

A STUDY OF  
NORTHWEST COAST MYTHOLOGY

IN THE LIGHT OF THE WRITINGS

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The Age of the Transformer

In this article we will consider the legend of the Great Transformer, who came after the flood to re-establish order in the world. This will be followed by a postscript—an attempt to place this legend inside the generalized historical scheme outlined in the doctrine of the four churches.

They believe that a man came down [the Nishka Roy Azak told me], to show them how to live on earth—what to eat, what to do, and how to find shelter, because everything in those days [*i.e., after the flood*] was the same as it is today, people had to be shown. This man was called Weegyot. He came to show the natives of the Nass River some of the things they didn't know. And I believe that in other parts of this coast there were other men like him, who came to show the people how to live. Some of them had super-powers that humans can't control. Some of them visited the animals, and lived with the animals, and had different spirits that no human could control, and some of them joined the birds. That's the tradition: they know all about it, and it was told to us, and we believe all those things.

The name Weegyot means Great Man. There is a long story behind it, and some people take days to tell the story about Weegyot; but (to put it briefly) he came to show the people how to live.

Mr. Azak was speaking of the semi-divine Transformer, that being found in the legends of so many Indian peoples, who was responsible for the origin of most human arts. In most legends, the Transformer also gave the physical world, which had been a dark and formless wasteland, the features it has today. For example, he stole the sun and moon from the selfish "gods" or departmental spirits and brought light to the world. But the Transformer is an ambivalent creature. On the one hand, he is a benefactor of man: he teaches him arts and crafts, he decrees that certain animals shall be subservient to him, and he creates the environment over which man may exert a limited but definite mastery. But he is also a spirit of mischief and evil: he is adulterous, deceitful, malicious, and on occasion murderous. His adventures, after

\* Last article in a series of three.

the magnificent opening in which he sets the cosmos to rights, diminish more and more into knockabout farce: even his crimes are seen as slapstick. The Transformer, beginning as a demigod, diminishes into a ridiculous victim of his own lusts.

For the Transformer stories the hero is usually a demigod of great intelligence and beauty, who has one flaw, an uncontrolled lust of some kind (usually greed or carnal lust). This flaw drives him out to perform bold acts which he would not otherwise dare to perform: the result is that he discovers or steals from the departmental spirits secrets of immense value to man—fire, craft secrets, arts of other kinds or various forms of arcane knowledge. But the same flaw which makes him an ardent pursuer of the secrets of civilization eventually makes him incapable of using them properly: he ceases to be intelligent, beautiful and dignified, and sinks through the entire hierarchy of created things until he is the very embodiment of the equivocal, a vicious and ridiculous creature who is an animal in all respects except his human cunning.

Now the stories of the Greek Titans are of precisely this kind. They are tricksters, deceiving others in their vigorous youth, and being deceived by their successors in their old age.

Here I find myself in disagreement with C. T. Odhner, though the disagreement is not basic. In his *The Mythology of the Greeks and Romans*, Odhner comes to the conclusion that the Titans, particularly Cronus (the name means "crow") represent absolute evil. This is to be too impatient with ambiguities. As a result of this, he must explain the fact that Cronus/Saturn was thought of as "the benevolent patron of the harvest"<sup>1</sup> as a result of the forgetting of true correspondences. His understanding of the curve of the story seems to me perceptive, since he points out that the Titans begin as noble beings and degenerate into monsters, but I think he is deceived as to the kind of monsters they became. The Titans were inherently ambivalent, Cronus particularly: he is *at the same time* the wise old king of the Golden Age, waiting in some blessed valley (just as Raven is, according to Tsimshian tradition) for his time to come round again, and a cunning, amoral and ultimately stupid trickster. There is a terrible realism in this concept, more perplexing and overwhelming than any image of pure evil. Cronus is "religion," also the "god" (actually the Titans were not gods, but

<sup>1</sup> Odhner, C. T., *The Mythology of the Greeks and Romans* (Bryn Athyn, 1927), p. 25.

departmental spirits) of human culture, with its implications both of wisdom and of that heaven-defying arrogance which is, in the end, stupidity.

