is variable in form and invariable in substance. Brahma, eternally adored.²²

The forms of beauty and horror²³.

Why should the gods bestow their gifts to the supplications of insignificant mortals? Why could such great beings be interested in the outcome of such small matters, in quarrels and tribulations, in hopes and devotions? Could it be that such enormous powers are assigned to a small region of the unfathomable Universe; could it be that in every point where a star shines, there dance other gods of whose destinies we have never known? However that may be, the nearest gods walk among us, transformed so that we may see them. Incarnated as mortals, in a thousand avatars they traverse existence. The ancient fathers said that thanks to the oblations and our right actions the gods increase their power. This explains that often we receive favours from them and that every so often they take part in a just cause as a compensation for the power that we give them. On the other hand, the dark demons wish to grow by feeding on the twisted nature of things and, growing, they hope to darken the sky itself. The great powers also help the small, created luminously, because even in the small its very essence exists. It is not strange that a medicinal drink, practically unseen by the eye, can overthrow us if there is poison in it, or can lift us up if there is healing in it. The same thing happens with the medicinal drink of human actions offered to the kindly gods.

But there have been times when the eyes have been able to see, if such a thing can really be seen with the eyes of the body, the great god of all. This is how he appeared before Arjuna²⁴ in his august and supreme form...

The Divinity came then with infinites heads swarming with eyes and mouths, covered in resplendent vestments and armed with all the divine weapons. For a moment Arjuna was lost in contemplation of the numerous limbs of the Cosmos. He was like an explosion of colors so brilliant they were painful, or an immense roar that thundered through space. But in that brief instant the Lord was shown in his infinite diversity, a diversity that extended even to the most inconceivable and monstrous forms. All the powers of the world were crushed in his ferocious jaws, as with inconceivable speed all existence separated from itself and was dissolved. Finally, frightened Arjuna succeeded in thinking (his words and muscles had been slow to respond to his will), and he began to call out invoke: "Lord show yourself in a more familiar form. Let me see you crowned, holding your mace and discus. Once again assume your four-armed form and come, my lord Krishna with the attractive human figure, allow my heart to beat again and my reason to return²⁵." (25)

The old book *Skanda Purana* tells of a demon named Durg who, having made sacrifices to appease Brahma, received his blessing. With this power, he ousted the gods from the heavens and, exiling them to the forests, obliged them to revere him, bowing their heads in his presence. Then he abolished the religious ceremonies and the gods, weakened by this, met to find a way out of this crisis in which they were trapped. Ganesha (son of Shiva and Parvati), the wise protector of human undertakings, shaking his elephant head, waved his four arms and suggested that it was absolutely necessary to reach his parents. To Hanuman the

monkey king, astute and rapid, conqueror of territories, was immediately given the task of traveling to the Himalayas to beseech the help of the celestial couple...

...there in the heights, they meditated in loving embrace, in harmony and peace. Hanuman explained why he had come and Shiva, moved to pity by the difficulties that beset the young gods, asked the delicate Parvati to deal with the problem.

Parvati calmed Hanuman and only then did she send Night to demand that the demon reestablish order in the worlds in her name. Overtaken by fury, Durg gave orders that Night was to be seized. But when he shouted the order, his fiery breath incinerated his own soldiers. Recovering, he dispatched his minions, but not before Night escaped and found refuge with her protector. In the deepest darkness, Durg, burning with anger, mounted his combat chariot. Ruddy and radiant his army of giants, winged horses, elephants and men stood out against the eternal snows of the Himalayas. With a horrendous clamour the impudent invaders set foot upon the sacred domain of Parvati who, with graceful movements brandished in her four arms the deadly weapons of the gods. The troops of the arrogant Durg let loose their arrows against the impeturable figure who could be seen standing far off in the Himalayas. So dense was the rain of darts that it seemed like a sheet of rain drops in the great storm. But she stopped the attack with her invisible shields. Splitting trees and mountains, the aggressors threw them at the goddess... until she responded! A terrifying whistle was heard as she threw her first weapon; the winged horses whinnied as they were carried away by the hurricane that accompanied Parvati's lance. Almost immediately she her spear tore off the arms of thousands of giants while various quadrupeds and their riders cracked to pieces with the terrible impact. Not only did the goddess repel all the arrows, stakes, maces and pikes that Durg threw but now their fragments destroyed the nearest invaders.

Then Durg took on the form of an enormous elephant and charged Parvati, but she caught the feet of the beast in her lasoo and then with her scimitar-like nails she cut him to pieces. From the spilled blood, a monstrous buffalo arose that immediately attacked her. But he ended up impaled on Parvati's trident. Badly wounded he reverted to his true form and tried to flee but the goddess lifted him in the air and when she hurled him to the ground the earth rumbled with the sound of thunder. Without hesitating, Parvati thrust her arm into the demon's jaws and pulled out his steaming viscera. Implacable, she crushed him in an embrace that made his blood gush forth and this she drank until there was none left. Finally, so that Durg would not be reborn she devoured his remains and, taking his bones in one hand she squeezed them with such force that they were, reduced to a powder that burst into flame. As she opened her fingers, the cold wind of the summits flew down and carried off a miniscule speck of ash as a memento. She received the offerings of the gods and quickly returned to her beloved Shiva. Most tender and beautiful, she took shelter with him in the softest music and in the most delicate radiance of immortality.

VII. PERSIAN MYTHS.

The clamour of Zarathustra¹.

Upon turning thirty Zarathustra abandoned his land and took himself to a faraway place.² There he lived in his cave for a long time. He eat only from a wheel of cheese that never got smaller, and he drank the pure water of the mountain. At night the fire spoke to him and so he came to understand the paths of the stars. During the day, the sun spoke to him and so he came to understand the meaning of light.³ Very early one morning the clamour of the beasts of the field reached his cave...Now since the cows and the herd animals have a soul, Zarathustra could listen to that great soul of Kine as he ask God for his blessings. Raising his lament like a great lowing, Kine said, "My soul suffers, Ahura Mazda⁴. Who did you create me for? In whose image was I modelled? Give me the good, save us from the onslaught of the tribes that drag cattle to the slaughter. I feel surrounded by hate, violence, the scourge of desolation, an audacious insolence and a furious pressure. Save my animals, oh Ahura Mazda, you who provide us with the green pastures!"

And so Zarathustra, from the mouth of his cave, looked out at the day and asked Ahura Mazda: "Let the Good Mind of Zarathustra guide those who till the earth so that it may produce good pastures and strengthen the herds; so that the cows may give milk and the milk cheese and the cheese nourish the men who labour; so that the plunderer never again brings ruin to the people and instead becomes the friend who learns to work and share with them. So I give thanks for your teachings and for the nourishment you have provided me with. I remember my first questions which I formulated with total candor back then and which in turn you in your benevolence, answered. And so it was that I asked you then: Who gave birth to everything? Who laid out the path of the Sun, the Moon and the stars?⁵ Who maintains the Earth from below and the clouds from above so they do not fall? Who made the waters, the winds, and the plants, who inspires our good thoughts,⁶ whou has created the dream and the delight. Who gave birth to the dawn, to the day and the night so that they might stand witness to our duty,⁷ who was it who created the Kine without which would our life be one of misery"?⁸

With infinite patience, The Lord of the Light, told me of Yima, the first father.⁹ So it was that he said: "I, Ahura Mazda spoke to him and asked him to meditate and take up my law. But Yima responded that he could not meditate, teach nor take up my law. Then I entrusted him with looking after my worlds so that they would remain fertile. I brought to him the weapons of victory and I made straight the path toward Mother Earth who carries both animals and men at her breast. On that new world livestock, animals and men multiplied because Yima had made Spenta Amaiti, The Mother Earth, fertile with his golden lance.¹⁰ And the people celebrated the vast empire of Mithra,¹¹ they fought with Indra¹² they did not give the purified Haoma to the impure,¹³ and they understood that to speak words of contempt to a pure man is the first sin." ¹⁴

"I asked and you have answered alll of my questions," said Zarathustra. "Since father Yima did not want to give wisdom, but rather care for and extend your dominions, it is time that I did what corresponds to your teaching."

Light and Darkness.

Each one of the two primordial spirits is independent in thoughts as in words and works.¹⁵ In the beginning they met so as to order the world setting the worst life, hell, for the wicked and the heavens for those of a better mental state.¹⁶ Each of the two spirits made their own Kingdom, one giving form to the habitation of error one and the other the to the habitation of justice. Ahura Mazda¹⁷ chose all those who, because of their kindness, pleased him, while the Spirit of Evil personified chose the demon-gods and all those who helped to soil human life.¹⁸ When the Deavas ally themselves with the Demon, and the final battle is unleashed,¹⁹ the Holy Mind will have won the Kingdom.²⁰ Of the first two spirits of the world, the kindest one said to the wicked: Neither our thoughts, nor our commandments, neither our intelligence, nor our beliefs, neither our works, nor our conscience, nor our souls agree on anything!"²¹

The Angels and the Saviour. End of the World, Resurrection and Judgment.

But now, in everything, the Light of Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and the Darkness of the Spirit of the Lie (Ahriman) are locked in struggle. And so, all beings have their good part and their impure part. Hence, it is the duty of the saint (in whom light predominates) to illuminate men, making darkness withdraw. But at the end of the world, evil will feign triumph to bring confusion to the mind. Good people will be persecuted and will have attributed to them all the faults of the wicked, and the wicked will appear most righteous. But this will be the time when Ohrmazd will send his son Saoshyant to save the world.²² He will be helped by the allied spirits of the Light – the angels and archangels – as the Dark will be aided by the hierarchies of demons. All will aligned in the final battle and then, in a Universal cataclysm, Ohrmazd will destroy Ahriman and thanks to the empire of Ohrmazd a new, pure world will arise. The dead will be resurrected, dressed in glorious bodies. The angels and the archangels will extend The Bridge of Judgement by which the just will cross over.²³ But the splendid and firm bridge will begin to close at the first steps of the reprobate and they will fall. The souls of those who died in sin will join those who served the rule of evil, with those who spoke falsehoods and with those of bad conscience. All the unjust souls will be welcome in the Mansion of the Lie²⁴ even as the souls of the just will come to live in the Mansion of Songs.

Zarathustra announced the reward of those who are apt for the cause, for those who can receive the gifts of the Good Mind that is inside each human being.²⁵

VIII. GRECO-ROMAN MYTHS.¹

The Struggle Between the Generations of Immortals.

From the union of eternal Uranus (Sky) and mother Gaia (Earth), were born the six titans who, with their sister titans, gave birth to a generation of gods. But it is with great Cronus (Time), the youngest titan, that everything began to move in that flow in which the following succeeds the previous. Before Cronus, time ran in jumps and starts in all directions: the past followed the future and, at times, every instant occurred without order. In reality, mortals can say nothing of what was before the beginning of things (and for this reason, some make Cronus the source of all that is thinkable).

The children grew angry with their parents because every time that a new brother was born, Uranus forced it to remain at Gaia's breast. So it came about that Gaia fashioned a sharp sickle and showing it to the children she laid out her plan. It was Cronos who accepted the instrument that his mother proffered and together they prepared an ambush. Then when Uranus, desirous of love came to lay with Gaia, their son came forth from the darkness and taking the genitals of his father cut them off and threw them behind him.²

Having overthrown his father as lord of the Universe, Cronus united with his sister Rhea and they began to have offspring. But as soon as she gave birth he would immediately devour the infant. In this way he hoped to insure that no descendant of his would ever reach maturity and force him from his place among the immortals. Rhea could do nothing to avoid the slaughter she asked for help from their parents, those who knew that it was to be the destiny of Cronus that he would be replaced in his power by one of his sons. In this way the Erinyes devoured³ by Cronus would be avenged and the chain of murders that keen minded Cronus had plotted would be broken⁴.

When Rhea was about to deliver her next child, her parents sent her to Crete and there in a cave on a secret mount gave birth to great Zeus. Wrapped him in swaddling cloths she presented him to his father Cronus to be devoured. In reality she had taken a rock and disguised it to resemble the infant. The result was that in the end Cronus ended up vomiting it up along with the children he had previously swallowed. Eventually, Zeus was grown enough to take over his father taking on his attributes. In this way the glorious Zeus began follow his Destiny. A destiny that would make him lord among the immortals and so that they would remember the viscidities of their birth, he mounted the rock used in this deceit in a cleft below Parnassus⁵.

The fated war arose between Zeus, his brothers, and their allies on one hand and Cronus and the Titans on the other. Zeus demonstrated his force descending from sacred Mount Olympus with his lightning bolts while the skies resounded with thunder and the swirling lightning made the sacred flame roil all around⁶. The earth crackled with fire, the ocean waters boiled and a burning cloud of smoke enveloped the Titans while the brilliance of the lightning stole whatever vision they had left⁷. The great war continued until the gods taking the Titans with their bare hands⁸ bound them with chains and cast them into a dark and dank place in the depths of the mountains, there to confine them in the great earth⁹.

Prometheus and the Awakening of the Mortals.

I saved the mortals from the Flood when I ordered Deucalion and Pyrrha to construct a boat. When the ship gently came to ground in the mountains of Thessaly I taught them how what was lost could be reestablished. Friend of knowledge and peace, I am at the verge of achieving my objective; for this reason I have gifted mortals with wisdom. Often this very knowledge is veiled by the dreams of domination that the gods inspire in men so that they lose themselves, returning them to the dark times from which I rescued them. But have faith in the advance! And when the sides face off before each other, repeat with me these bitter words that are no less true for their vulgar nature: "Idiot mortal, make your war, destroy the fields and the cities. Violate the temples, and the tombs, torture the vanquished. And in this way you prepare your own destruction!"¹⁰ May this warning serve for something.

Like Zeus, I Prometheus, am a son of Titans. He has never looked favourably on me since I refused to take sides in the war between the Titans and the gods. And so it was. The gods won out, not because the Titans were evil but because, Zeus was both haughtier and more cunning than they. After the Olympians, had finally become lords of the world, they were unwilling to abandon their tyrannical power and, seeing future enemies in the fragile humans they cruelly attacked both their bodies and their minds. They smothered them with superstition and shame so that until today the lies of that tribe of immortals oppressors is respected still.

