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## **Prefazione Preface Prólogo**

Chronica Mundi è una rivista scientifica a vocazione internazionale nata con l'idea di creare una piattaforma dove studiosi e anche semplici appassionati di storia possano trovare spunti di riflessione e dibattito. Gli studi pubblicati sulla rivista sono originali, hanno un'ampia copertura temporale e geografica e vengono valutati attraverso il metodo del peer-review.

Chronica Mundi is a journal with an international vocation founded with the idea of creating a platform where experts, but also history enthusiasts, can find food for thought and discussion. Studies published in the journal are original, have broad geographic and temporal coverage and are evaluated through the method of peer review.

Chronica Mundi es una revista científica de enfoque internacional con miras a crear una plataforma en la que estudiosos y aficionados a la historia puedan encontrar elementos de reflexión y debate. Los estudios publicados en la revista son artículos originales de investigación histórica, tienen una amplia cobertura geográfica-temporal y se evalúan a través del método de revisión por pares.





# “Neque impetu hostium neque motu tempestatum”. I pericoli del mare nel racconto di Saewulfo, pellegrino anglosassone del XII secolo.

**Francesca Tasca**

**Sommario:** Il contributo si propone di mettere in rilievo all'interno della *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* – resoconto del viaggio compiuto dall'anglosassone Saewulfo tra il luglio 1102 e il settembre 1103 in Terrasanta – l'atteggiamento e la percezione del pellegrino di fronte ai numerosi pericoli affrontati durante il viaggio per mare. La tortuosa rotta costiera, seguita tanto all'andata quanto al ritorno, riservò, infatti, a Saewulfo minacce diverse ed incombenti rischi: tempeste marine, naufragi, attacchi pirateschi e saraceni, forti venti contrari. E in tutti questi eventi Saewulfo, con profondo approccio religioso, riesce a leggersi puntualmente la certa, speciale protezione divina accordatagli.

Tra il luglio 1102 e il settembre 1103 l'anglosassone Saewulfo svolge un pellegrinaggio ai *loca sancta* mediorientali.<sup>1</sup> Salpato il 13

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<sup>1</sup> In base ad esplicite informazioni interne al testo stesso, la narrazione del pellegrino anglosassone Saewulfo copre un arco temporale facilmente identificabile, che si distende tra il luglio del 1102 (“die dominico, festiuitate sanctae Mildride virginis, III Idus Iulii [di domenica, nella festa della santa vergine Mildride, il terzo giorno prima delle Idi di luglio]”) e la fine del settembre 1103 (“post festum sanctis Michaelis [dopo la festa di san Michele]”). L'edizione di riferimento è R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Peregrinationes tres. Saewulf, John of Würzburg, Theodericus*. With a study of the voyage of Saewulf by J. H. Pryor, Turnholti, Brepols, 1994 (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis, 139), accompagnata da CETEDOC (ed.), *Peregrinationes tres. Saewulf, John of*

luglio 1102 dal porto pugliese di Monopoli,<sup>2</sup> dopo aver toccato diverse isole del Mediterraneo orientale e aver fatto tappa in numerosi porti della Grecia e dell'Asia Minore, Saewulfo era approdato, infine, a Giaffa nell'ottobre del 1102, dopo oltre tre mesi di navigazione. Da lì giunse, quindi, a Gerusalemme via terra, compiendo successivamente anche pellegrinazioni nei territori della Giudea e della Galilea. Dopo circa sette mesi di permanenza in Terrasanta, era ripartito, dunque, per l'Occidente latino: salpò, nuovamente da Giaffa, il 17 maggio 1103, giorno di Pentecoste, e tenne, anche per il viaggio di ritorno, la rotta costiera del Mediterraneo orientale.<sup>3</sup> Fu lo stesso Saewulfo – del quale, per il resto, null'altro si conosce, se non che, curiosamente, il nome in lingua sassone significa proprio “lupo di mare” – a mettere poi per scritto la propria esperienza di viaggio (e, soprattutto, le proprie

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*Würzburg, Theodericus*, Tournhout, Brepols, 1995 (Instrumenta Lexicologica Latina, Series A. Formae, 84). Una traduzione in lingua italiana, con testo latino a fronte, è disponibile in S. De Sandoli ofm, *Itinera Hierosolymitana Crucesignatorum (sec. XII-XIII). Vol. II. Tempore Regum Francorum. Textus latini cum versione italica*, Ierusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 1980, pp. 7-31 (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Maior, 24). Si segnala anche H.-M. Rochais, 'Le pèlerinage de Saewulf en Terre-Sainte (juillet 1102-septembre 1103)', *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, vol. 58, 1996, pp. 125-140, dove si offre una riduzione in francese del racconto di Saewulfo.