So much is apparent in Hesiod, who refers to him as "the trickster Cronus"<sup>2</sup>: Sisyphus and Prometheus, two other Titans, are also referred to as "tricksters." Three such references will do: it is likely that all the male Titans may be seen as "tricksters," and that they all represent aspects of the same trickster figure. Seen in this light, they become astonishingly like the pan-Indian transformer-trickster figure who takes on such forms as Raven, Hare, Mink, Coyote and Bluejay. The story of how Cronus swallowed his children, and was just about to swallow Zeus when Rhea, his wife, gave him a stone to swallow instead could have come straight out of the Raven cycle. Odhner does recognize the "humorous as well as gruesome features" of this story,<sup>3</sup> but although his analysis is most perceptive in other respects (his discussion of the meaning of the concept "stone" in the light of the revelations of the Writings is most illuminating) he is misled, I think, in an important historical point, which seems to be the cause of his error of interpretation.

The error, I believe, is caused by his assumption that the Titans represent the last stage of the Most Ancient Church, and the giants referred to in Genesis 6: 4-5. Yet there are giants mentioned in the Greek myths—the Cyclops and the Hundred-handed—who are much closer to those giants, the Nephilim referred to in *Coronis* 38. These are sons of Uranus, like the Titans, and it seems to be Uranus, in his senility, who represents the decay of the Most Ancient Church. Cronus, in emasculating Uranus (this is basically the separation of heaven and earth which is referred to in shamanist tradition and in ancient Egyptian mythology) destroys the vicious dregs of the Most Ancient Church and becomes the founder of a new religion. Yet in fact he represents the religion itself, rather than God (the Old or "Drowsy" God: Uranus-El-Ra-Brahma). This is, I believe, the transitional church of the period just after the flood, symbolized by the raven which Noah sends out. The establishment of the Ancient Church proper is represented by Zeus, as Odhner points out.

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, trans. by Norman O. Brown, *Theogony* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Odhner, 1927, p. 25.

There can be no doubt of the immense age of the Transformer figure, nor of his origin in the Old World. His trail may be traced across Siberia to the ancient Near East, and he has relatives in every continent and on the islands of the Pacific.

In ancient Suméria he appears as Enki, god "of the fickle waters" as Thorkild Jacobsen calls him.<sup>4</sup> Enki has all the characteristics of the trickster-transformer. He woos the earth goddess, Nin-hursaga, and wins her, only to leave her pregnant. He makes her father drunk so that he may take his pleasure with her unmolested. When she gives birth to eight plants he eats them all. He thus begins as a creature of pure appetite. Later he becomes a culture god, a demiurge and a friend of man. However, he cannot refrain from mischief and is eventually banished to the lower regions. Now Enki, as de Santillana and von Dechend point out, is the Babylonian god, Ea, who in turn is the Oannes of Berosus,<sup>5</sup> who is in fact Saturn or Cronus.

Wilkinson<sup>6</sup> remarks that,

The sea signifies the external natural mind in its compass; and the living creatures brought forth from the waters, Genesis I, are the knowledges, sciences, intelligence of the natural man on the way to the spiritual man. Oannes is a revelation from that ground.

His book is full of such perceptions, and in spite of its overblown and self-conscious literary style it is really a book of tremendous value. It has that quality of depth, that refusal to force things into narrow and self-consistent logical moulds which distinguished the British New Church in the closing years of the last century, and which we seem to have lost, at least temporarily. For Wilkinson refuses to say that Oannes is simply the Word, or the natural man, or the sciences of the natural man: he is all these things at once, in a way which is extraordinarily difficult to express in words apprehensible by the purely literary or scientific intelligence. (This in itself was probably responsible for the odd convolutions of Wilkinson's style.) But he makes the mistake, all too common among New Church scholars, of looking for a continuous internal sense

<sup>4</sup> Frankfort, Wilson and Jacobsen, *Before Philosophy* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Santillana, Giorgio de and Dechend, Hertha von, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), p. 419.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson, J. J. G., *Oannes According to Berosus* (London: James Speirs, 1888), p. 10.

in his pagan sources—in this case, the lost account of Berosus, as preserved by Eusebius and other writers of the early church.

### The Raven Myth

So far in this article we have considered the Transformer-trickster in general terms. Let us now consider him as Raven, the best-known Transformer-figure of the Northwest Coast.

The Raven story opens at the time when the entire world was in semi-darkness. The flood had ended, and the world was a waste of mud and water, almost an undifferentiated chaos. The sun and the moon had not yet reappeared in the sky and the people lived in perpetual twilight. Food was hard to find in this eternal dusk.

A certain village chief (the village seems to have been Metlakatla near Prince Rupert B.C.) had a son of extraordinary intelligence. It was his habit to move about in his own little canoe, shooting at game birds with his bow and arrow. One day he pushed out into the bay, with his companions following him in another canoe. He stood up in his canoe to shoot at a duck in the water, and his canoe capsized. He disappeared into the water, and did not rise again. His young companions went back to the village to bear the news to his father and mother.