Who but I gave the knowledge to the humans; these creatures who, for century after century looked but did not see, just as they listened but did not hear? They were like ghosts in a dream. Everything about them was muddled. Fearing the light, they lived in deep caverns. They knew nothing about how to make shelter from brick, or wood; nor did they understand the succession of the seasons, nor the rising and setting of the stars. Everything they did was done without reason until I taught them how to yoke the beasts, to cultivate and harvest, to write numbers and letters and to construct the chariots that plow the waters.¹¹

Having no knowledge the human being could not make choices. Until I taught them they had neither medicine, nor metals, I taught them everything; it was from me that they gained all the arts¹². No doubt there are still some who will nonetheless pay homage to the Olympians, still believing their false history...a history that goes like this:

"While the gods and the humans were locked in dispute, Prometheus tricked Zeus into accepting the bones and fat of the sacrifice, leaving the the best parts for the people. In the face of this the Olympians said "Prometheus son of Iapetus¹³ how unequally the portions have been distributed! The tribes of man commemorates the fact every time they burn offerings of animal's bones covered in smoking fat for the gods. In order to avoid similar deceptions that might benefit Prometheus's friends and harm the Olympians Zeus declared that the kindling* would no longer have the force to produce fire.

Offending once again clever Prometheus mocked the sacred plan by stealing the eternal flame and giving it to mankind hidden inside a hollow branch. Seeing the flames in the distance and understanding what it meant Thundering Zeus was filled with wrath. For this, and so all would know that it is not possible to *transgress the divine will he chained wicked Prometheus to a column fixed to a rock. So, in spite of all his wisdom the punishment the son of Iapetus¹⁴ earned was to be bound to the column, to which every day an eagle would come and devour his liver which would then regenerate during the night"¹⁵.

Whatever the false histories may say, it is the fact is that it was a human, Heracles, whose arrow dealt with the ravenous eagle. When Zeus became aware of the fact he resigned himself to my being burdened with a piece of the chain and the rock that I pulled up with the help of the hero. Foolishly, Zeus, didn't care to listen to what I had in mind for our mutual benefit. Only, when I warned him about danger lurking in the future did he reluctantly trade me my liberty for the the advice that he needed. And still obstinate, he thought that my time was running out since immortality was never granted to me. But Chiron, the good friend and teacher of humans, exchanged my fate and his, choosing to descend to Hades and leaving me with eternity in my grasp. Now with hope always reborn through penury and fatigue, I attract humans so that they might also gain liberty and their immortal destiny.

Demeter and Persephone. Death and resurrection of nature.¹⁶

To Demeter I sing, and to her daughter Persephone who was abducted when she went the fields to gather flowers. One hundred buds sprouted from a single root when she decided to grasp the branch but in that moment the earth itself resounded as it split apart and spat forth the lord of Hades and his black steeds. Against her will the maiden was carried to Hades by its subterranean king.

No witness heard or saw the deed. For nine days Demeter did not partake of ambrosia but the all seeing Sun told the grieving mother everything that had occurred: "No mortal is guilty of what it happened, only Zeus is responsible for it all because he has given Hades your daughter Persephone as gift. So, oh goddess, cease your crying; a son-in-law like Hades is not without worth, is he not brother of generous Zeus." Burning with fury the goddess left the heavenly agora and vast Olympus. Disguising her features, making herself ugly so as to not be recognized she descended to the cities and the fields of the men. But in her state the blessings that Demeter distributes remained restricted within her and so no seed would germinate nor plant give forth fruit.

Zeus sent for the offended goddess; but she ignored his summons seeking instead to be reunited with their daughter. So the father of the gods sent Hermes, he of the winged feet, to parley with infernal Hades and Hermes said: "Hades, king of the dead, Zeus has sent me to bring forth Persephone from your domain so her mother may see her. And seeing her she may set aside her fury, which has stopped the seeds from germinating, and so threatens to be the end the fragile race of man. " Persephone leapt for joy when Hades recommended the point from whence she might depart. But Hades fed her the mysterious seeds of the pomegranate so that she should return to their dark domain. Then Hades gave his chariot to Hermes who, accompanied by Persephone, began the return voyage.

The reunion of mother and daughter moved the gods and far-seeing Zeus sent mother Rhea to them, and in their meeting she said to Demeter:

"Come, my child, for thundering Zeus has summoned you to the family of the gods, and has promised to give you whatever honors you choose among the immortals. But he has said that your daughter must during the course of the year spend a third of her time in the kingdom of the shadows, but the other two seasons she will spend with you and the other immortals. So he has said it shall and so he has confirmed it with a nod of his head. Now come, my daughter, be persuaded, and do not continue to be angry but quickly make the plants grow that men may live." Demeter obeyed and immediately caused flower and fruit to blossom throughout nature.

And she explained that out of respect for the gods there are mysteries that should neither be neglected nor examined. Blissful are those who have contemplated these mysteries because the uninitiated have no part in this and after dying, they do not share the luck of seeing in the gloomy darkness!

Dionysus, the divine madness.

None of us know anything at all; not even whether we know or do not know, nor if we know that we know or that we do not know; nor if in total there is something or there isn't. Because things are what we believe of them.¹⁷ Therefore, reason should move aside and open another horizon for the gods to speak.

Boisterous* Dionysos I sing, crowned in Ivy and laurel son of Zeus and Semele, scion* of the tribe of immortals. Raised by the nymphs of the forest, he fills the dark spaces with a great din, hail Dionysos, he of the many clusters*¹⁸.

As Semele doubted that her lover was Zeus himself, she asked that he appear in all his power. When the Olympian fulfilled her wish, the apparition was so great and terrible that she was struck by lightning and died. Her unborn son was torn from her womb by the god, but as it had not had sufficient gestation time, Zeus cut open his own thigh and, inserting him within it, sewed the wound back up. When the time came, his father took him out alive. This is why he is called "Dionysos," "Young Zeus", or also "the twice-born". But Hera, jealous of Zeus' love for Semele sought out the newborn to kill him. So it was that Dionysos had to be taken to Egypt where he was educated in deep caves. To further protect the child Zeus the father transformed him into a young goat.

Dionysos was still young when made wine from the vine. It was there that vengeful Hera found him and, driving him mad, she sent him wandering throughout many countries, until the Asian Cybele, Great Mother of many peoples, purified him, giving him back his reason by means of mysterious procedures. Surrounded by bacchantes, he carried the vine from one people to another. Among one of these was a tyrant who wished to destroy the sacred plant but, going mad, he cut off his own legs and then his subjects quartered him in order to escape the curse of the god. Reaching India, he subjected the people to his inebriation and his rites before returning to Greece. Once back there, his cult was opposed by another ruler who, consequently, was torn to pieces by women possessed by intoxication and bacchic delirium. He traveled from place to place until, desiring to reach the Greek islands, he went to the beaches waiting for a ship to pass. Finally this occurred, but then the sailors thought to take him prisoner and sell him into slavery. And so it happened that the crew saw vines grow all over the ship while streams of wine sprang up from the deck and Dionysos, transformed into a lion, roared threateningly.

Driven mad, the sailors threw themselves overboard into the sea where they were changed into those dolphins that even today follow ships, always trying to explain their confused destiny to the sailors. But Dionysos continued his missionary labour... Meeting Ariadne of Crete (she who, with her thread, had unravelled the labyrinth of the Minotaur), he was delivered from his amorous pain.

The god continued onward in his panther-driven chariot, his brow encircled by vine leaves and ivy, in his hand the divine Thyrsus. In every town he reached, he established his cult and, at night, by torchlight, his inebriated devotees danced to the sound of the tambourines, horns and flutes. In divine ecstasy the bacchantes demolished reason's pretensions and then, regaining their senses, they doubted what they had seen before and

after. That is why, when celebrating the fusion of the teachings of dark Dionysos with luminous Apollo, the human soul gives up the ferocity of its unbridled instinct, and distant reason descends to the comprehension of its depths. And so, vengeful Hera recognized Dionysos' merit, and he was able to return to Olympus. However, before that he descended to hell where he rescued the sad shadow of his mother Semele.

IX. NORDIC MYTHS.¹

Yggdrasil, the tree of the world.

To the house, powerful and courteous,
three Aesir came from that family;
they came to Earth and found tired
Ask and Embla, luckless and weak.
Low in spirit and Lacking in inspiration
in life and word, lacking good color;
Odín raised their spirit, Honir gave them genius
Lodur gave them words and good color².

In the horizons of ice, in the cold winters of the Great North, what thing could be more loved than the tree, seed of fire, warm skin and protector of the warring horde, the serpent body that takes us viking, tool of the fertile field, witness to the commitment that we celebrate before it! We love the plant and, although the sun is made of gold, we feel it to be like a plant. And so we have always dreamt that the world would end when the Wolf devours the sun, when a darkness envelops the earth, when the plants die. We are descendants of Ask ("ash") and Embla ("elm"), two beautiful trees who were felled and, by the will of the gods, the Aesir givers of form, returned to life as human beings.

Aesir and Asinias also loved the tree, and so it was there that they would meet to hold their deliberations. (* But better than those who speak about these things are those who know how to do them).

Then asked Gangleri: "Where is it that the gods meet?"

Har replied: "At the ash tree Yggdrasil. There the gods hold court and trace the world's destiny." And Jafnhar added: "Its branches reach all the worlds but its three roots begin where the Aesir³ have their home, where the Frost Giants live⁴ and in Neflheim⁵. Here is Hvergelmir⁶ where Nidhogg⁷ gnaws at the end of the root. Under the root that reaches towards the Frost Giants is Mimir's well⁸ where knowledge is to be found. It was here that came Odin to ask to be allowed to drink of its waters. His request was granted but only after he gave one of his eyes as an offering⁹.

Some say that Odin the great traveller went to other countries in his never ending searching for wisdom. During one of those voyages he descended to the depths of the mines and, seizing the dwarf Alberecht (they say), he made him hand over the helmet of invisibility, and the ring that held the great secret of Rhine gold that the gnome had robbed from its nymph custodians. It was because of this that the giants Fafner and Otr fought with Odin. One, his skull broken, fell lifeless while the other, changed himself into a dragon, lived and became guardian of the treasure of the Nibelungen; until Sigfried (our Sigurd) killed him, seizing the ring, source of so many troubles; troubles that continued until they finally destroyed all those who had become involved with it, because only the wisdom of Odín could manage those forces. How could Odin – Odín, who would even sometimes consult the hanged, and who at all times attacks each undertaking driven by that "thirst" the "thirst for knowledge"—how could he not have gone to the Norns for a drink of the water of knowledge?

Odin pleaded with the three Norns for a drink of that water, but they would allow it only in exchange for one of his eyes. Damned those three who lanced the divine face so as to maintain their wealth.¹⁰ These three women, called Urd,¹¹ Verdandi,¹² and Skuld,¹³ shape the days of men. But there are other Norns who determine the life of the humans, of the elves and of the gnomes. Good lives are governed by the good Norns, bad by those of wicked lineage.

But there is much more to recall, how could one forget Balder's horse who accompanied the hero to the pyre at his death; or Odin's horse, magnificent Sleipnir, who with eight hoofs traced the distances of the world? And what of the joyful memory of the two swans nurtured in the sacred waters.¹⁴

Thor, the valkyries and Valhalla. The warrior and his heaven/sky.

Of all the Aesir, Thor is the strongest. The greatest dwelling anywhere lies within his kingdom. The god travels in his chariot pulled by two magnificent goats. He has three powers that he carries with him: the hammer Mjollnir, which is like thunder and which the skulls of the ice trolls and the giants of the mountains know well. Another power lies in his belt which increases his power when he puts it on. Finally, with the power of his iron gloves he takes his hammer and thanks to the gloves, the handle does not slip out even when he gives his furious blows. Tremendous as is Thor's energy, he is not alone on the fields of war. When the battle begins, the Valkyries ride and chose those who are destined to die with valour so they may carry heroes to Valhalla¹⁵. There they will find enormous gates and rooms built of shields, there they will find tables and goblets, there they will eat the sacred boar.

At dawn the warriors leap up from their beds, take their weapons and go to the fields. There they meet in single combat and they fight, smashing each other to the ground. What better entertainment could fill the days of heroes. In the evening they return to Valhala on their horses and passing through its gigantic doors they are made comfortable in the room. Linking their arms they form long chains, and as if moved by the wind of the sky or the waves of the sea, they sway right and left while they roar out their songs. Later, as friends they sit together eating and drinking.¹⁶

Ragnarök, the Destiny of the gods¹⁷.

Then the Terrible Winter will come and in the icy winds endless frost and snow will blow without end. There will be great battles incited by greed. Brother will meet out death to brother, families will be annihilated, lost in murder and incest¹⁸.

In her song the old Seer foretold how in Voluspa the guardians of hell will burst their chains asunder. She sang the fall of the gods,¹⁹ the collapse of the world²⁰ she foresaw how the wolf would devour the sun while another monster swallows the moon. She saw how the stars fell and listened to the trembling of the earth. She prophesied how the chains that hold Fenris wolf would be unleashed and the destruction of the earth from end to end when the sea serpent made the ocean tremble coming forth on to the dry land.

The ship Naglfar built from the fingernails of the dead will be completed and start its voyage into the sea even though the gods will try to delay the launch, because it will mean

that there will be many corpses that will not be picked up and their hair and fingernails will continue growing with nobody to cut them. The sky will part and the ash tree Yggdrasil will tremble. The Aesir will bind on their brilliant armor and advance toward the field of battle. Odin in his golden helmet will be fighting in the very jaws of Fenris wolf; Thor will deal death to the great serpent but will in turn fall dead from its venom; Vitharr will break the jaws of the wolf, they will battle until all the Aesir and all the monsters destroy each other. Finally Surtur, hurling his fire, will incinerate the world.²¹

What will remain of heaven and earth then? What of the gods? The seer foretells saying that the images of the gods and the earth and the ancient peoples will have evaporated like an hallucination, like those that Thor suffered from when he thought that they he was being defeated. The illusion of this world and the gods who corresponded to that world will have evaporated. Then, the hidden humans will be nourished on the morning dew. The earth will be beautiful and green; it will bear fruit without sowing and there will be palaces floating in the air. Everyone will gather and converse and remember their ancient wisdom and they will speak of the events that occurred, of the snake that surrounds the Earth and of the wolf Fenris. In the fields they will also find those gold pieces with which the Aesir played on their boards. Humanity will be ready to learn and because of this they will begin to walk among the gods. But there is nothing more to add for because these things have not yet come about.