<sup>2</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 59: “Nos autem Monopolim, dieta distante Varo, navim ascendimus, die dominico, festivitate sanctae Mildride virginis, III Idus Iulii, hora egyptiaca, sicut nobis postmodum evenit”. Sull'Italia meridionale come area di transito dei flussi di pellegrini provenienti da tutto il continente europeo e diretti in Medioriente si vedano F. Vanni, 'Itinerari, motivazioni e status dei pellegrini pre-giubilari: riflessioni e ipotesi alla luce di fonti e testimonianze intorno al Meridione d'Italia', in M. Oldoni (ed.), *Fra Roma e Gerusalemme nel Medioevo*, Salerno, Laveglia, 2005, pp. 71-156 e L. Russo, 'Spazi e aspirazioni del pellegrino tra Mezzogiorno e Terrasanta nei secoli XI-XIII', *Reti Medievali*, no. 9, 2008, <http://www.rmojs.unina.it/index.php/rm/article/view/90> (consultato in data 13 luglio 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Si può consultare un'agevole e dettagliata carta della rotta seguita da Saewulfo, con le diverse tappe compiute tanto nel viaggio di andata che in quello di ritorno, in *Peregrinationes tres*, appena dopo la 'Introduction', pp. 7-33.

traversie marittime) in un dettagliato resoconto, noto con il titolo di *Relatio de situ Ierusalem*.<sup>4</sup>

### **La *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* di Saewulfo**

Benché breve e bruscamente interrotta,<sup>5</sup> la *relatio* di Saewulfo è una fonte estremamente preziosa. Nel testo, scritto in un latino semplice e lineare, convergono notevoli informazioni di tipo sia pratico (itinerari, distanze, denominazioni in lingua locale), sia devozionale – specie quando Saewulfo descrive i luoghi da lui piamente visitati, sforzandosi di armonizzarli con le Scritture e con le credenze religiose.<sup>6</sup> La *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* consente, quindi e in primo luogo, di conoscere le condizioni dei territori palestinesi a ridosso della conclusione della prima Crociata, nei primissimi anni del

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<sup>4</sup> Il racconto di Saewulfo è stato conservato in un unico manoscritto del tardo XII secolo, all'interno di un codice miscelaneo oggi custodito a Cambridge, presso la Biblioteca del Corpus Christi College (ms. Corpus Christi College Cambridge, 111). Cfr. *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 7. Per la descrizione del codice si rimanda a M. Rh. James, *A descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Corpus Christi College*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1912, I, pp. 236-247. Sulla tipologia testuale dei resoconti di viaggio e di pellegrinaggio ci si limita qui a indicare J. Richard, *Les récits de voyages et de pèlerinages*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1981 (Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental, 38).

<sup>5</sup> Il testo si interrompe bruscamente, durante la narrazione del viaggio di ritorno, descrivendo l'attraversamento del Mar di Marmara, nei pressi di Eraclea. Non è possibile stabilire se tale interruzione sia dovuta a Saewulfo stesso o, piuttosto, a chi ne ha trascritto il resoconto. Pryor, pp. 56-57: "Saewulf's narrative breaks off at Ereğli. What happened? On the one hand, did he himself fail to complete the story of his pilgrimage or did his transcriber fail to finish the text? On the other hand, there can be no doubt that whoever Saewulf was he had certainly made his pilgrimage".

<sup>6</sup> Del resto, come già affermava lucidamente Halbwachs in un lavoro ormai classico sul pellegrinaggio medievale, "non [era] ai luoghi reali, ma alle credenze che la realtà doveva adattarsi" (M. Halbwachs, *Memorie di Terrasanta*, Venezia, Arsenale, 1988, p. 138).

regno di Baldovino.<sup>7</sup> Ma non solo. Il grande valore del resoconto di Saewulfo – per la verità, ad oggi non ancora né sufficientemente indagato, né comunemente conosciuto<sup>8</sup> – risiede soprattutto nelle dettagliate notizie che esso offre su condizioni, usi navali, tappe, centri portuali, rotte e modalità di viaggio dei pellegrini nel Mediterraneo all’inizio del XII secolo.<sup>9</sup>