His parents did not forget him after the usual period of mourning. They used to go down regularly to the point near which he had drowned, to mourn their loss.

One day, while they were sitting on the beach of a point, they saw a kelp patch far offshore, and, straining their eyes through the dusk, they saw what seemed to be two boys playing on it. The chief ordered his slave to go out to the kelp patch in his canoe, and bring the two boys in.

When the slave returned with the boys, the chief looked at them, and saw to his joyful surprise that the older boy was his son. The couple had never seen the other boy before, but they accepted him as the lad's new brother. Rejoicing, the chief and his wife took the two children home with them.

The two boys grew quickly, and proved to be much taller than ordinary men. The older boy, Thraymsem (the younger brother, Laraebulae, does not take an active part in the myth), was walking one day along the shore. There he saw a huge raven, hopping gravely along the sand. At once he took his bow and arrow, and

shot the raven, which he then skinned. When the skin dried, he put it on; suddenly he was a raven, and could fly. Every day he would fly a little farther out to sea, and on his return would put the raven garment away. He practiced every day until he thought he was ready for a long flight.

Now Thraymsem, as a hunter of birds, is clearly related to the Haida solar hero Sin, and thus belongs to the hero-class, Ascending or Self-Transcending Person. However, he is cursed with a "fatal flaw," unlike the other members of this hero class. This is particularly shown in a Haida version of the story.

In this version, the young chief's son comes back to life, after his corpse has been placed in a grave box on a pole. The chief owns a double-headed monster (like the Kwakiutl *sisiutl*), who hunts for the people, but has the regrettable habit of eating most of what it catches. When the chief's son, after his return to life, asks the monster why it has such a voracious appetite, it replies, "Because I eat my own scabs. That always gives me a huge appetite. Why don't you try it?" One day the chief's son does just this, eating a scab from his own body. He becomes so voracious he has to be sent away, because he is eating all the food of the village. So his father sends him on an impossible errand, ordering him to capture the ball of light from the old chief at the head of the Nass. Now this is a marvellously vivid image of the ravenous intellect of the man obsessed with his own proprium, but it also relates Raven to the Earth-Supporter and Monster-slayer, who is covered with scabs, which imply self-mutilation and self-sacrifice. Raven's eating of his scabs implies a misuse of these ascetic techniques, as well as the more venial sin of intellectual narcissism. One is reminded of the giants in the Ethiopic *Book of Enoch*:

And the women, conceiving, brought forth giants, whose stature was each three hundred cubits. These devoured all the labour of man produced; until it became impossible to feed them (7: 11-12).

The old earth-supporter at the bottom of the sea in the Strong Man myth, whose place Strong Man takes, is ministered to by the ducks, who are his messengers. Thus the chief's son who is drowned while aiming at a duck has obviously been taken to the bottom of the sea by the earth supporter. This relates him to Wise Man and others whose quest takes them to the bottom of the sea. Thus Raven is related to all three classes of symbolic hero. The whole earth is the province of this ambiguous creature.

Raven or Giant, as he is now called, asks his father why the people must live in darkness. His father answers that the Chief of the Skies has taken the sun and moon into his house, in order to punish the men of the earth for disturbing his sleep with their noise. This is clearly a reference to the impiety which, as we have seen, brought about the flood.

Raven feels sorry for the people, and decides to find a way of recovering the sun and the moon so that the world may be lit for them.

So he flies to the head of the Nass River, where the old Sky-Chief lives inside or behind a mountain with his family and his advisors. (It might be added that the Paradise inside a mountain is a very old mythological motive, found in the Epic of Gilgamesh.) Since no stranger is allowed inside this house, Raven must enter it by a stratagem.

He perches himself on a tree above a water-hole where, he has noticed, the daughter of the Sky-Chief often comes to drink. As she leans down to drink he transforms himself into a spruce needle or a hemlock needle (in some versions it is a piece of dirt or a small stone), and she swallows it. Since she has swallowed Raven himself, she eventually finds herself pregnant. She gives birth to a son, who is, of course, Raven. It should be remembered, also, that the Old Sky-Chief, Nascakiyel, is himself an aspect of Raven, or an older form of Raven.

The Chief of the Sky is very happy at the birth of a son. He feeds the child himself, and will allow nobody else to go near it.

Eventually Raven, who retains his wit and cunning despite his infantile form, finds the ball of daylight in its secret compartment or room, a place only the chief and his advisors are allowed to enter. He begins to cry continually, demanding that he be given the ball to play with. The chief's councillors give him other balls with which to amuse himself, but they do not satisfy him.