*With this the cycle of the ultimate viking is closed. De Haki heard the voice, while his long serpent slithered towards the sea. The sentences directed at his son were heard by De Haki, while the mist like a dense mantle settled at his back. A red light burned away the fog and the roar of the waves kissed the whisper of his words. So spoke Haki: ""Do not confuse these fables with those that have been rendered innocent of the knowledge we have received. For now these will go on reaching reach strange, intolerant people who erase the memory of other peoples. These people like to hear that Yggdrasil withers because Odin cut one of its branches to make his spear. They will lick their lips with delight because Odin lost an eye. They will rejoice because our heaven falls with dreadful crack and it appears to them that this presages their dawn.

We have told our things in this way, but they know nothing... Yggdrasil will rise up immense and shining in the night; the entire heavens rotates around the axis of its Great North while its apex connects with the fixed star and the sun turns pale in the frozen horizons. They will celebrate their most important day with our snow-covered tree and on its top will be the fixed star, and that night we will send them gifts, descending from the sky in a golden sleigh pulled by reindeer. Our goblins, trolls, giants and magic rings will inhabit their dreams and stories. Our forests will call them and when they turn their heads very quickly they will manage to see an elf; they will hear the song of the nymph in the murmuring brooks and they will seek the pot of gold that the gnomes leave at the end of the rainbow... But let us go now! In our blizzards and glaciers the volcano erupts and the geyser *spews forth its heat. Tighten your hand on the helm, son and friend! We have already left the known fjords. In the aurora borealis the dancing gods change colour, while we down here ride the waves of the furious sea.²²"

X. AMERICAN MYTHS.

*Popol Vuh (Book of the Quiché people)*¹

The Lost Story.

In the book of The Popol Vuh is pictured the arrival of the first inhabitants from the other side of the sea.² Here is recounted the history of darkness and life in the new worlds. This is the first book that was drawn in ancient times³. In this great tale is related how the heavens, the earth and the inferno were formed; how each one was divided into four points; how the measuring rope was extended and each of the four points divided. With four points were formed the squares that were divided into three: the square of the sky, earth and the underground world.

Human Generations: the Man-Animal, the Man of Clay, the Man of Wood and the Man of Corn.

While the Makers worked, they thought that when they had made light then a being would appear that would invoke them. To do that this being would have to know how to speak, to name. It would have to eat, drink and breathe. For this future being they created an appropriate world with land, water, air, plants and animals. Having finished that creation, they said to the animals: "Speak and praise us!" But they they could not speak. Instead each animal began to screech in its own way. The creators and Makers said: "we have not succeeded in making animals that can speak and invoke our name". So they spoke to them said, "This is not well. Your flesh will be torn." And so the animals became food for each other.

As dawn approached, they said that they must hurry and try again. Then they made a man of mud, but he could move neither his head or limbs. It could speak but had no understanding. It lasted a while but then got wet and could no longer stand erect. And so they destroyed their work and took council together.

They decided to make a man from wood and so they made these puppet men that could speak and could drag themselves over the earth. They had children that were also wooden figures. But they were bloodless; their hands and feet were dry. With the failure of these manikins, The Makers sent a great rain. They caused a flood to fall from the deep of the Sky. All the beings rebelled against the wooden men. The animals big and small, the stones, the plates, the crockery, the pots, they all rose up and began to scream: "you burned us and now we will burn you. You hit us and now we will hit you!" Without knowing where they were going the wooden men climbed on the houses but they were thron from the roofs; they hid in caves but these closed in on them and crushed them and so they wre wiped out. There are those who say there descendants are the monkeys that live today in the forests. These beings look like men but in fact they are the successors of the wooden manikin people.

The Makers spoke together and decided to put food and healthy drink inside the human being, and so they formed their flesh out of white and yellow corn meal and prepared liquids with which they made their blood, making them plump and vigorous. Since they looked like

men they ended up being men. They were beautiful, good and gifted with intelligence. They looked around and immediately their vision extended until they could see everything in the world. Immediately they gave thanks to the creator and the shaper. They said: "we spoke, we thought, we felt and we know that you are close and far, we see the huge and the tiny in the sky and the earth."

The Maker and the Creator didn't like what they heard from their creatures. The first fathers said: "what our creation says is not well. What if they become more than creatures, maybe even gods like us? So they met in Council to discuss the future of their creatures. They had started fear what would happen if these creatures did not multiply, if they did not reproduce by the time that the sun goes down. Over and over again the gods discussed all of this until they decided to fill the dreams of the humans and to veil their eyes so that they would only be permitted to see a short way. In this way the wisdom of the origin of the Quiché race was suppressed. The Creator and the Maker created women and when the men woke up of their dream their hearts were filled with joy thanks to their wives⁴.

The Destruction of the False Principal Macaw at the Hands of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer⁵.

The Sun had not yet come out above the surface of the Earth and the one who claimed to be Principal Macaw who magnified his power and virtues. Principal Macaw told the story of those who had perished because of the floods of water and the dark resin-like substance that had fallen from the skies⁶. For a long time the men had to walk through unknown places, fleeing the cold and searching for food⁷.

They had fire but when it went out they had to create it by rubbing sticks together. At the beginning they found the sea, and during an immense cold they walked upon it until they reached other lands. Neither the Sun nor the Moon could be seen. The tribes became separated over time, and now, when one group met another, they no longer understood each other. It was the time in which they searched for the Sun that warms the forests and the animals. There were no houses and only the skins of beast for clothing. But when the first inhabitants arrived to the lands full of forests and rivers and volcanos, Principal Macaw wanted them to believe that he was the Sun and the wealth and that it was to him that men owed their obedience.

Two gods were engendered, they were called Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer. They found Principal Macaw when he had climbed a tree so as to eat its fruit. Without being seen Master Wizard drew as near as was prudent. He aimed his blowgun at Principal Macaw and at the opportune moment shot a dart into his jaw. The unhappy Principal Macaw fell to the ground with his voice screaming in his throat.

Master Wizard ran up with the intention of killing Principal Macaw. But when he got there he was grabbed and violently shaken to the point that Principal Macaw was able to rip out one of Master Wizard's arms and run away with it. Arriving to his house Chief Macaw put the arm in the fire so that its owner would have to search for it. Meanwhile the two who had been engendered left in search of their grandfather the Great Boar of the Dawn and their grandmother Tapir of the Dawn and with them came up a scheme. Becoming two children the two who had been engendered accompanied their grandparents to the house of Principal Macaw. Seeing them arrive Chief Macaw, totally exhausted by the pain in his jaw, went to the strangers asking if they could cure it. They responded saying that they were experts in

that art and giving their assurances they put their hands to the bloodstained face of Chief Macaw. While he groaned, the visitors tightly bound his head, neck, arms and legs. Then they began to skin him. They skinned him completely, removing his precious stones and resplendent metal of which he boasted so much. So died Principal Macaw at the hands of Master Wizard and the Sorcerer. Then these two went and recovered the arm that finally fit perfectly back into the body of its owner.

The two who had been engendered, carrying out the Word of the Spirits of the Sky, worked so as to put an end to the wickedness in the world. Then, they swiftly went to carry out the command that they had been given by the powers of the Sky, the Words of the Sky, who are: Giant Master (Lightning), Mark of the Lightning and Splendor of the Lightning. Those great forces of the sky had also ordered them to destroy the two children of Principal Macaw: a son called Wise Pez-Tierra and another called Giant of the Earth. They ravaged life and were killed by those who were engendered. So it was that there works were many, but they had not been able to contain evil in its territory because it was scattered everywhere and mixed in all the things

The Ball Game in the Hells: descent, death, resurrection and ascent of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer.

The Kingdom of Xibalbá is a subterranean world in which resides all the harm that humanity suffers. From they arise illnesses, rancour, and fratricidal struggles. And there are dragged only those who have done evil. Before Master Wizard and Sorcerer all humans were taken down to Xibalbá, not only the evil ones. Now then, there was a time when the parents of Master Wizard and Sorcerer, called Supreme Master Wizard, and Principal Master Magician, walked the surface of the world. When they took their shields of leather, their rings, their gloves, their crowns, their helmets and their ball, those of Xibalbá were greatly offended. When they played with the ball during the game, they made the earth tremble, and all Xibalbá would get angry. Finally, one day, those-from-below, sent their ambassadors to them with the proposal that they settle their dispute with a game of ball. But those of Xibalbá betrayed and sacrificed them—leaving this insult to the Sky unavenged.

Now, Master Wizard and Sorcerer were happy because the Sky sent them to play ball overhead of those of Xibalbá. Those who were engendered *swept and arranged their space so as to finally, start to play ball. Then, those-below, did said: "Those that play above our heads and make the earth tremble, are they not the children of Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Magician? Are they not the children of those that we sacrificed?" Thus they said and they agreed to call to these disruptive ones. They sent ambassadors to those who were engendered with instructions that they appear before them. "That they come here, because we want play ball with them. In seven days we will play."

Receiving this message, Master Wizard and Sorcerer remembered how those of Xibalbá had betrayed the Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Magician. And so they accepted the challenge and descended to the underground world. They went down the steep slope and passed beyond the charmed rivers and the ravines; they arrived to the crossroads of the damned and continued to the place where those of Xibalbá were. The leaders had put wooden puppets in their place so that nobody could see their true faces (and they also hid their names in order to be more effective). But the visitors knew all of this said: "Greetings, " Greetings to you, Supreme Death. Greetings to you, Principal Death. Greetings to you, *Extend Cripple. Greetings to you, Blood Gatherer. Greetings to you Abscess Master.

Greetings to you, Jaundice Master. Greetings to you Bone Scepter. Greetings to you, Skull Scepter. Greetings to you, Blood Hawk. Greetings to you, Bloody Teeth. Greetings to you, Bloody Claws." They discovered the faces of all of them, they named all their names, without forgetting one and with that all the dissimulation practiced by those of Xibalbá lost their effectiveness.

The chiefs, grumbling, invited them to sit down on a bench but they refused because it was really a burning rock. And so those of Xibalbá offered them rooms in the Dark Mansion and gave them pine torches so they could see and tobacco so they could smoke. Later that night they went to look for them so they could play ball and those who were engendered won over those of Xibalbá. So, the chiefs sent them to rest at the Mansion of Obsidian, which was swarming with warriors, but they left uninjured and ready for a new game of ball. Again they won. They were rewarded, then, with a rest at the Mansion of Incalculable Cold, to which, as an homage, dense hail was added. Leaving there they went to the Mansion of Jaguars from where even ferocious beasts fled in fear. In order to play ball in the same way they were sent to the Mansion of Fire, then that of Bats. In the end the games concluded with the of Xibalbá. Then, the chiefs ordered that a burning stone as for cooking be erected and they requested that those who were engendered demonstrate their power by throwing themselves on it. They did as they were asked and were burned until all that was left was their bones. And then those of Xibalbá cried out: We have beaten them! Then they ground up their bones and scattered them over the river. But the following day, those who had been engendered returned in the form of two very poor men who danced at the gates of Xibalbá. Taken before the chiefs, the beggars demonstrated many wonders. They would set something on fire and then restore it, they would destroy something that would then recompose itself, excited by this magic, the chiefs asked: "Kill someone and then revive him" And so they did. Then they said "now dismember yourself and then rejoin your parts." And so they did.

Witnessing these wonders, Supreme death and Principal Death asked: "Sacrifice and then revive us." And in this way, Master Wizard and Sorcerer sacrificed Supreme death and Principal Death, but they did not revive them. Great was the confusion among those of Xibalbá upon seeing their supreme leaders split open and with their hearts removed. When those who were engendered split their chiefs in two their henchmen fled but all of them were captured and themselves were cut in two. All their children were led to a ravine and all of them were used to fill in the abyss. There remained the lifeless bodies of those of Xibalbá. By these wonder, by the metamorphosis of those who were engendered conquered those of Xibalbá

Those who were engendered made their true names known and proclaimed that their parents, Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Sorcerer, had been avenged. Sealing the hell those who were engendered said: "the glory of Xibalbá no longer exists but nevertheless we leave you dominion over the wicked. Your domain will be over those of War, of Sadness, of misery, but now you will no longer thrap the The Children of the Dawn, nor will you seize men by surprise as happened when Xibalbá dominated to the world." Then they addressed their parents, who, in earlier times, had been sacrificed in Xibalbá, saying: "we have avenged your torture and your death." Then engulfed in light they rose up to the high heavens where they become the Sun and the Moon and illuminated the face of the earth, dissipating the darkness that they had reigned up until then.

I. Sumerian-Akkaadian Myths

ⁱ In this elaboration of the myth of Gilgamesh we have kept in mind the XII Assyrian tablets which are a compilation of other earlier Akadian ones, derived in turn from the Sumerian, as the most recent discoveries demonstrate. We have based our approach on R. Campbell Thompson's translations of the original material. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Oxford University press. 1930, and of G. Contenau. *L'Épopée de Gilgamesh*. L'Artisan du livre. Paris, 1939. We have also taken the works of Speiser, Bauer Kramer, Heidel, Langdon, Schott and Ungnad into consideration. Finally we have called upon G. Blanco's *Cantar de Gilgamesh*. Ed. Galerna. Buenos Aires. 1978.

ⁱⁱ The poem of Gilgamesh was apparently composed toward the end of the third millennium, on the basis of much older material. We are led to agree with this hypothesis through the history of developments in ceramic technology. In fact, towards the epoch of the redaction of this tale, history's first potter's wheel had already been invented in Uruk (circa 3500 BCE). This instrument consisted of a ceramic wheel, 90 centimetres in diameter and 12 centimetres thick, that would be rotated with the left hand while the material was worked with the right. Given the weight of the flywheel, it would continue spinning for a number of minutes, permitting the use of two hands for the perfecting of the work. Mesopotamia would later see the invention of the foot powered wheel. Nonetheless, in the poem, the goddess Aruru creates the man of clay with nothing more than her dampened hands.