Questo perché, tanto all’andata quanto al ritorno, Saewulfo non procedette in alto mare. Seguì, bensì, una rotta costiera tortuosa e piuttosto lenta che si snodava lungo il Mediterraneo orientale. Le ragioni di tale scelta non sono chiare. In apertura della propria *relatio* il pellegrino – che, in modo abbastanza usuale, si autodefinisce “indignus et peccator” (“indegno e peccatore”) –,

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<sup>7</sup> Su Baldovino, re di Gerusalemme, fratello di Goffredo di Buglione: S. Schein, ‘Balduin I., König von Jerusalem (1100/1058-1118)’, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, I, München-Zürich, Artemis, 1980, col. 1366 e M. Balard, ‘Baldwin I of Jerusalem (1058-1118)’, in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, Roma, Città Nuova, 2000, I, p. 142. Inoltre G. Ligato, ‘Baldovino I, re di Gerusalemme, Domini Sepulcri vessillifer’, in K. Elm e C. D. Fonseca (ed.), “*Militia Sancti Sepulchri*”. *Atti del Colloquio Internazionale tenuto presso la Pontificia Università del Laterano, 10-12 aprile 1996*, Città del Vaticano, Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1998, pp. 361-380.

<sup>8</sup> La bibliografia estremamente esigua esistente sulla *Relatio de situ Jerusalem* è indice dello scarso interesse per questa preziosa fonte. Molto limitate sono, del resto, anche le notizie su Saewulfo stesso: S. Schein, ‘Saewulf, Jerusalem-pilger (1102-1103)’, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, VII, München-Zürich, Artemis&Winkler, 1995, coll. 149-1250.

<sup>9</sup> Pryor, p. 57: “Even in the incomplete form in which we have it, Saewulf’s narrative of his voyages is the best description of voyaging by sea in the Mediterranean in the twelfth century to survive from the Latin West”. Sulla navigazione medievale: M. Tangheroni e L. Di Nero, *Commercio e navigazione nel Mediterraneo medievale*, Roma, Scholastica, 1978; J. H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War: Studies in the maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988 (Past and Present Publications); M. Murino, *Andar per mare nel Medioevo. Le antiche consuetudini marittime italiane*, Chieti, Vecchio Faggio, 1988; M. Tangheroni, *Commercio e navigazione nel Medioevo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996 (Collezione storica).

spiega sì l'impossibilità di procedere per alto mare ("directo tramite") come conseguenza delle proprie colpe ("pondere pressus peccaminum [oppresso dal peso dei peccati]"), ma anche con l'oggettiva scarsità di navi ("penuria navis [per mancanza di una nave adeguata]").<sup>10</sup> Quando invece intraprende la descrizione del viaggio di ritorno, Saewulfo motiva la rotta costiera come deliberata modalità cautelativa contro eventuali attacchi pirateschi o saraceni.<sup>11</sup> Non è possibile fare ulteriore luce su tale circostanza, frutto, come spesso accade, di un intreccio inestricabile di fattori esterni e di scelte personali. Comunque sia, la scelta della rotta costiera, tanto all'andata quanto al ritorno, ha consentito di custodire all'interno della *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* notizie di estremo interesse sul mare e sulla navigazione nel XII secolo.

Non è, però, su aspetti marittimi tecnici<sup>12</sup> che ci si vuole fermare in queste pagine. Dal complessivo racconto di Saewulfo emerge del mare un'esperienza molto vivida: il mare come spazio fitto di pericoli, di rischi gravissimi, di minacce letali e continuamente incombenti. Tuttavia, e nel contempo, appunto per questa sua

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<sup>10</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 59: "Ego Saewlfus, licet indignus et peccator Ierosolimam pergens causa orandi sepulchrum dominicum, dum recto tramite simul cum aliis illuc pergentibus, vel pondere pressus peccaminum vel penuria navis, per altum pelagus transire nequivi, insulas tantum per quas perrexi vel nomina earum notare decrevi [Io Saewulfo, benché indegno e peccatore recandomi a Gerusalemme per pregare al sepolcro del Signore, o perché oppresso dal peso dei peccati, o per la mancanza di una nave adeguata, insieme con altri là diretti, dal momento che non potei procedere per alto mare, ho deciso di annotare soltanto le isole che toccai o i loro nomi]".