Finally, for the sake of peace, the ball of daylight is given him, and he amuses himself by rolling it across the floor. He seems to be playing with it in all innocence; after a while the Sky-Chief and his advisors stop watching him.

While their attention is diverted he rolls the ball of daylight to the door, turns into his raven form, and picks it up, flying away with it. A reminiscence here, perhaps, of the well-known Babylonian story of the storm-bird Zu, who brought the lightning (the

fire of heaven) from the gods to men, and also stole the oracles of the gods, the "tablets of destiny."

Raven flies down towards the mouth of the Nass River. There he sees the people groping about in the dark and trying to catch oolichans.

Out of pity for them he breaks open the ball of light and daylight comes into the world. Thus, daylight first appeared, after the flood, at the mouth of the Nass River.

In one Tlingit version of the story, Raven is born of a hot stone swallowed by "the sister of God," who is also His "wife," brother-sister incest being among the West Coast Indians, as in some ancient Near Eastern kingdoms, a royal prerogative. This immediately reminds one of the stone swallowed by Cronus in lieu of Zeus (see above). In most versions of the story, however, Raven is born of a conifer needle swallowed by the "daughter of God."

A legend of the pre-Hellenic Thessalians known as the Lapiths<sup>7</sup> is similar in certain remarkable ways to this part of the Northwest Coast myth, though the order of motives is different.

In the Thessalian legend, Coronis ("crow") was the daughter of Phlegyas ("fiery"), the king of the Lapiths and father of the Titan Ixion. She lived on the shore of a lake in Thessaly.

Apollo found her desirable, and became her lover. When he was absent, and about his godlike business, he left a crow with snow-white feathers to guard her. But Coronis fell in love with Ischys ("strength"), the son of Elatus ("of the fir") and also called "Chylus" ("juice of a plant"). They had intercourse. The crow flew off to seek its master and report the betrayal. Apollo cursed it for not having plucked out Ischys's eyes when he approached Coronis, and the crow was turned black by this curse.

Apollo shot down Coronis with his arrows, then wished in remorse to restore her to life, but could not. However, he did save her unborn child, who was cut living from Coronis's body even as she was on the funeral pyre. This child was Asclepius.

We note the following clear and seemingly inexplicable relationships between this Thessalian legend and the Raven cycle of the Northwest Coast.

Coronis is impregnated by Chylus, son of Elatus. That is to

<sup>7</sup> Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), entry "Asclepius."

say, a crow-goddess is impregnated by the juice of the fir-tree; and because he cannot prevent this, the crow who guards her is turned black.

Now the daughter (also the wife and sister) of Nascakiyel (Great Raven at the Head of the Nass), who is an "old god" who has the sun in his keeping, is impregnated by the Raven himself in the form of a conifer needle. The Raven was white at this time. He is later turned black as a punishment for stealing fresh water from the seabird deity, Petrel, who is a kind of aquatic "old god."

As we have seen, the most important negative aspect of Raven's character is his insatiable greed, which is responsible at once for his discoveries and his degeneration. A reflection of this may be found in a seventeenth-century Mongolian work, *The Bejewelled Summary of the Origin of Khans*.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of this book an early "sentient" (a kind of ancient demigod) who is "greedy for tasty things" finds and eats "a food called Woods or Greenery." Up to this point men have lived on a pure food known as *samadhi*, but the sentient introduces them to this peculiar food (cf. the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), and having eaten it they become sexual beings, and both lust and marriage come into the world. In this we find the motive applied to an earlier stage in the history of the Most Ancient Church—the Fall.

### Summary

In this series of articles we have covered a great deal of ground, much of it too quickly for comfort. I hope the reader will pardon my having subjected him to a jet-flight over territory he might much more profitably have traversed on foot. But we have, in any case, discovered some important facts, which it might be worthwhile to recapitulate.

The shamanist tradition of the Northwest Coast is related to the shamanism of the "primitive" peoples of the Far Northeast of Asia, and through that to a very ancient Eurasian tradition which shows an acute and agonized memory of the loss of spiritual sight at the end of the "Golden Age." This cosmology refers to a spiritual world much like our own in superficial appearance, but its valleys, lakes, seas and villages are organized according to mental or spiritual principles. This world has links with the

<sup>8</sup> Sagang Sechen, trans. by John A. Krueger: Publications of the Mongolia Society, Occasional Paper Number Two (Bloomington, Indiana), pp. 10-11.

material world in the sense that physical objects and beings are the "canoes" or vehicles of spiritual beings. It would be impossible, by the way, to find an image which more vividly represents the doctrine of discrete degrees; it is much closer to the ancient tradition than the simple incarnationism of Near Eastern polytheistic systems.