This is a detail of some importance since one can deduce from this technical description that the myth pertains to a time previous to introduction of the potter's wheel. On comparing the Sumerian myth of creation of the human being with its Egyptian equivalent we see that in the later case the god Khnum shapes the body out of clay using a potter's wheel (which had recently made its appearance in the Nile region during the Dynastic Era). El hecho de que Enkidu nazca velludo In the Sumerian poem, allusion is made to the creation of the hero Enkidu as a "double", a copy of Gilgamesh, after "the goddess Aruru concentrates within herself". It is possible that this refers to the technique used for the production of ceramic human figures; making copies through the use of molds (i.e. "within herself") that were based on a previously manufactured original. The fact that Enkidu is born hairy ("The hero was born with his whole body covered in shaggy hair... is thick like the barley of the fields"), could refer to the visible presence of plasticizers (cereal cuttings, straw, etc.) which was added to the clay to avoid its cracking, in the same way as it is done in other places with the clay used to prepare adobe. All this corresponds to a stage before that of a ceramic industry and the use of the potter's wheel. Thus, the story is earlier than the epoch of al'Ubaid and long before the appearance of the myth of Marduk in which Marduk wants to create man from his blood and bones, although he later decides to do it with the blood of his enemy Kingu. In this case, we are already in the presence of engobe or of enameled ceramics, of which there are numerous examples in Babylon at that time. Moreover, in the British Museum there is a tablet in which a formula for enamel appears, based on lead and copper, given by the Babylonian master Liballit, possibly contemporaneous with the writing of the myth of Marduk.

It could be objected that in the Hebrew Genesis, as in the Quiche Popol Vuh, there is no reference made to the potter's wheel, even though it was a technology that existed at the time of their respective compositions. As for Genesis, God creates Adam from clay and later creates Eve from his rib (as in the case of Marduk, from blood and bone) and gives him life by blowing with his breath. There is no reference to the wheel, but the "blowing" is suggestive

because the use of an instrument for the introduction of air into the furnace is predates the potter's wheel. It is a procedure then was perfected with the bellows, allowing the production of temperatures that in another way could not have surpassed 800 degrees, since everything depended on the caloric value of the resins in the firewood of that region. It should also be noted that the invention of the ascending-draft furnace allowed the production at times of temperatures of approximately 1000 degrees, but air injection is an advance based on earlier techniques.

Among the Quiche it was said that the first man was made by the gods from mud but in time the first man fell apart (a pre-ceramic time of dried clay); then the gods made man from wood but this didn't work either and this version of humanity was destroyed as well, until in the end, the human being was made from corn. This indicates that the origin of the myth can be fixed in the stage of neolithic instruments (rock, bone and wood), i.e. before the ceramic revolution. On the other hand, neither the wheel nor the potters lathe was known in America and so there is no reference to that technology. It is true that in the three classical translations of the Popul-Vuh (Arciniegas, Recinos and Chavez) there are descriptions of potters tools and ceramic technology coexistent with the myth of the creation of the human being but this only indicates that these technologies existed before the text was finalized.

In synthesis, as regards the idea of the creation of the human being by a potter god the Sumerian myth is oldest as. Nonetheless, some doubt could be cast regarding the age of certain ceramics on the basis of the firing temperatures. Fortunately, many problems of this type were resolved by Wedgwood's work on Etruscan vases. The pyrometer designed by this researcher (notwithstanding the imperfection of its scale) allowed the determination of the amount of heat absorbed by a clay. Knowing the composition of a clay and then submitting a replica to controlled firing allowed the degree of contraction to be determined according to the parameters established by the scale. The criteria indicated that the greater the heat, the greater the contraction. This contraction moreover remains fixed once the form has cooled. Another method consisted in submitting a piece of the test material to an increasing temperature up to the point that contraction was produced, and noting in what moment the original heating stopped. However, current technology allows pyrometric analysis of a far greater precision, so that today it is possible to determine the temperature within a tenth of a degree.

iii "The fragments 'Death of Gilgamesh' and 'The descent to Hell' come from Sumerian tablets found in Nippur that have been dated to the first half of the second millennium B.C. They do not connect with the structure of the poem, although the second one is found translated literally in the Assyrian Tablet XII, the most complete and recent version that we have of the poem,." *Cantar de Gilgamesh* (Op. Cit. p.95). In A. Schott's translation, the text that appears regarding Enkidu's speech to Gilgamesh is as follows: "Look, my body which you held with tenderness, the vermin gnaw away at it like old clothes. Yes, my body, which you touched with joy, is invaded by decay, and it fills it with the dust of the earth! ...Have you seen that one who died, burned in combat? I certainly have, he was in the silent night, reclining on his bed and drinking pure water. Have you seen someone fall in battle? I certainly have, his dear parents cradle his head, and his wife leans over him. Have you seen someone whose remains were discarded on the steppe? Oh poor me! I have seen him also: he finds no peace. Have you seen someone whose soul is not cared for by anyone? I have seen it: with

only the leftovers in the pot, and the crumbs by the road has eat..." *El país de los sumerios*. H. Schmökel. Ed. Eudeba. pág. 210. Buenos Aires, 1984.

^{iv} The vision of a jewelled Paradise is usually related to knowledge and, sometimes, to eternal life. The latter has its guardians, often serpents as in a Cretan myth cited by Apollodorus. In that tale the serpents possess the herb of immortality where as in the Gilgamesh myth, the serpent steals the plant of life that the hero already possessed.

On these themes Graves says they have seen interpretations ranging from the the most extreme spiritualism to the the crudest positivism: "...the celestial paradise is enjoyed in a schizophrenic trance, induced either by ascetism, by glandular disturbance, or by use of hallucinogenetic drugs. It is not always possible to judge which of these causes produced the mystic visions of, say, Ezekiel, 'Enoch', Jacob Boehme, Thomas Traherne and William Blake. Yet jewelled gardens of delight are commonly connected in myth with the eating of an ambrosia forbidden to mortals; and this points to a hallucinogenetic drug reserved for a small circle of adepts, which gives them sensations of divine glory and wisdom. The Gilgamesh reference to buckthorn must be a blind, however – buckthorn was eaten by ancient mystics not as an illuminant but as a preliminary purgative... All gardens of delight are originally ruled by goddesses; at the change from matriarchy to patriarchy, male gods usurp them... The jewelled Sumerian paradise to which Gilgamesh went, was owned by Siduri, Goddess of Wisdom, who had made the Sun-god Shamash its guardian; in later versions of the epic, Shamash has degraded Siduri to a mere 'ale-wife' serving at a near-by tavern. *Hebrew Myths, The Book of Genesis*, R.. Graves and R. Patai. New York: Doubleday, 1964, p. 80.

As for the relation between immortality, serpents and the act of theft, Wilkins in his Hindu Mythology observes how Garuda brought a bit of amrita (ambrosia) from the Moon for the Nagas or serpent deities as the price to pay to free his mother from slavery. Indra tried to persuade Garuda to give him the amrita so that the Nagas would not become immortal. Garuda did not abandon his plan and instead handed a vessel containing the substance to the abductors. However, Indra stole it while the Nagas were bathing. The Nagas, believing that the ambrosia must have spilled onto the Kusa herb (*Poa Cynosuroides*), licked it. The herb's sharp thorns ripped their tongues; and so it is that the serpent has a forked tongue. (Wilkins, W.J. *Hindu Mythology – Vedic and Puranic*, London, Curzon, 1973.)

⁵ From the fragment called "Death of Gilgamesh".

II. Assyrian-Babylonian myths

¹The poem, created in Babylon based on Sumerian material, was later found in the royal library of Assurbanipal (VII century B.C.)

² The eleven monsters, and their chief Kingu, are the twelve constellations of the zodiac that Marduk will place in the sky like statues (fixed images).

³ In this case the author is drawing on the *Enuma Elish – Tablet I* (When On High) v. 147 to 157. Babylonian Creation Poem. E.L. Peinado and M.G. Cordero. Ed. Nacional. Page 98. Madrid. 1981, the translators have also consulted the "*Enuma Elish – Tablet I*" of The Babylonian Genesis, Alexander Heidel, University of Chicago Press, 1951. p.24

⁴ Tablet III v. 134 to 138. Tablet IV v. 1 to 32

⁵ The plant associated with Tiamat and Kingu could be an aquatic species with poisonous qualities that, in small doses, could have healing power (i.e. the "blood" of Kingu as a giver of life). Such apparently contradictory ideas are not unheard of. In Pausanias VIII,

17, 6 ss, we read that the water of the Styx had pernicious properties, destroying iron, metal and ceramics. Inversely, these waters also possessed the quality of an 'elixir of life' as can be seen in the case of Achilles, who is made invulnerable by his immersion into them. As we read in Hesiod: "*Such is the oath the gods made of the primeval and immortal water of the Styx which never fails, but leaps out from the rocks.*" (*Theogony*. v.805)

⁶ The zodiac.

⁷ The Sun.

⁸ The star Sirius.

⁹ The planet Jupiter.

¹⁰ Tablet V. v. 14 to 22.

¹¹ Bab- El, meaning "Door of God"

¹² Tablet VI. v. 5 to 10. The Iggi and the Anunnaki, entities of the heavens and the infernal depths, respectively.

¹³ Tablet VI. v. 11 to 16.

¹⁴ Tablet VI. v. 29 to 37. The blood released through the sacrifice of Kingu cleanses the the gods of their guilt and allows the transmission of life to humanity. Perhaps the phrase: "in an incomprehensible act" reveals the perplexed state of the Babylonian poet, or the lack of evidence, in front of an unsatisfactory explanation that, perhaps at one time had a more complete context with the Sumerians (from whom the myth derives). In the Chaldean tradition, Marduk and Aruru were the ancestors of man. In the poem of Gilgamesh this goddess, by moistening her hands and modelling clay, creates human kind, just as she later creates Enkidu, the king's double. Another version (transmitted by the priest Berrosos) has humanity modelled from clay into which the blood of a god was mixed.

¹⁵ This refers to the truncated, stepped pyramid (ziggurat), at whose summit there was always a small temple that was also an astronomical observatory. The Esagilla complex included other towers, residences and fortified walls in which ramps frequently replaced steps. In subterranean spaces of the pyramid, funeral or ritual chambers were found, in which Marduk "rested" or "died" for the New Year festivities (Akitu). Afterwards, he would be rescued from the "mountain of death" and through complex ceremonies, the destinies of the New Year would be set.

Of course, the myth of death and resurrection had already taken shape much earlier in Sumer. On this matter, Schmokel comments: "Today we know that the problem of life, death and resurrection, expressed in the mystery of Inanna and Dumuzi, was a core problem in the ancient Sumerian religion... We must ask if the sombre description of the beyond in the epic of Gilgamesh should not be considered a reaction against hopes that were too effusive in that sense. All those who wholly commits themselves to faith to the giver of life Inanna and her lover Dumuzi, who annually in autumn would descend to the nether world accompanied by the lamentations of mankind, and then be joyously received upon his return the following spring, could perhaps participate in that return, and become himself a link in the eternal chain of death and birth... And we have already seen that, at least in the first dynasty of Ur, the belief in the king as Dumuzi provided/supplied the strangest effects: whole groups of men would take hemlock in the tomb of the dead sovereign or of the late/deceased priestess, in order to accompany their god and arise again with him. We will bypass the question regarding the degree of spontaneity in each case; the fact that those men and women put an end to their lives without any visible coercion, appears certain. *El Pais de los Sumerios*. O.C. p211.

¹⁶ Tablet VI. v. 95 to 98. It appears to be a reference to the Flood.

¹⁷ Tablet VI. v. 120 to 123. "Black heads" is a designation given to human beings. On the other hand, the reduction of the numerous names of Marduk reveals the monotheistic aspect of Babylonian religion after this local divinity expanded throughout Lower and Upper Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean. The Assyrians would do the same thing with Assur.

¹⁸ Tablet VII. v. 161 to 162. This refers to the final words of Enuma Elish.

III. Egyptian myth.

¹ The form that we have given to this creation story corresponds to the mythology of Memphis and with the inscription in basalt that Pharaoh Shabaka had engraved around 700 B.C. This inscription in turn was transcribed from a papyrus of a considerably older date. Atum was the principal god during the time of the Old Kingdom, though occasionally he was related with Ra, the solar disc. In the New Kingdom however Ra occupied the central position at the expense of Atum and the other gods. The source that we are drawing on shows Ptah as the creator of all that exists but in Egyptian mythology there are always difficulties in following the process of the transformation of a divine entity. Very often, a god totally unknown in one era begins to make its first tentative appearance on the historical stage in subsequent eras. Later, this figure might even develop to the point that it threatens to totally absorb religious or mythic life over an extended period. Egypt, with its long cultural history, is rich with examples of this kind. According to the *Aegyptiaca* (referred to by Flavius Josephus), the first dynasty begins around 3000 B.C. (during the time that the capital was in Tinis). Up to the time of Persian, Greek and Roman domination, Egypt remained active and hence openly in transformation. Even during the Ptolemaic era, Egyptian mythology continued developing new forms that influenced the Hellenistic world just as it had influenced the beginnings of Greek culture at an earlier moment. We are talking therefore of 3000 years of continuous development and it is clear that a great deal of confusion could be caused by the appearance and transformation of myths over such a long period of time. So it is that over the course of a millennium or more, a given divinity can have different (and at times opposing) characteristics.

² Both the not yet born and the already dead coexist in the present of Ptah.

³ One legend specifically mentions Byblos. Phoenicia was a region of Asia Minor on the west coast of Syria that, reached from Lebanon to the Mediterranean, and as far south as Mount Carmel. Its main cities were: Byblos, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre and Acca. During the period of Roman domination, the territory of Celesyria or Phoenicia of Lebanon was added, designating the old nation as Maritime Phoenicia. We have used "Phoenicia" in the story, to highlight the very root of the "Phoenix", the fabled bird that died in fire and was reborn from its ashes. In any case, we do not ignore the fact that "Phoenicia" comes from the Greek 'Phoenikia', that is, "country of palm trees" and that the inhabitants of that place called themselves "Canaanites" and not "Phoenicians".