<sup>11</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 75: "Die Pentecostes repatriandi causa Ioppen navim ascendimus, sed Sarracenorum metu per altum pelagus Adriatici Maris, ut venimus, classem illorum metuentes tendere ausi non sumus, et ideo civitates maritimas pertranseutes ["Il giorno di Pentecoste ci imbarcammo a Giaffa per rimpatriare, ma per paura dei Saraceni e temendo la loro flotta, non osammo, così come all'andata, dirigerci in alto Mare Adriatico e così passammo davanti alle città marittime]".

<sup>12</sup> Gli elementi tecnici della navigazione di Saewulfo sono, del resto, esaurientemente già esaminati in Pryor, 'The Voyage of Saewulf'.

propria natura, il mare dimostra a Saewulfo in modo privilegiato la particolare vicinanza e l'assistente grazia divina. Nulla viene risparmiato al pellegrino anglosassone. I naufragi, le tempeste marine, le fatiche, i forti venti contrari, gli attacchi pirateschi o saraceni infestano, e all'andata e al ritorno, il viaggio per mare di Saewulfo. Il quale, però, nel loro felice superamento vede il segno della speciale, costante e sicura protezione divina. Nell'intensa esperienza di viaggio per mare vissuta nei primissimi anni del XII secolo da Saewulfo, invece che elementi oggettivi (per altro già sufficientemente sondati), le presenti pagine intendono mettere in rilievo l'approccio mentale del pellegrino medievale proprio attraverso la percezione e la rilettura da questi proposta sugli imprevisti della navigazione.

Le “*magnae marinae tempestates*”, il “*ventus validus et contrarius*”, i “*piratae*”, la “*violentia undarum*”, i “*naufagia*”, l’“*impetus hostium*”: molteplici sono i pericoli del mare che intessono fitti la pur breve narrazione del pellegrino anglosassone. E altrettanto numerosi sono gli episodi di mare afferibili ad una visione religiosa dei pericoli marittimi e del loro felice superamento. Tra i molti possibili, all'interno della *relatio* di Saewulfo si sceglie nel presente contributo di soffermarsi su due soli passaggi, in quanto ritenuti particolarmente emblematici: in primo luogo, la descrizione della terribile tempesta cui Saewulfo assistette nell'ottobre del 1102 nel porto di Giaffa; quindi, l'attacco che l'imbarcazione su cui viaggiava Saewulfo subì da parte di navi saracene presso il porto di Giaffa, nel maggio 1103, appena intrapreso il viaggio di ritorno verso l'Occidente.

## **La tempesta nel porto di Giaffa**

Nella *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* un momento testuale in cui emerge in modo rilevante l'atteggiamento di Saewulfo verso l'esperienza

del mare si ha nella descrizione della violentissima tempesta autunnale che, abbattutasi sul porto di Giaffa nell'ottobre del 1102, provocò la distruzione di ventitre navi e la morte di un migliaio di persone. La profonda emozione prodotta dalla grave sciagura marittima è acuita dal fatto di ambientarsi nel porto di Giaffa. Ossia proprio quel porto la cui vista, nella luce sorgente del mattino ("surgente sole"), dopo circa tredici settimane di navigazione ("post circulum tredici ebdomada rum") (e, per di più, trascorsi gli ultimi sette giorni in balia di un'impetuosa tempesta marina), aveva suscitato in Saewulfo e negli altri pellegrini una gioia improvvisa e ormai insperata, che centuplicò la letizia per il tanto desiderato approdo ("gaudium improvisum et desperatum laetitiam in nobis centuplicavit").

Quando al mattino sorse il sole, apparve davanti ai nostri occhi il lido del porto di Giaffa. E poiché un così grande turbamento per il pericolo corso ci aveva abbattuti in una tanto grande tristezza, la gioia improvvisa e ormai insperata centuplicò in noi la letizia. Dunque, dopo un arco di tredici settimane, sempre alloggiando o tra i flutti marini o sulle isole in tuguri o capanne abbandonate – poiché i Greci non sono ospitali –, così come di domenica ci imbarcammo a Monopoli, di domenica approdammo al porto di Giaffa con grande letizia e rendimento di grazie.<sup>13</sup>