The Northwest Coast tradition of the creation of man combines the ideas of special creation and evolution: it is very close to a similar tradition which lies at the root of the Near Eastern polytheistic traditions, but which has been distorted by them.

The world before the flood is described as an Edenic state in which men, spirits and animals lived in harmony. The culmination of this period of history is the building of the town of Temlaham, which is a "sacred village," apparently governed by the law of the four quarters as were the ancient cities and/or temple-complexes of Mexico, Peru, China and the ancient Near East. Because of the impiety of its inhabitants, God sends a flood which destroys its high culture. Some escape, and from them, after the flood, spring new peoples, the present Indian inhabitants of the area.

The period which follows (which I equate with the period between the Most Ancient and Ancient Churches, or the Golden and Silver Ages, is dominated by the ambiguous figures of various Titanic or trickster demigods, the most prominent of which, on the Northwest Coast, is Raven, "Giant" or "Great Man." They introduce the arts of civilization as the Indians understood them, and re-establish order out of chaos. But a fatal flaw causes their downfall; they become foolish, corrupt, and in the end criminal.<sup>9</sup>

I believe it is justifiable to consider Raven and other transformer figures in conjunction with other traditions of the same kind, such as the Greek tradition of the period dominated by the Titans.

I have had on occasion in this series to disagree with some of the conclusions drawn by C. T. Odhner, but his work remains of the greatest value, and I would like to conclude this section with a

<sup>9</sup> I would refer the reader at this point to the passages in *Arcana Coelestia* which explicate Genesis 8:7-12, and ask him to pay particular attention to the raven which Noah sends forth from the ark. However, I will not comment myself on this passage, because I believe it is inappropriate for lay persons to attempt to expound Scripture, since theological as well as humanistic learning is involved.

quotation from his preface to *The Mythology of the Greeks and Romans*:

Mythology, being the science of ancient religions, is a sacred science and must therefore be handled with reverence and care. Two things are needed for its interpretation: correspondences and rational doctrine. Without correspondences Mythology will never open up its buried temples and treasures, but correspondence is merely the key; within are labyrinthine passages and chambers where unguided imagination may easily go astray. A guide is needed and this guide we have in the systematic theology of the New Church, which is one with the doctrine of the Ancient Church, and which not only points the way but at the same time warns against false interpretations. But with both the key and guide at hand we may safely explore the labyrinth, and our journey will then serve most important uses.

### A Postscript Regarding Dates

The question now arises, is it possible to date, at least in a general way, this period?

We do know (see the second article in this series) that there was a tremendous degeneration in the state of man during the Mesolithic period, the result of the loss of the high "primitive" tradition of the Advanced Paleolithic period, and that during this period there occurred the flooding of low-lying coastal areas in many parts of the world.

If the transformer-trickster figure does indeed represent the shamanistic religion itself, then it must have been, with the matriarchal cults which seem to be roughly contemporary with it and perhaps followed it (as Noah's dove followed the raven<sup>10</sup>), the first religious system to emerge after the "flood." Two modes of dating the foundation of this system may be considered—one technological, the other astronomical.

"Smith and shaman come from the same nest," according to the North Asiatic Yakuts,<sup>11</sup> and they say, "The smith is the older brother of the shaman." Like all such "primitive" oral traditions this is no more to be discounted than written texts: the tradition implies that shamanism developed out of the guild-secrets of early

<sup>10</sup> See Odhner's beautiful discussion of the goddess Aphrodite (1927, pp. 92-101). It is to be noted that dove symbolism is associated with the very beginnings of the painted pottery culture of the Near East (see archeological accounts of these cultures, corrected by new dates in *Scientific American*, Oct. 1971).