⁴ Allusion to the preparation of the mummy, according to what is related by Herodotus (*Histories*, Book II, LXXXVI and following).

⁵ Some have sought to derive the word "pyramid" from the greek term meaning "wheat cake", arguing that the Egyptians and Greeks prepared certain pastries in that shape. It has been maintained that perhaps these derived in turn from others that were used in ceremonial

theophagic practices. However there are others who hold that they were merely artfully adorned foodstuffs. Pyramid, from the Greek *pyramis*, has the same root as *pira*, *pyra*, and as fire, *pyr*. "Pira" has been used as the "pyre" upon which the bodies of the dead or the ritual sacrifice was burned. We do not have the exact word in the ancient Egyptian language that refers to the pyramid in a geometric sense. In any case, the Greek name of that body and the initial mathematical studies about it, could well have derived from Egyptian teaching as Plato maintains in the *Timaeus* where he deals with the earliest scientific knowledge of his people, and considers it to be of Egyptian origin. These considerations have allowed us to make a play of words in which the pyramid in question is in the end identified with the potter's kiln. For his part, Herodotus (*ibid.* II, C and C1) tells a story regarding the motive for construction of the pyramids that brings connects it to the theme of Osiris. Given a reasonable degree of license we feel that the composition of the paragraph we are commenting on is acceptable, especially keeping in mind the antiquity of the myth proper to primitive ceramic culture (in which the rebirth of man is due to the potter-god),. As for the Mesopotamian pyramids (ziggurats), they take us to consider the idea that these constructions were not only temples and astronomical observatories but also "sacred mountains" in which Marduk was buried and from where he later resurrected. As for the step and covered or semi-covered pyramids of Mexico and Central America (e.g. Xochicalco, Chichen Itza, Cholula, Teotihuacan), we have no data that would lead us to state that they functioned as sepulchers or filled any function beyond being cultic constructions and serving as astronomical observatories. As for their historical development, the pyramids of Egypt evolve from the mastabas that by the Third Dynasty were already linked to the cult of the Sun in Heliopolis.

⁶ According to what is observed, for example, in the *Papyrus of Ani* (Brit. Mus. N. 10,470, sheets 3 and 4).

⁷ The high white crown of the Upper Nile and the flat red crown of the Lower Nile represented both the origins of the Pharaoh and his power over those regions. At times both crowns were combined to form the double crown. In the times of the New Empire the blue crown of war began to be used. Often the ureaeus, the sacred cobra, or instead, ostrich feathers combined with the high crown, each of these representing power over both lands;. In the case of Osiris, the crown assumes a priestly character, as in a tiara. The same thing occurs with the papal headdress (but in which can be observed the three-tiered crown). In this case, the pontifical tiara can be seen to derive from the mitre of the bishops, but its style is somewhat more Egyptian.

⁸ The whip and the crook or staff frequently appear crossed over the chest of the Pharaohs. In the representations of Osiris, they serve a priestly function, like the crooked staff of the Christian bishops.

⁹ Ka was not the spirit but rather the vehicle that visited the mummified corpse. It had some physical properties and, as it appears in the various epochs of the *Books of the Dead*, was represented as a "double". When the Ka of the Pharaoh was represented it was usually by two identical painted or sculpted figures holding hands.

¹⁰ The equal-armed cross was the Chaldeo-Babylonian symbol of Anu. The Ankh cross or *crux ansata* was a Tau with a circle and a handle, a symbol of triumph over death and the attribute of Sekhet. This cross was later adopted by the Coptic Christians.

¹¹ Ba was the spirit not subject to material vicissitudes. It was normally represented as a bird with a human face.

¹² Amenti was hell, the kingdom of the dead.

¹³ Khnum, often represented with a human body and ram's head, was the main divinity of the Elephantine triad of Upper Egypt. This divinity made the bodies of humans from clay, forming on his potters wheel. In its spinning this wheel acts like the wheel of fortune, determining the destiny of each person from the moment of their birth. Beltz, citing E. Naville, *The temple of Deir el Bahri*, II, tables 47-52, has Khnum speaking these words when he creates an important queen: "I wish to give you the body of a goddess; perfect like all the gods. You will receive from me not only happiness and health but the crown of both countries. You are at the summit of all living beings; you who are queen of Upper and Lower Egypt." W. Beltz. *Los Mitos Egipcios*, Losada, pp. 97 and 98. Buenos Aires, 1986.

¹⁴ Thoth, god of Hermopolis and creator of culture also had the role of the one who guides souls to Amenti. He was usually represented as having a human body and the head of an ibis. He was also the one who had the role of guiding the souls on their way to Amenti. His equivalence with the Greek Hermes gave rise to the figure of Hermes-Thoth. Later, towards the third century A.D., the neoplatonists and other gnostic sects produced the Hermetic Corpus (Pymander, The Key, Asclepius, The Emerald Tablet, etc.) that they attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus (the "thrice-great ") the creator of science, the arts and law.

¹⁵ The sycamore was a type of fig tree that had an extremely durable wood that was used to make sarcophagi. An allusion is also made here to the Djed tree that represented the resurrection of Osiris since from new shoots spring from its dead trunk.

¹⁶ "Lady of the West", the name that the goddess mother Hathor would take in funerary invocations. She lived in the western region of Libya where the kingdom of the dead was.

¹⁷ Anubis, with the body of a man and the head of a jackal, was the accuser in the judgment of the dead. At times he was known as the "Embalmer" or "The Guardian of the Tombs". Anubis was said to have helped in the embalming of Osiris. He also appeared as "The one who is on his mountain", that is, in charge of the funerary pyramid.

¹⁸ The amulets (ushabtis or "those who answer") were clay figurines that were placed in the tombs to accompany the dead to the land of Amenti, where they would acquire human size and characteristics, carrying out the most onerous labor on behalf of the deceased.

¹⁹ Horus, with his parents Osiris and Isis, formed part of the trinity of Abydos. Considered in his aspect as the rising sun he was represented with the head of a falcon and a solar disc on his forehead.

²⁰ A local god of Coptos, Panapolis and of certain desert regions. Represented with an erect phallus like Priapus, he was a divinity of regeneration in the court of Seth. Called "Bull of his mother", he was both the son and husband of a divinity that presided over the East. At some point there may have been some inter-mixture between Seth and Min since some legends present Seth as a black bull assassinating Osiris. On the other hand, the very ancient Min might in fact be closely related to the the legendary Minos of Crete, also represented as a bull.

²¹ Apophis was a monstrous serpent that lay in wait for the ship of the Sun. Over time, he became identified with Seth in his demonic aspect. In the Book of the Dead, invocations are made to assure that this serpent does not take the ship carrying the deceased.

²² The loss of a god's head does not indicate death but rather a replacement of attributes. Many divinities can easily be identified thanks to the fact that the head they bear is the totem of their people or of the place they came from.

²³ I have thought it important to make note of the history of Akhenaten under a subtitle that refers to its quality as an "antimyth". In reality we're dealing with another root myth: that of the one god that, as a system of thought, clashes strongly with over-populated pantheons. Although there were monotheistic proposals already in Mesopotamia, it is in Egypt and with Akhenaten (1364 to 1347 B.C.) that this particular religious form acquires strength. Akhenaten's reform lasts only as long as his reign. According to Beltz, the priestly castes that granted an honorific primacy to the clergy of Amon of Thebes often saw themselves as the treasure and the safeguard of national traditions. Their successful resistance to Akhenaten's reforms had not only a religious but a national character as well. After they annulled the reforms of this heretical sovereign, their influence and power became stronger than ever. "The temples became the greatest economic power of the country. The kings of the Twentieth Dynasty were puppets in the hands of the Theban high priests whose functions were, formerly, hereditary" (Tokarev). As opposed to the cases of Christianity and Islam, religions that progressed in alliance with the new political forces, Egyptian religion regressed towards autochthonous forms. If Akhenaten's political and religious reforms had progressed, it is quite probable that a universal religion would have arisen much earlier than those known today. In any case, although the traces of heresy were officially erased, its influence transcended the limits of Egypt.

²⁴ Heliopolis.

²⁵ The translations of the *Hymn to Aton* are numerous. For our part, we have drawn on fragments of diverse translations modifying them and supplying a unifying style.

IV. Hebrew myths

¹ Genesis 2, 9 and 2, 16-17.

² Based on book V of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

³ Genesis 3, 4-5.

⁴ In this story, following the tone of the myth of Gilgamesh, "he who knew all", but who returned to die in Uruk, the serpent is interested in man acquiring knowledge but impedes him from achieving immortality.

⁵ Genesis 3, 22-24.

⁶ Annunciation of the Laws of Moses.

⁷ Genesis 22, 1-14.

⁸ "God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall be the mother of nations; kings of many peoples shall spring from her. Then Abraham threw himself down on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" *ibid.* 17, 15-18.

⁹ "Then the stranger said: "I will surely return to you in due season, and Sarah your wife will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah had grown very old; Sarah was long past the age of child-bearing. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Shall I have a child now that I have grown old, and am past child-bearing, and my husband is old?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? In due season I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied

this saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid; but he said, "Oh yes, you did laugh." Ibid. 18, 10-16.

¹⁰ The theme of Abraham was treated dramatically by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*. In one of the possible scenarios on the theme of the sacrifice, he says: "It was early morning. Abraham rose in good time, embraced Sarah, the bride of his old age, and Sarah kissed Isaac, who had taken her disgrace from her, and was her pride and hope for all generations. So they rode on in silence and Abraham's eyes were fixed on the ground, until the fourth day when he looked up and saw afar the mountain in Moriah, but he turned his gaze once again to the ground. Silently, he arranged the firewood, bound Isaac; silently he drew the knife. Then he saw the ram that God had appointed. He sacrificed that and returned home... From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had demanded this of him. Isaac thrived as before; but Abraham's eye was darkened, he saw joy no more." (*Fear and Trembling*, p.46 Penguin. London.1985.)

For our part, instead of insisting on the guilt motive of existence, we have highlighted certain redeeming aspects of the myth as regards divine mockery in front of the laughter motivated by incredulity.

¹¹ Not only Jacob but also Moses struggles with God- "During the journey, while they were encamping for the night, the Lord met Moses meaning to kill him." *Exodo.* 4, 24

¹² Israel, that is "he who strives with God", or "he whom God strives with".

¹³ Peniel, that is "the face of God".

¹⁴ "Arabic lexicographers explain that the nature of the lameness produced by injury to the sinew of the thigh-socket causes a person so afflicted to walk on the tips of his toes. Such a dislocation of the hip is common among wrestlers and was first described by Harpocrates. Displacement of the femur-head lengthens the leg, tightens the thigh tendons, and puts the muscles into spasm – which makes for a rolling, swaggering walk, with the heel permanently raised, like that attributed by Homer to the God Hephaestus. A belief that contact with the jinn results in a loose-mannered gait as though disjointed, is found among the Arabs: perhaps a memory of the limping dance performed by devotees who believed themselves divinely possessed, like the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings XVIII. 26). Beth Hoglah, near Jericho may have been so called for this reason, because *hajala* in Arabic means to hobble or hop, and both Jerome and Eusebius call Beth Hoglah 'the place of the ring-dance'. The Tyrians performed such limping dances in honour of Hercules Melkarth. It is possible therefore that the Peniel myth originally accounts for a limping ceremony which commemorated Jacob's triumphal entry into Canaan after wrestling with a rival." (*Hebrew Myths*, Graves and Patai, op. cit., p. 229, footnote 7.)

¹⁵ The theme of the divine limp is found extensively throughout universal mythology – from lame Hephaestus who is thrown from Olympus to the Terena and other tribal peoples like those of Vancouver Island. The Ute of Whiterocks in Utah practiced limping dances" and this can also be read in the talmudic text that refers to the "dances of abandon celebrated towards the second century B.C. with the goal of producing rain. This idea of the divine limp also appears in ancient China. The founder of the Yin Dynasty, T'ang, who fought against drought, and the Great Yu, founder of the Chang Dynasty, were both hemiplegic and limped. Comments on this detail can be found in Frazer, (*The Golden Bough*, 4, vol. 7) and in C. Lévi-Strauss (*From Honey to Ashes: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* vol. 2. Harper and Row: New York. 1973. Pp. 460-464). On the point of the limping dances or "ecstatic

dances carried out with the goal of encouraging rainfall, we believe that the officiants or officiants of the ritual simulate the discomfort of some people who complain of arthritic pains when storms approach. In those cases, an attempt is made to "trick" the heavens and, within that logic, if one limps it is because the rains are about to fall and so it can do nothing else but rain. In the case of Jacob's fight and the subsequent limp, we believe that although it may have to do with a rite, it is not to one related to the theme of rain but rather to the change of stage of the protagonist. This is confirmed by the transformation of his name into nothing less than that of Israel.

We might also consider the other case of a fight with Jehovah. In that case Moses is not left lame but the fight is immediately followed by the institution of circumcision. Furthermore all of this occurs on the way back to Egypt, following God's command to rescue his people from the prisons of the Pharaoh. Therefore, the story of the "attempt" by God to "kill" Moses also possibly reflects a ceremony of the change of stage.

¹⁶ We can do no less than transcribe a few paragraphs of Freud's curious study regarding Moses and monotheism. Although his reasoning is not completely supported by any sort of historical certainty, nonetheless it is worth keeping in mind. Of course, we will not cleave to the psychoanalytic themes of the thesis that appeared under the title "Moses and Monotheism" (*The Origins of Religion: Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works*, Penguin, London, 1990). In the first chapter of this somewhat dated work, Freud tried to prove that Moses was an Egyptian. and as proof he cites a document of Sargon of Agade (founder of Babylon, circa 2800 B.C.E) in which there appears a version of the rescue from the water legend that was circulating throughout the entire cultural world of Mesopotamia and hence became known to the semites in Babylon, or, like Abraham, in Ur of Chaldea.