<sup>11</sup> De Santillana and von Dechend, 1969, p. 128; also Eliade, Mircea, *The Forge and the Crucible* (London: Rider and Co., 1962), p. 80.

metal-workers. The process of creation of the shaman, as described by Asian shamanists, involves so many elements of ancient craft symbolism—reconstitution of the body after dismemberment, trial by fire and so on—that it is easy to see its relevance to metallurgical processes. Smith-magic may indeed have inherited earlier concepts associated with the cold-hammering of native copper, which would be so old that they would be impossible to place in any historical context, but the concept, properly speaking, is associated with the rise of copper metallurgy.<sup>12</sup> It is generally considered that, since similar techniques are involved, metal-working followed quickly on the discovery of the art of firing painted pottery. According to current knowledge, painted pottery developed in Mesopotamia sometime between 6000 and 5000 B.C.<sup>13</sup> Pottery did not exist on the Northwest Coast (though the pottery of the Pueblo peoples of the Southwestern U.S. is very similar to that of the ancient Near East), but the importance of copper as a religious symbol is all-pervasive in the area. Iron was also known to the Indians before the whites came, but it seems to have been acquired in hand-to-hand trade and had taken on no symbolic overtones. Both were cold-hammered, according to the accepted opinion; but this is much too confident, since the original sources are much more ambiguous. On this matter, two facts should be taken into account: that the copper-workers among the Chilkat Tlingit kept their process a family secret,<sup>14</sup> and that the great goddess Dzilaquons is definitely related to an Athapascan fire and volcano goddess associated with the discovery of copper.<sup>15</sup> Why would copper and fire be associated if it were not understood that copper could be worked by fire?

The art of the coppersmith may therefore be dated back at least to the neighborhood of 6000 B.C., a period near the beginnings

<sup>12</sup> That copper-working preceded the discovery of iron-working is made clear in the *Kalevala*, Runo 9: 107 ff, where the smith god Ilmarinen is in fact a coppersmith (he is depicted with a copper hammer) before he discovers how to work iron. Gold and silver are already known.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, Grahame, and Piggott, Stuart, *Prehistoric Societies*, in the series *The History of Human Society*, edited by J. H. Plumb (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965), pp. 184-6.

<sup>14</sup> Krause, Aurel, trans. by Erna Gunther, *The Tlingit Indians* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> Barbeau, Marius, *Haida Myths* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953), pp. 9-26.

of village culture in the Near East. Shamanism (though many of its elements so obviously date from a much earlier time) must have come into existence, as an organized system, about this time, before the revelation granted to the Ancient Church.

Clark and Piggott, as we have seen in the preceding article, relate the end of the Ice Age and the accompanying flooding to about 8000 B.C. The decay of culture, the so-called Mesolithic Age, was well-advanced at about that time.<sup>16</sup> It was a period of warfare as well as cultural degeneration, distinguished by the rise of cannibalistic and head-hunting cults in Europe.<sup>17</sup> This monstrous time is remembered in European and Near Eastern mythology, and some "primitive" peoples with Mesolithic economies remained cannibals almost to our day, as is well known.

It is as if the traditional culture of the Northwest Coast represented a state of emergence from this phase, in which these revolting manifestations had been brought under control, but remained as haunting possibilities. It must be stressed once again that the Northwest Coast peoples did not practice cannibalism, except as an occasional atrocity in that terrible period of cultural breakdown from the late eighteenth to the middle nineteenth century. It may fairly be said, though, that they were obsessed by it, even as early Christian ascetics, surrounded by a sexually vicious society, were obsessed by lust. This obsession was expressed by a violent and conscious loathing, a sense of it as a magically potent act, and a continual attribution of the vice to their enemies, as the writings of early explorers attest. There is thus some basis for relating the origin-point of the world-wide cultural complex of which Northwest Coast culture is one aspect and Polynesian culture another, to that period in which society was just beginning to emerge from a long period of horror, the beginnings of social regeneration, which began in the Near East with the rise of village civilization.<sup>18</sup>

There are two more indications as to the time the "Golden Age"

<sup>16</sup> Clark and Piggott, pp. 140-144.

<sup>17</sup> For a popular but apparently reliable account of this period, see Part III of the *Life* magazine series, the *Epic of Man*, published some years ago.

<sup>18</sup> It should be added, to prevent racist fantasies, that no race remained immune from this madness: cannibalism was practiced extensively by the early Scandinavian peoples of the southwest Baltic coast at about 4500 B.C. and by the so called "Tardenoisian" peoples of southwestern France, as well as among the Irish and Scots of a later time. The practice seems to have been very widespread.

ended. Aratus, in his astronomical poem *Phaenomena* (95–136), tells us that Virgo (or Themis) retired to the “hills” at the end of the Golden Age, no longer consenting to live with men. Now the sun was “in” the constellation Virgo—*i.e.*, the spring equinox occurred in the constellation Virgo—from (roughly, of course) B.C. 14000 to B.C. 10800. The assumed end of the Advanced Paleolithic period is 10000 B.C. (see the second article in this series). The date given by Plato for the destruction of Atlantis is about 9600 B.C.