The text says: 'Sargon, the mighty King, the King of Agade am I. My mother was a Vestal, my father I knew not, while my father's brother dwelt in the mountains. In my city, Azupirani, which lies on the bank of the Euphrates, my mother, the Vestal, conceived me. Secretly she bore me. She laid me in a coffer made of reeds, closed the cover with pitch, and let me down into the river, which did not drown me. The river carried me to Akki, the drawer of water. Akki, the drawer of water, lifted me out in the kindness of his heart. Akki, the drawer of water, brought me up as his own son...', etc.

[*Later, p.301 and following*] Freud says:] "...the Aten religion was abolished, the capital city of the Pharaoh, who was branded as a criminal, was destroyed and plundered. In about 1350 B.C. the Eighteenth Dynasty came to an end; after a period of anarchy, order was restored by general Haremhab, who reigned until 1350 B.C. Akhenaten's reform seemed to be an episode doomed to be forgotten. Thus far what is established historically; and now our hypothetical sequel begins. Among those in Akhenaten's entourage there was a man who was perhaps called Tuthmosis, like many other people at that time – the name is not of great importance except that its second component must have been '-emose'. He was in a high position and a convinced adherent of the Aten religion, but, in contrast to the meditative king, he was energetic and passionate. For him the death of Akhenaten and the abolition of his religion meant the end of all his expectations. ...Under the necessity of his disappointment and loneliness he turned to these foreigners and with them sought compensation for his losses. He chose them as his people and tried to realize his ideals in them. After he had left Egypt with them, accompanied by his followers, he made them holy by the mark of

circumcision, gave them laws and introduced them into the doctrines of the Aten religion, which the Egyptians had just thrown off."

Thus for Freud. As for the circumcision, we know that this was already established rite in Egypt before Moses. Its use by various peoples can be historically confirmed even before its use by the Egyptians hence it cannot be proved to necessarily derive from them. That Moses could have been Egyptian, does not strike us as especially important. The theme of interest lies in that Egyptian cultural influence made itself felt in that part of the Jewish people that settled in the land of the Pharaohs. The events unleashed by Akhenaten were very close to the era of the Exodus and the religious theses that Moses upheld overlapped with those of the Egyptian reformer. As for Freud's historical interests, we must remember that around 1934 numerous hypotheses were circulating regarding the Egyptian origin of Moses, among them those of Breasted and of Edward Meyer whom Freud often cites, echoing their discussion of the theme. Of course already from the time of *Totem and Taboo* in 1913, Freud was not indifferent to the theme of the foundations of religion. When in *Moses and Monotheism*, he concludes the Moses was assassinated by a group of his followers, all the antecedents of the case and especially the father-son relationship can not be overlooked, at least not within the logic of psychoanalysis or that of anthropological tradition represented by J. G. Frazer, to whom Freud was so indebted. He held that the assassination of the chiefs was a manifest or hidden tendency, but one which existed in many societies. As the chiefs know or intuit, the people must take care of them and guard against them. ("*He must not only be guarded, he must also be guarded against*").

¹⁷ Exodus 3, 2-16. See also: Exodus 6, 2-3.

¹⁸ Ibid. 12, 37-38.

¹⁹ According to Eusebius and Julius Africanus, Amenhotep had a canal built that, beginning in the Nile at Coptos, below Thebes, went through Cosseir in the Red Sea. This canal was closed during the invasion of Cambyses. Aristotle, comments that Ramses II or Sesostris opened a canal through the isthmus. The work was interrupted and then later continued by Necho until it was finally finished by Darius. The canal started in Patumos on the Red Sea and ended in the Nile near Bubastis. The Ptolemeians improved it and Strabo says he saw it in operation. It was maintained by the Romans for one and a half centuries after the Arab conquest. Apparently, the canal was stopped up and then rebuilt by Omar, becoming navigable up to 765, at which time El-Mansur decided to close it so as to stop *Mohamed-ben-Abula from receiving provisions from his rebel companions. For more details on Egyptian canals, see *Rompimiento del Istmo de Suez*, by Cipriano S. Montesinos. Regarding the passage of the Israelites through a dry part of the Red Sea, everything points to the fact that, in effect, a system of sluices in a branch connected to the Nile existed, or that (since historical data is missing on this point) two sectors were dug up that later must have been connected by If this was the case, provisional containment walls allowed the canal work to be finished. It is likely that a heavily-weighted Egyptian unit passed along one of those walls could very easily have caused it to fall apart. If this explanation seems rather unbelievable, we should remember the project of the indirect layout of the Suez canal, according to Stephenson, Negrelli and Paulin Talabot. According to that plan, known as the Linant-Bey plan, 24 sluices connecting the Red Sea to the Nile were to be built. On the other hand, at the official inauguration of the Suez canal on November 17, 1869, there were numerous tracts barely reached 22 metres wide and 8.5 to 9 metres deep. We are not speaking, then, of gigantic tracts or of very high sluices.

²⁰ "When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. This is why it was called Marah." Exodus 15, 23.

²¹ "*The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*" Ibid. 16, 31. Here "mana" means "What is this?" – a reference to the surprise expressed by the Israelites when they ate the seeds that Moses gave them.

²² Exodus 19, 18-21.

²³ Ibid. 20, 18.

²⁴ 24.- Deuteronomy 33, 4-7.

²⁵ Ibid. 33, 10-12.

V. Chinese Myths

¹ The doctrine of the Tao is much older than either Lao Tzu or Confucius (both of whom lived in the sixth century B.C.E.). The rudiments of these ideas exist in the origin of the Huang Ho culture. On the other hand, important antecedents in the development of Confucianism and Taoism can already be found in the *I Ching* or *Book of Transformations* (possibly pre-tenth century B.C.E.). The *I Ching* is at times attributed to the legendary Fu Hsi, at other times to Wen, founder of the Chou Dynasty, and even to a succession of authors and editors. What is clear is that it has had enormous influence in the formation of numerous schools of thought, giving rise as well to a series of divinatory techniques and other superstitions that still exist today.

² The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tse.

³ An allusion to chapter XI of the Tao Te Ching. In the Chinese-English translation by Lin Yutang (and from there it is translated into Spanish by A. Whitelow), we can read: "Thirty spokes are united around the hub; the usefulness of the wheel comes from its non-existence..."(?) *Sabiduría China*. p. 35. Nueva, Buenos Aires, 1945.

⁴ Profundity in Taoism is considered the infinitely small and the profundity of profundity and the infinitely small of the infinitely small.

⁵ In this free translation, the return to sleep means the contraction or the freezing of all things after the first expansion. The great vortex continues to expand, according to Taoism, but the contraction that balances the universal wave begins in each thing.

⁶ *Yin* has been interpreted as a passive force, complementary to *Yang*. *Yin* however appears as a force that is previous to *Yang*. Associating *Yin* to the feminine and *Yang* to the masculine has provoked a number of anthropological discussions in which it has been argued that this anteriority is historical and not conceptual. This argument leads to the conclusion that the primacy of the feminine primacy corresponds to a matriarchal epoch that was later displaced by the patriarchy in which *Yang* imposes its activity, as appears with the Dragon Emperor (*Yang*) and Feng Empress (*Yin*).

⁷ Allusion to the myths of the afterlife. In the fragment mentioned below we find reflected various popular beliefs about the afterlife although they are drawn from different epochs. For example, the case of the Eight Immortals that first appear in the 13th century C.E. (Yuan Dynasty) set beside figures feared or venerated anywhere from the 11th to 2nd centuries C.E. (classical period of the Chou Dynasty). In any case, this is a work of merit that also gives certain ritual rules: "Do you know what they will do with you?" asked Tchong-Kuang, looking

at him attentively. "They will skin you alive, they will tear out your nails, your teeth, and your eyes, they will strip off your flesh and throw it to the vultures. Then the dogs will gnaw your bones. And while the one hundred and five days of the Yin solstice pass, your relatives will not be able to go to your tomb and offer you the sacrifices of the festival of death. The young men of the your village will throw their kites, illustrated with the legends of the Eight Immortal Sages, to the air and they'll hang their bells and lanterns from them. Millions of lanterns will be lit that day in China, but none of them will be lit for you... Neither sulfur nor artemis leaves will you burn in the middle of the patio to expel the demons. Ching, the great demon who carries the register of the Life and Death, will have already written your name on the door of Hell, on the Great Ocean, on the path that leads to the Yellow Fountains, where the dead live... *Sung-Ti, the Infernal Majesty who lives in the palace of the *Black Ropes, and the Lord of the Five Senses, *Yen-Lo the terrible and the implacable *Ping-Tang, Lord of the Hells, will one by one make you pass through their torture chambers in an infinite cycle of torments. You will not go to the *Kwang Sung Paradise, where the Queen Mother of the West strolls amid her peach trees, nor will you ever again see the sun, *Father Yang, beautiful Raven of Gold, traverse the sky in his chariot of flames." *La Flor del Tao*. A. Quiroga. Cárcamo, pp. 13 y ss. from the bilingual edition. Madrid. 1982.

⁸ *I Ching*. Disertación de Ta Chuan. Translation by A. Martínez B. Ed. Tao. Quindío. Colombia. 1974.

⁹ Tao Te Ching. Op. Cit. LXXI.

VI. Indian myths

¹ The mystical literature of India is without a doubt the most extensive of the world. Furthermore it is rich in scientific, philosophic and artistic conceptions of the utmost interest. There have been many attempts to order that enormous production in a simple way. Following a basic scheme, we can say that the four Vedas were followed by works of exegesis like the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The oldest substrate of the Vedas can be dated to around the 15th century B.C.E; the Brahmanas around the 6th century B.C.E. and while in general the Aranyakas are more recent, many of them were first sketched at a period almost contemporaneous with the Brahmanas. The Upanishads are the most recent of these writings and are given the name "Vedanta", because they end the Vedic cycle. The Vedic cycle was composed in the language of the invaders of India who are today referred to as "Indo-European" or "Indo-Aryan". Over time, their language continued to transform until finally it was systematized in its classical expression known as Sanskrit. No longer used for secular purposes today, but nonetheless it holds a position similar to that ancient Greek has for the West. According to Max Muller, the Vedas were written between 1200 and 800 B.C.E; the Brahmanas from 800 to 600 and the rest from 600 to 200. There is nothing in these texts that indicates when they were written, the only certainty is that, their transmission was oral for many centuries before they were written down. As for modern Hindu mythology, we can mention the two great epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata), the Puranas (the traditional stories of which there are eighteen), and the Tantras (there are five major ones). In this first section that we have called, "Fire, Storm and Exhaltation", we have limited ourselves to transcribing some of the hymns dedicated to the three most important divinities of the Rig Veda. Authors like Yaska, perhaps one of the oldest authorities in Vedic commentary, considers that Agni, Indra and Surya (the sun) constitute the fundamental trilogy of the literary

monument that concerns us. It seems to us, however, that the supplanting of Soma with that trilogy corresponds to an important change in the mythic perspective of the later authors, with respect to the original Vedic stage.

² Fire as the figure of Agni. In Agni, different kinds of fire are recognized: that of the earth (wildfire, domestic fire and sacrificial fire); that of the air (thunderbolt and lightning) and that of the heaven (sun). He is usually called "eater of wood" and of "fat", the latter referring to the sacrificial fat that is spilled over him. He is born by the rubbing of the two sacred sticks and has no feet, hands, or head. He does, however, possess numerous tongues and hair of flames. His voice is the crackle. More than 200 hymns of the *Rig Veda* are dedicated to him. He was also worshipped by the Aryan branch that went to Iran. There it (he?) took on a great importance in the pre-Zarathustran religion, continued on after the reformer and arrived to the present-day cult of the Parsis (these, following the Muslim struggles/fights ?, are still present in Iran, however in a reduced number of 30,000, as a group that today represents the majority of that religion emigrated to Bombay). Apparently, many of the attributes of Agni ended up being absorbed by Indra, but in his sacrificial character he continues involving the greater part of Hindu divinities.

³ Storm as the figure of Indra. Strictly speaking, the image of Indra is the lightning bolt but here he appears as the guide of the waters after having liberated them with his triumph of Vrta, the female-demon that held them prisoner. This Vrta could have been a god of the natives against which the Aryans fought during their invasion of India through the Punjab. The native inhabitants who were displaced to the south, possibly channelled water towards their fields, in a more advanced stage of civilization than that of the foreigners, but they did not have the weapons of iron that the invading hordes were equipped with. The natives are called "Dasyu" in the *Rig Veda*, no doubt a reference to Dravidas groups. In Indra can also be seen the god that fights against drought and who liberates the beneficent waters of the sky. About 200 hundred hymns of the *Rig Veda* are dedicated to this god (a quarter of the whole book) – and this demonstrates the importance that he had in those times. Later he lost force/strength/power and many of his attributes ended up being absorbed by other gods.

⁴ Exaltation as in the figure of the inebriating god Soma. This drink corresponds to the Haoma of the Aryans that invaded Iran. Even today the characteristics of the Soma-producing plant are discussed. It seems possible that the drink was, with time, obtained from different vegetables and that is why confusion has surrounded this theme. According to W. Wilkins in his *Hindu Mythology*, the plant in question is the *Asclepias ácida* of Roxburgh. It grows in the hills of the Punjab, in the Bolan Pass, around Poona, etc. But in the era in which the *Vishnu Purana* was written, intoxicants were already strictly prohibited, and that is why Soma was not exalted as such. In any case, there it is vaguely related to the moon. Hence, the path is lost almost completely. According to other authors, the plant is none other than a variety of the zigophyllacea. It could be that what is involved is the seeds of the plant known as "RUDA Asiria" (*Pegorum harmala*) that was used by the Mesopotamians, who burnt it in ceremonial fumigations.

There are also those who see in Soma a fermented beer like drink, similar to those consumed by the Indo-Europeans. But the most interesting theory has come from A. Hofmann. This investigator (discoverer of L.S.D.) states that Soma is in reality a mushroom: the *Amanita muscaria*. According to him, what had been an ethnobotanical enigma for more than two thousand years was solved in 1968. That was the year *Plants of the Gods* was

published. In that work (which he wrote in collaboration with R. Evans Schultes), Hofmann says that the *Amanita* has been known as a hallucinogenic since 1730, thanks to the information of an Swedish official, who had been imprisoned in Siberia.

He reported that the shamans dried it, added reindeer milk, and ingested it, resulting in the same symptoms reported by the natives of Lake Superior, of North and Central America, who were devoted to the same practices. It was later confirmed in the laboratory that the active ingredient was not muscarine as had been thought, but rather ibotenic acid. This acid was isolated and finally, the biochemist Takamoto obtained the alkaloid "muscimole". It was known through this investigation that it was in the process of drying the mushroom that the whole transformation is produced wherein the acid is converted into muscimole. Another important observation was supplied by that Russian official mentioned earlier. Apparently, in certain Siberian tribes, the urine of shamans who had previously taken the mushroom, was in turn ingested by others producing effects similar to those shown earlier by the shaman in trance. The authors of *Plants of the Gods* mention that this was possible because the psychoactive ingredients passed into the urine without being metabolized, or at least in metabolic form that were still active, something that is not very common in terms of the hallucinogenic components of plants. And what is more, in the *Vedas* it is mentioned that the urine of some of the Soma ceremony participants was collected in special receptacles, and this allows us to establish these curious relations. In India today, urine therapy, based on the drinking, while fasting, of one's own urine is still practiced. While this is not exactly the case described above, it is a custom that could very well have its earliest roots in the Vedic era of Soma "medicine".

Regarding the *Amanita*, a Roman fresco (end of the twelfth century) in the chapel of Plaincourault shows it as the tree of Eden, with the famous serpent twisted around it. As for toxic substances used in religious ceremonies, the Assyrians already knew of *cannabis* in the first millennium B.C.E. and it was of course also used in Tibet and India to the same ends. In his travels, Marco Polo tells about the case of Hasan-al-Sabah, known as the "old man of the mountain", who used *hashish* (from whose name comes "hashashim" or "ashasin", that later becomes "assassin"). He claims that Al-Hasan would subject a group of young people to the intoxicant and then send them off against his enemies. Surely, much of the use of aromatic substances has its origin in the inhalation of the smoke of hallucinogenic plants burnt for ritual purposes. With the observation of intoxicating effects, it is possible that, with time, these plants were replaced by resins that are still used today in the practices of many religions, e.g. incense, myrrh, storax, as well as aromatic woods like sandalwood. A similar path can be traced in the origin of certain perfumes that disappeared over time.

As for the extent of use, we can say that out of the enormous number of terrestrial plant species, only 150 have been used for their hallucinogenic properties. Of these, some 20 were known in the Eastern and about 130 in the Western hemisphere, with a significant number indigenous to Central and North America. In the origin of the universal religions, a few features can be observed that seem to suggest the presence of hallucinogenic substances. It would seem that given the numerous references to be found in the *Rig Veda* (about 120 hymns), Soma ranks as the third most important god of Vedic India. We cannot, however, ignore that in different times and places, numerous religious manifestations have been related to the actions of toxic substances. On abnormalities of perception and representation, see our

Contributions to Thought (Psychology of the Image – Variations in the space of representation in altered states of consciousness).

⁵ *Rig Veda* I, 1, 2. An adaptation based on the translation of F. Villar Liébana. Ed. Nacional. Madrid, 1975.

⁶ *ibid.* I, 31, 2.

⁷ *ibid.* I, 36, 14 and ff.

⁸ *ibid.* I, 60, 3.

⁹ *ibid.* I, 78, 2. It is possible that the historical Buddha is descended from a branch of this Gotama family. In the *Rig Veda* the Rahūḡanas are mentioned as belonging to that group. (I, 78, 5).

¹⁰ *ibid.* II, 4, 5 and ff.

¹¹ *ibid.* I, 32, 1 and ff.

¹² *ibid.* III, 48, 1 and ff.

¹³ *ibid.* IX, 1, 5 and ff.

¹⁴ *ibid.* IX, 45, 3 and ff.

¹⁵ *ibid.* IX, 48, 3 and ff.

¹⁶ *ibid.* IX, 50, 1.

¹⁷ *ibid.* IX, 57, 1 and ff.

¹⁸ *ibid.* X, 129, 1 and ff. Adaptation based on the translation of R. Griffith.

¹⁹ Based on W. Wilkins translation of the Mahabharata. *Mitología Hindú*. Visión, Barcelona, 1980.

²⁰ A reference to the teaching of Buddha (500 B.C.). According to that doctrine, the human being can be liberated from the wheel of reincarnations and reach Nirvana, a kind of dissolution from the point of view of the sense characteristics that form the 'I'. The Buddhist doctrine (in reality a philosophy and not a religion) was gradually converted into a religious belief that in turn gave rise to an abundant mythology.

²¹ "Om" is often pronounced at the beginning of prayers and religious ceremonies. Originally, the letters that made up this word (a u m) represented the *Vedas*. With time, it came to denote the three main deities of the Puranic cycle, namely: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

²² This oration is taken from the *Vishnu Purana*. Regarding Brahma's name, Monier Williams says, "Only a few hymns of the Vedas appear to contain the simple conception of the existence of a divine and omnipresent being. Even in these, the idea of a god present in all of nature is a bit diffuse and undefined. In the Purusha Sutra of the Rig Veda, the One Spirit is named Purusha. The most common name in the later system is Brahman, neutral (nominative Brahma), from the root *brih*, 'to expand', denoting the unity of the expansive essence, or the universally diffused substance of the universe... Brahma is the neutral, being the 'simply infinite being (the only real and eternal essence) who, when passing to manifested essence is called Brahma; when it develops itself in the world it is called Vishnu and when it again dissolves within itself into a single being it takes the name Shiva; all the remaining and innumerable gods and semi-gods are also new manifestations of the neutral Brahman, who is eternal." *Indian Wisdom*, p. 12. Cited by Wilkins O. C. p. 106.

²³ The title of this paragraph, "The forms of beauty and horror" synthesizes that contradictory sensation that divinities very often present in which their twin beneficent and

sinister faces can be seen. The first case that is presented is the transformation of Krishna before the hero Arjuna. The second is that of the radiant Parvati who is quite capable of destroying a monster, swallowing its blood and devouring its remains and then, as mild and beautiful as always, returning to the side of her beloved Shiva. Impressed by that kind of contradictory state provoked within him by his lover, Baudelaire writes his Hymn to Beauty which could very well be dedicated to those ambivalent gods: "Are you of heaven or the nether world? Charmed Destiny, your pet, attends your walk; you scatter joys and sorrows at your whim, and govern all, and answer no man's call... Beauty, you walk on corpses, mocking them; Horror is charming as your other gems... What difference, then, from heaven or from hell? O Beauty, monstrous in simplicity? If eye, smile, step can open me the way to find unknown, sublime Infinity? ["Flowers of Evil" translated by James McGowan, Oxford Press, 1993]

²⁴ Arjuna, one of the heroes of the epic Mahabharata.

²⁵ Adapted from The *Bhagavad Gita*, translated by J. Roviralta Borrell. Canto XI. Diana, México, 1974. The *Bhagavad Gita* is an episode of the *Mahabharata*, written towards the third century B.C.

VII. Persian Myths

¹ Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, lived approximately between 660 and 580 B.C. His preaching began in a remote district of western Iran. From the religious point of view, he is one of the most important figures because his personal existence is as verifiable as that of Mohammed's – a thing that does not occur with many other founders, for example. However/Nevertheless, counting with Indo-iranian and other primitive elements, the prophet inaugurates a new universal religion that has a strong impact on others. His cosmology and cosmogony, his apocalypsim and his ideas of salvation begin a religious cycle that, together with Isaias, Malachi, and Daniel (in the Bible), will have an enormous influence in wide regions of the East and West. Later, Zoroastrianism, converted into Mithraism, will advance once again, this time in the direction of Imperial Rome. In strong competition with Christianity, it will influence it, but even when this new religion imposes itself in alliance with Roman political power, the seeds of Mithraism will grow in its bosom to the point of expressing itself as serious heresies. This same thing will occur in Iran where the Muslim invasion will end up eradicating almost all Zoroastrianism, but many of its ideas will produce the Shiite heresy within Islam. Already by the 19th century, Ba' and the Bahai faith will constitute a new transformation of the teaching of Zarathustra. In the doctrinary aspect, the writing of the *Avesta* or *Zend-Avesta* is attributed to Zarathustra, but it seems as if the prophet only wrote the *Yasna* (perhaps only 17 of its hymns or *Gathas*). The *Avesta* is made up of the *Yasna* (72 chapters of Parsi liturgy); the *Vispared* (24 chapters of invocations); the *Vendidad* (another 22 chapters); the *Yashts* (21 chapters with invocations to angels and which constitutes the *Avesta* really of the priesthood) and the *Khordah Avesta* or *Minor Avesta* (book of priestly and private devotions). For our quotations of the *Avesta*, we have only taken the *Gathas* and the *Vendidad-Sade*. The *Gathas* were written in Avestin, which was the language of ancient Bactria, but the original texts suffered numerous vicissitudes from the time of Alexander's pass through Persia. That is why the material has come to us in the Pehlevi language, with great gaps and, surely, interpolations of all kinds. Regarding certain divinities or spirits

common in its origin with the Aryan branches that split between India and Iran, we should bear in mind that they take on an opposed character, probably due to the wars or disputes that occurred between those primitive tribes. Thus, Indra and the Devas are worthy of devotion in the Hindu *Vedas*, but have a sinister character in the *Avesta*. The same thing happens with the legendary Yima of the *Avesta* ("Djimchid, chief of peoples and flocks/herds" for Anquetil-Duperron, according to the citation of Bergua), who, in the *Vedas* appears as Yama, the divinity of death (*Rig-Veda* 1, 38, 5). But Haoma (Soma for the *Vedas*) and Mithra (the Vedic Mitra) maintain their beneficent characteristics.

² This is an allusion to the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lakes of his home and went into the mountains." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, F. Nietzsche London: Penguin, 1961. p.39. It seems that Nietzsche's preoccupation with the Persian prophet began when, as a youth, he saw him in his dreams. In his correspondence with his sister Elizabeth and with Lou Andreas Salomé, as well as in comments to Peter Gast and E. Rhode, Nietzsche describes someone capable of founding a new moral and, as such, as a destroyer or transformer of established values.

³ Reference to Zarathustra's cosmological and cosmogonic system, developed by Persian magi.

⁴ Kine, soul of living beings and particularly of livestock. Ahura Mazda, divinity of Light, also called Ohrmazd.

⁵ Yasna XLIV, 3. Adapted from *The Avesta*. Translated by J. Bergúa. Bergúa. Madrid. 1974.

⁶ *ibid.* XLIV, 4.

⁷ *ibid.* XLIV, 5.

⁸ *ibid.* XLIV, 6.

⁹ Based on the second Fargard, 2 and ff. *The Vendidad-Sade*. Op. Cit.

¹⁰ *ibid.* Second Fargard, 7 and ff.

¹¹ *ibid.* Nineteenth Fargard, 52.

¹² *ibid.* Tenth Fargard, 17.

¹³ *ibid.* Eighteenth Fargard, 29 and 31.

¹⁴ *ibid.* Fifteenth Fargard 5 and 6.

¹⁵ Yasna XXX, 3.

¹⁶ *ibid.* XXX, 4.

¹⁷ *ibid.* XXX. 5.

¹⁸ *ibid.* XXX. 6.

¹⁹ *ibid.* XXX. 8. Refers to the alliance of the Daeva spirits with Ahriman, god of darkness and evil.

²⁰ *ibid.* XXX, 8

²¹ *ibid.* XLV, 2.

²² *ibid.* LIII, 2.

²³ *ibid.* LI, 13.

²⁴ *ibid.* XLIX, 11.

²⁵ *ibid.* LI, 15.

VII. Greco-Roman Myths

¹ Under this title we've included not only a number of Greek and Roman myths, but also others belonging to the Cretan-Mycenean world that, therefore, would really require separate treatment. It can be seen that we use Greek and never Roman names for the subjects we deal with since the sons of Romulus absorbed their most prominent myths from Greek culture, at times only changing the names and places in which events unfolded. In no way are we saying that the Roman culture never gave rise to its own myths and legends, since the successive waves of invaders of those lands must have encountered older inhabitants, and these, of course, had more or less different mythic and religious forms from the new contributions. On the other hand, Greek cultural influence upon Roman culture is not the only factor to consider, since numerous "histories" come from the Egyptians, Phrygians, Hitites, etc. Turning to the case at hand it is obvious that within Greek mythology itself, the names of many gods have a foreign origin. On the other hand, one thing is the collection (and often the transformation) of legends and myths from the pen of the ancient mythographers, and another is the role that gods, demigods and other entities played in the personal and collective cult. In reality it is there, (in the actual cults) that the real importance of myths should be sought, in relation to the the system of beliefs rather than with simple poetic, plastic and at times philosophic expression, as in the case of Plato, creator of "myths" (Symposium, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Republic, etc.) through which he explains his doctrine. For our part, we have used the texts of Homer, Pindar, Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus for their great expressive beauty. Of course, we have also drawn on Hesiod's *Theogony*, and *Works and Days*, which, though they lack the poetic flight of some of those authors, constitute important works of compilation and "classification".

Historically, the myths that concern us circulated through the Greek speaking world from the 10th century B.C.E. to approximately the 6th century of the present era. In this way, works like those of Hecatus, written in the 6th century B.C.E. would have been of inestimable value, but unfortunately only dubious fragments of his four books of *Genealogies* have reached us. Nonetheless the work of that author seems to have decisively influenced Pherecyde who writes on the first Athenian myths.

To be sure, it is not a question of rejecting later writers, including the Roman authors, but in the measure that time passes, the tangle of information grows in such a way that the original source becomes confused with the more recent creation. The most important beings mentioned in this chapter of "Greco-Roman myths" are (Greek designations with Roman equivalents): Cronus = Saturn; Zeus = Jupiter; Hera = Juno; Rhea = Cybeles; Hermes = Mercury; Demeter = Ceres ; Persephone = Proserpina ; Dionysos = Bacchus and Herakles = Hercules.