Now Virgo is the Queen of Heaven in innumerable ancient mythologies: Atargatis, Cybele, Diana, Minerva, and Isis and Beltis<sup>19</sup>: it is for this reason that astrologers of Roman Catholic belief have often equated Virgo with the Virgin Mary. She is very often shown as a goddess with an infant in her arms. Eri-gone, another name for the constellation Virgo, means, says Robert Brown Jr., the “Dawn.”<sup>20</sup> She is the “daughter” of Icarus or Bootes, who in another form is the cannibalistic Lycaon.

Now the immense age of much stellar symbolism is illustrated by the fact that it is found right across Central Asia to China, much preceding, it should be added, the later introduction of Western zodiacal symbolism to that country. The Sinologist, Gustave Schlegel, was so taken by such resemblances that he concluded the symbolism of the constellations had been invented in China and transmitted thence to the West, a nonsensical idea which was the result, at least, of his profound insight into the age of certain myths related to the stars. He quotes the ninth-century Arab scholar Albumazar:

With the first decan of Virgo there rises, in the spheres of the Persians, the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, according to the teachings of Hermes and Aesculapius, and this from remotest antiquity, a virgin . . . pure, immaculate, of beautiful form and agreeable features, having long hair, and holding in her hands two ears of corn. She sits on a throne and nourishes a child, named by some nations Jesus or Eeza, and by others Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Allen, Richard Hinckley, *Star Names, their Lore and Meaning* (reprinted, New York: Dover Publications, 1899), pp. 462–463.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, Jr., Robert, *Semitic Influence in Hellenic Mythology* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1898), p. 174.

<sup>21</sup> Schlegel, Gustave, *Uranographie Chinoise* (reprinted, Taipei, 1967), p. 655, my translation.

Early Christian astrologers frequently compared Christ with Saturn, on the argument that the Christian age was the Golden Age restored.<sup>22</sup>

Also significant is his discussion of the symbolism of the star Spica in China, Spica being the chief star in the Virgin. He quotes his ancient sources as saying, "The most ancient among constellations is Kio and Kang" (both lunar asterisms found in Virgo, Kio being Spica). These asterisms are also called "The Chiefs of the Four Quarters," "The Celestial Roots" and "The Celestial Fields." It was in them that the sun, the moon and the five planets were made, and began their revolutions.<sup>23</sup>

Another asterism in Virgo is called "The Portico of the Temple,"<sup>24</sup> and was associated with the beginning of the year,<sup>25</sup> as well as the beginning of the reigns of princes newly come to the throne.

In China, too, the figures of Virgo and Bootes are related, since we find Arcturus in Bootes is called, like Spica, the Horn. It also bears the title of the "Eastern beam (support) of the sky," which, as it happens, is a title borne by Cannibal Giant in Northwest Coast myth—"the post of our world" and "the right-hand side of our world." This may relate to a time when the equinoctial colure ran through Arcturus.

It remains to be seen whether any of the peoples of the Advanced Paleolithic possessed the capacity or the desire to make systematic calendrical observations. If they could not, the Chinese theory that the world "began" in Virgo, and the Cronian imagery of Virgo in the ancient Mediterranean is a backward-looking speculation. In other words, the symbolic implications of Virgo relate to cosmogonic speculations, and perhaps represent an Ancient Church attempt to date the period during which the Most Ancient Church flourished. This seems to me more likely than that the symbolism dates back to the Advanced Paleolithic Age. However, some have interpreted an inscribed bone dating from this period as representing the beginnings of a lunar calendar.<sup>26</sup>

That we may not be too rash in attributing world-initiating

<sup>22</sup> De Santillana and von Dechend, p. 221 and p. 223.

<sup>23</sup> Schlegel, pp. 87-89.

<sup>24</sup> Schlegel, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Schlegel, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> Chard, Chester S., *Man in Prehistory* (New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1969), p. 169.

qualities to Virgo is indicated by the fact that the Sumero-Accadian lunar zodiac, inasmuch as one may depend on modern reconstructions<sup>27</sup> makes the sky-god Anu the patron deity of Spica. Anu was the oldest of the gods, the creator of the heavens, the originator of kingship, and the chief of the Babylonian gods, and his throne was at the pole of the *ecliptic*. In the lunar zodiac of India, Spica was identified with the god Tvastri, the divine artisan and architect of the universe in Vedic mythology. His daughter was the Dawn, Saranyu (cf. Erigone). Finally, Spica was the ithyphallic and generative god Min to the Egyptians,<sup>28</sup> as well as Aten, the solar disc with rays ending in hands. Now Aten was the god whose cult Ikhnaton (sometimes naively thought of as the first monotheist) revived: "Aten . . . was one of the most ancient forms of one of the most ancient gods of Egypt, Ra of Heliopolis."<sup>29</sup>

Odhner's comments on the god Ra, which he identifies with the spiritual sun, are most interesting.

Attempts have been made to derive the name from roots signifying "to make to be," "operative and creative power," etc., but most of the Egyptologists admit the name to be of unknown origin, and materialistic interpreters such as Maspero and Wiedmann insist that "it means the sun and nothing more," but they refrain from telling us the origin of the word for the sun (ra). But knowing as we do that the Egyptians did not possess the sound of L in their language, but always pronounced it R, we feel convinced that the name *Ra* is nothing but the Egyptian form of the Hebrew *El* or the Assyrian *Ilu*, both of which involve the root meaning of strength and power, and stand for the general idea of "God." . . .

Besides his character as the god of the Sun, Ra figures also as the king or god of the most ancient times, the Golden Age in Egypt, even as Ouranos figures in Graeco-Roman mythology.<sup>30</sup>

Thus we have seen Virgo, specifically Spica in Virgo, associated with a very ancient figure of the Supreme God—Anu or Ra—most specifically in his character as creator. The god is usually seen as an old, senile or "drowsy" patriarch, which indicates that the image was invented by a people conscious of the decay of the Most Ancient Church, probably after the fact. In the astronomical sys-

<sup>27</sup> Jobes, G. and J., *Outer Space* (London, New York: Scarecrow Press, 1964), p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Lockyer, pp. 297, 319 and 320. Spica was also symbolised by an ear of corn, an Egyptian birth-symbol (King, Henry C., *The Background of Astronomy*, London: Watts, 1957, p. 25).

<sup>29</sup> Lockyer, p. 321.

<sup>30</sup> Odhner, 1914, pp. 78-83.

tem of China the creation of the heavens is associated with this constellation, though theistic implications are absent here as they are generally in Chinese stellar symbolism. The Graeco-Roman symbolism of the constellation Virgo relates it to the idea of the Great Mother (the creative process seen as female), and this interpretation may date from a later time, having been originated by the adherents of the matriarchal religions of the early Mediterranean, perhaps in the painted pottery period. That this matriarchal symbolism was also related to the senility of the Uranian god is indicated in the legend of Isis, which Odhner summarizes.

Isis grew weary of men and was seized with the desire to rule over Ra in heaven, a power which could be obtained only by forcing the god to reveal his secret name. Ra, in the meantime, was growing old; his mouth ran, and the spittle fell upon the earth. Out of the mud resulting from the mixture Isis now shaped a serpent which she placed in the way of Ra. The god, bitten by the serpent, could find no relief until he had revealed his secret name to Isis, who then cured him by her magic formulas.<sup>81</sup>

However, Odhner relates this (mistakenly, it seems to me) to the story of Adam and Eve. Isis's ruling over Ra in heaven may refer to the goddess of the matriarchal religion taking over the masculine creative symbolism of Virgo, since the constellation carries both patriarchal and matriarchal symbolism (raven and dove again).

The implication here is that we are dealing with the period of transition between the Most Ancient and Ancient Churches (the age of Uranus and Zeus) and that we have to deal with the first postdiluvian formulations of religious belief and social culture, in both patriarchal and matriarchal forms, in the early village cultures of the ancient Near East. Elements of these cultures (and the cultures which succeeded them) diffused by many different routes over the whole world. Many religious ideas dating back to this period survived in the cultures of the Amerindians, and with particular completeness in the cultures of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast.

When these speculative dates are collated in tabular form, we have:

? to approximately 10000 B. C.	Period of Most Ancient Church
10000 B.C. to approximately 8000 B.C.	Degeneration of Most Ancient Church. During this period there are notable physical catastrophes

<sup>81</sup> Odhner, 1914, p. 82.

	including widespread flooding. Rise of animistic and magical cults.
8000 B.C. to approximately 6000 B.C.	Beginning of village life in Near East. Beginnings of Ancient Church. Rise of concepts which later degenerated into shamanism and the Great Mother cult.
6000 B.C. to approximately 3500 B.C.	Apogee of Ancient Church and rise of town civilization.
3500 B.C. to approximately 2000 B.C.	Degeneration of Ancient Church, and rise of great Asian despotisms.
Approximately 1900 B.C.	Birth of Abraham.

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