² Based on Hesiod's *Theogony*. v 154 to 181. Penguin. London 1973. Hesiod of Askra, first half of the VII century, B.C. E.

³ There are three Erinyes: Teisephone ("*avenger of murder"); *Alecto ("unceasing in anger") and *Magaera ("always jealous"). According to A. Garibay, they refer to personifications of the idea of reparation of the order destroyed by the crime. They have, among other missions, the mandate to repress the rebellion of the young against the old. They live in Erebus and are older than Zeus. For A. Bartra they are spirits of punishment and of blood vengeance. Lastly, P. Grimal relates that they are born from the drops of blood with which the earth was impregnated when Uranus was castrated. They were also called "Eumenides" and "Furies" by the Romans.

⁴ Theogony. v. 460 to 474.

⁵ *ibid.* v. 470 a 501.

⁶ *ibid.* v. 686 a 692.

⁷ *ibid.* v. 693 a 699.

⁸ *ibid.* v. 717 a 720.

⁹ *ibid.* v. 730 a 732.

¹⁰ Freely adapted from Euripides's *The Trojan Women* at the end of the 11th scene in J.P. Sartre's adaptation. Losada. Buenos Aires. 1967. The section in quotations marks corresponds to the speech given by Poseidon but we have put it in the mouth of Prometheus given that it fits his character well and also the general context in which the Titan tells his tale. In any case, the surprise that the introduction of turns of phrase like: "Make war, stupid mortals", or "Like that you'll destroy everyone!" is understandable in as much as it breaks with the epic and serious style with a mocking, almost vulgar dissonance, proper to the mid-20th century. And besides, these turns of phrase are not in Euripides original and correspond to the Sartrean adaptation. Regarding Euripides, he was born in Salamina in 480 and died in 406 B.C.E.

¹¹ Adapted from *Prometheus Bound*, by Aeschylus. Aeschylus was born in Eleusis in 525 and died in 456 B.C.E.

¹² *ibid.* Episode II, after the first Chorus.

¹³ Son of Iapetus. Iapetus is, in turn, the son of Uranus and Gaia, and brother of Cronus and the other Titans (Oceanus, Coeus, Hyperion and Creus), and the Titanids (Tethys, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Dione and Theia). The Titans and Titanids belong to the first generation of gods (called the "Titan gods"). From the line of Iapetus and Clymene comes Atlantis, Menoetius, Prometheus and Epimetheus; just as from the line of Cronus and Rhea come Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. Prometheus is then a "cousin" of Zeus. But it is the line of Cronus (those of the "Cronida") which imposes itself. Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus (and his opposite, given his clumsiness and lack of ingenuity), accepts Pandora as a gift, and Zeus uses her to ruin humanity one more time. From Epimetheus and Pandora is born Pyrrha and from Prometheus and Clymene, Deucalion is born. These two form the couple that repopulated the world after the Flood which Zeus sent as a punishment. Once again it is thanks to another action of Prometheus that the human beings manage to save themselves. This happens because Prometheus instructs Deucalion and Pyrrha to build an Ark. Later, the survivors of the catastrophe make men rise again by throwing stones behind them (over the shoulder), while they walk through the fields. Women and men are born, a product of that "sowing". In all of the above, it is most notably the line of the children of Iapetus that promotes human propagation.

¹⁴ *Theogony*. v. 535 to 570 and 615 to 618.

¹⁵ *ibid.* v. 521 a 525.

¹⁶ Adapted from the Homeric Hymns. II. To Demeter. (in *Iliad* II) Losada. Buenos Aires 1982.

¹⁷ *Sobre la Naturaleza*. I and II. Metrodoro de Kío.

¹⁸ Adapted from *The Homeric Hymns*. To Dionysos.

IX. Nordic Myths

¹ Regarding the antecedents of Nordic literatures related to myths, F. Durand makes the following historical consideration: "In 1643, the Icelandic bishop of Skalholt discovered a manuscript that he gave to Frederick III, king of Denmark. The *Codex Regius* contained, under the generic title of *Edda*, transcriptions of Snorri's (dating from the 13th century) of a group of very old poems. Later the manuscript of another scholar, Saemund, was found, which contained the same works, and cast light on the use of the plural: *Eddas*. Conceived in a preliterate era the greater part these poems seem to date from the 7th and 8th century, but certain philologists date the most archaic poems as belonging to the 6th century. It is evident that these poems began to be recited in Norway and were transmitted from generation to generation until the colonizers brought them to the island of "fire and ice," later the medieval scribes saved them from oblivion, placing them on vellum parchment. The rest of Scandinavia also participated in the development of this work. So, for example in the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus there can be found Latin translations of what can be qualified as proto-Eddic. The magnificent 10th century Danish poem, the *Bjarkemal*, that Olaf made his men sing in formation in Stiklestad, differs only slightly from certain Eddic strophes. *Los Vikingos*, pp. 108 and 109. Eudeba. Buenos Aires 1975. In this way, a tradition that began in the era of migrations (between the 3rd and 4th centuries) and that spread throughout all of the Germanic world was recovered.

This particular mythic literature remained restricted to the Scandinavian environment but if we spoke of groups of more or less epic Nordic legends or writings we can find as many productions in England as in Germany and other countries. But, due to complex factors, including geography, we are dealing with a type of literature that is found concentrated mainly in Iceland. From the discovery and colonization of Iceland by the Norwegians (around 874) to the first generation of Christian Icelanders (around 1000), numerous phenomena occur throughout the Scandinavian world that can easily be shown to coincide with the "Viking cycle". This turbulent epoch, of expansion and continuous conflict, runs head on into the advance of the continental, Christian powers. During this period, important documentation is destroyed or lost in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. However, in Iceland, an enormous body of work is conserved, and furthermore continues being produced, until well into the 8th century. This is the case of the Elder Edda from which we have drawn the verses with mythological themes, and left aside the epic themes. Fortunately for literature, the colossal figure of Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) arises, who composed numerous sagas and rescues Nordic mythology, particularly in his *Gylfaginning* (*The Deluding of Gylfi*) and, to some degree, in his *Skaldskaparmal* (*The Poetics*). Thanks to the Icelanders we have the *Elder Edda* or *Verse Edda* (also known as the *Poetic Edda*), and the *Younger Edda* (or *Prose Edda*, or *Snorri's Edda*), which together constitute the most sure source of Nordic mythology.

² *Elder Edda Mayor*. Völuspá. 17 and 18.

³ This is a generic designation for the gods. When speaking of a particular goddess, she would be called an Asinia.

⁴ Space filled with energy. When the ice stopped flowing this place filled up and sank because of the weight of the ice. Then, when in certain places ice and volcanic fire fought and the frozen glaciers melted Ymir began to form from the drops of water. Ymir is the first of the Frost Giants. He has volcanic heat and some of the energy of Ginnungagap within him.

⁵ The place of northern ice, as opposed to Muspel, the mythic hot region of the south. A giant lives there who brandishes a sword of fire with which he defends the place. At the end of time he will leave there and set fire to the world.

⁶ A spring.

⁷ The serpent that gnaws at the roots.

⁸ One of the Aesir.

⁹ This is adapted from *The Gylfaginning (The Deluding of Gylfi)*, The loss of an eye in exchange for a greater good also appears reflected in other legends and stories like the following one which, furthermore, tells us something about bellicose Viking behaviour: "When he reached the farm where Armod and his wife and daughter were sleeping, Egil opened the door and went to Armod's bed. He drew his sword and grabbed Armod's beard with his other hand and pulled it towards the end of the bed. But Armod's wife and daughter rose quickly and asked Egil not to kill him. Egil said that, 'he deserves to be killed' but for their sake he would desist. 'And so Egil cut the beard from his chin; then he *plucked out Armod's eye* with his finger and left it hanging on his cheek; then Egil and his companions left." *Egil's Saga*.

¹⁰ The Song of the Nibelungen.

¹¹ The spirit of the past. The Norns should be considered engraving into their tablets, that is, imprinting the magic runes in which they set down people's destiny. This is not the case, then, of the "spinners" in the style of the Roman Parcae or of the Greek Moiras.

¹² The spirit of the present.

¹³ The spirit of the future.

¹⁴ Adapted from *The Gylfaginning*.

¹⁵ The dwelling of heroes. The valkyries choose the valiant who die in battle, but they also decide the outcome of battles. These warrior women easily bring to mind the Amazons, even though their action is somewhat more indirect. We rely on a historical trail in which the women of the primitive Germans participated in, and at times contributed to, the outcome of battles. It is possible that those customs later contributed to the mythification of the Viking Valkyries.

In his *Germanica*, Tacitus (55 to 120 B.C.E) tells us: "...close at hand, too, are their dearest, whence is heard the wailing voice of woman and the child's cry: here are the witnesses who are in each man's eyes most precious; here the praise he covets most: they take their wounds to mother and wife, who do not shirk from counting the hurts and demanding a sight of them: they minister to the combatants food and exhortation.

Tradition relates that some lost or losing battles have been restored by the women, by the incessance of their prayers and by the baring of their breasts; for so is it brought home to the men that the slavery, which they dread much more keenly on their women's account, is close at hand: it follows that the loyalty of those tribes is more effectually guaranteed from whom, among other hostages, maids of high birth have been exacted.

Further, they conceive that in woman there is a certain uncanny and prophetic sense: they neither scorn to consult them nor slight their answers." Included in *Germania*, (translated by William Peterson), William Heinemann: London, 1914.

¹⁶ Tacitus (op. cit. p346) referring to the inebriating drink (beer) and to the nutritional habits of the primitive Germans says: "They make a drink of barley and wheat, that is something like wine. Those who live near the shores of the Rhine buy it. Their food is simple:

wild apples, fresh venison, and curdled milk. Without any pomp, fuss or luxury they satisfy their hunger; but they do not use the same temperance against thirst. And if one gave them to drink as much as they like, it would be as easy to defeat them with wine as with weapons."

Mead is mentioned in the *Edda* – a drink of the gods and that should not be confused with beer even though they are sometimes figuratively identified.

¹⁷ Since Wagner, "Ragnarök" has been translated as the "Twilight of the Gods". However, a more correct translation would be "Destiny of the Gods, which we have taken as the title of this scene.

¹⁸ *La Alucinación de Gylfi*. Snorri Sturluson. 51. J. L. Borges translation. Alianza. Buenos Aires 1984.

¹⁹ *Völuspa*, 58..

²⁰ *ibid.* 45.

²¹ *La Alucinación de Gylfi*. Op. Cit. 51.

²² This last speech of Haki's is somewhat reminiscent of Snorri's description in the *Ynglingasaga*, regarding the battle the Fyrisvellir (in which Haki was seriously wounded). "...And so he ordered his ship to be brought, he had it loaded with dead men and their weapons, had it set sail, had the helm straightened towards to the sea and had the sails hoisted, and had a pyre of dry wood lit on the deck. The wind blew from the land. Haki was in agony or already dead when he was put on the pyre. The flaming ship then disappeared on the horizon, and this was left etched in memory for a long time." The bitterness of a world that is dying is reflected in the words that we put in Haki's mouth. Haki is not a Viking that converts to Christianity, on the contrary. Rather he makes us understand that the defeat before the advancing religion (that of the "foreign peoples") is in reality only a parenthesis in which numerous Nordic images and myths invade the victor.

X. American Myths

¹. The book of the Quiches of Guatemala has been translated with different names: "*Popul Vuh. The ancient stories of the Quiche*", by A. Recinos (published by F.C.E. Mexico. Our references are to the sixth printing of 1970, although the book was written in 1947); "*Popul Vuh or Book of the Council of the Quiche Indians*", by M. Asturias and J.M. Gonzalez de Mendoza (published by Losada, Buenos Aires. Our references are to the second edition of 1969, although it was written in 1927); "*Pop Wuj. Mytho-historical Ki-che Poem*", by Adrian I. Chavez (published by Centro Editorial Vile, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. We are using the first edition of 1981, although the text was written in 1979). The Recinos translation was based on the manuscript entitled *Art of the Three Tongues [Arte de las Tres Lenguas]*, composed at the beginning of the XVIII century by Friar Francisco Ximenez. The source document passed to the Brasseur collection and later into the hands of A. Pinart, who in turn sold it to E. Aller and from there it reached the Newberry Library, from which Recinos made a photocopy.

Arciniegas' work was translated to the Spanish from the French version, entitled *Les dieux, les héros, et les hommes de l'ancien Guatemala d'après le Livre du Conseil*, by P. Renaud. Reynaud used the Ximenez manuscript. And finally, the Chavez translation was also based on the Ximenez manuscript, although with the precaution of considering the two

columns that the friar had composed. Ximenez put the Hispanized Quiche transcription in the first column and in the second column, the Spanish translation. Chavez updated the original Quiche transcribed by Ximenez and used that material to do his Spanish translation. In 1927, a translation based on the French text of Brasseur by Villacorta and Rodas was published in Guatemala, but the book has remained unavailable to us. The same thing occurred with another Brasseur translation by J. Arriola, published in Guatemala in 1972. In each case, the source document is that of Ximenez. Between 1701 and 1703, a manuscript written in the Quiche language but with Latin characters came to him, through the royal patronage of the town of Santo Tomas (today Chichicastenango). The document was dated around the mid-16th century. Unfortunately, the original was lost but Ximenez took care to copy it, although with a few alterations.

² Chavez considers that this phrase refers to the passing of the inhabitants of north America from Asia. That is, from their West.

³ Chavez states that the "paintings" were real books or tablets folded together and bound and not simply isolated engravings on rock, bone or wood. Backing up his point of view, he cites *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* by the Friar Diego de Landa in which the author says: "We found a great number of their books, their letters, and because there was nothing there that didn't involve superstition and the falsity of the demon, we burned all of it. This they felt very strongly and suffered greatly from it."

⁴ Adapted from the translation by Resinos (Op. Cit.)

⁵ From here to the end, is based on the translation of Arciniegas'. (Op. Cit.)

⁶ Chavez believes that this is a kind of acid from a cosmic cataclysm. But it could be the result of the expulsion of lit petroleum due to the rupture of methane stratum during a volcanic eruption.

⁷ A reference to a long "descending" peregrination from very cold regions to more permanent settlements.