"Cum laetitia magna et gratiarum actione": di lì a poco l'abbattersi della devastante tempesta turberà la grande letizia. Non riuscirà ad intaccare, invece, il rendimento di grazie, che sarà, anzi, addirittura amplificato. Saewulfo apre, infatti, la descrizione della tempesta con una accorata lode a Dio, per averlo scampato dalla morte. Con

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<sup>13</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 61: "Mane quoque surgente sole apparuit etiam litus de portu Ioppen coram oculis nostris, et quia tanta turbatio periculi nos in desolazione contristavit, gaudium improvisum et desperatum laetitiam in nobis centuplicavit. Igitur post circulum tredici ebdomadaram, sicut die dominico Monopolim navim ascendimus, vel in marinis fluctibus vel in insulis in tuguriis et in mappaliis desertis, quia Graeci non sunt hospitales, sempre habitando, cum laetitia magna et gratiarum actione die dominico ad portum Ioppen appulimus".



un'ardente apostrofe, che riecheggia toni salmodici, il pellegrino invita, anzi, anche i propri "karissimi" lettori ad unirsi nella lode verso "Colui che è potente" ("qui potens est"), per avergli "usato misericordia" lungo tutto il proprio viaggio ("quia fecit mecum in omni itinere meo misericordiam qui potens est"):

Ora io vi scongiuro, o voi tutti miei carissimi amici, levate le mani al cielo, applaudite, giubilate a Dio insieme a me in un'unica voce di esultanza, poiché Colui che è potente ha usato misericordia verso di me lungo tutto il mio viaggio: sia per ciò il Suo nome benedetto ora e nei secoli. Porgete gli orecchi, o carissimi, e ascoltate quanta misericordia la divina clemenza mostrò a me, benché suo ultimo servo, e alle mie cose.<sup>14</sup>

Presso Giaffa, secondo Saewulfo, il segno della protezione divina si era lasciato già duplicemente scorgere: sia nel felice avvertimento ricevuto all'approdo di lasciare immediatamente la nave ancorata, sia nel turbamento del mare verificatosi durante il tragitto verso terra.

Infatti lo stesso giorno in cui approdammo, qualcuno mi disse, credo su ispirazione divina: "Signore, sbarca oggi, non che domani magari tu non possa più sbarcare, se questa notte o all'alba arrivasse una tempesta". Quando sentii ciò, fui immediatamente preso dal desiderio di scendere, presi una barca e mi diressi a terra con tutte le mie cose. Proprio mentre mi stavo dirigendo a terra, il mare si turbò, il movimento crebbe e sorse una forte tempesta, ma con l'aiuto della grazia divina giunsi sano e salvo alla riva. Che cosa di più? Entrammo nella città per alloggiare e, stanchi e vinti dalla grande fatica, dopo aver mangiato, ci riposammo.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, pp. 61-62: "Modo vos obsecro, omnes amici mei dilectissimi, expansis in altum manibus plaudite, iubilare Deo una mecum in voce exultationis, quia fecit mecum in omni itinere meo misericordiam qui potens est: sit nomen eius benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum. Arrigite aures, karissimi, et audite misericordiam quam divina clementia michi, licet ultimo servo suo, meisque exhibuit".

<sup>15</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 62: "Nam eadem die qua appulimus quidam dixit michi, ut credo deifice: "Domine, hodie litus ascende, ne forte, hac nocte vel diluculo tempestate superveniente, cras ascendere non possis". Quod dum audivi,

Il mattino successivo lo sbarco, si scatena la tempesta vera e propria. Lo spettacolo che si mostra a Saewulfo, di ritorno dalle celebrazioni mattutine, è grandioso e terribile nella sua potenza distruttiva. Il pellegrino inglese descrive con precisione la distruzione implacabile provocata dai flutti sulle navi, e le onde gigantesche che si abbattono sul porto di Giaffa. Il “*rugitus maris*”, la “*ferocitas ventorum*”, la “*violentia undarum*” convergono in una devastazione ineluttabile.

Il mattino dopo, mentre tornavamo dalla chiesa, udimmo il fragore del mare, le grida della folla, e tutti che correvano stupefatti per cose mai sentite prima. Noi, timorosi, correndo giungemmo insieme con altri al lido. E infatti, proprio mentre li giungevamo, vedemmo onde superare l’altezza dei monti, vedemmo innumerevoli cadaveri di uomini e di donne affogati giacere miseramente sulla spiaggia, vedemmo le navi, sbattendo l’una contro l’altra, andare in frantumi. Ma chi poté sentire qualcosa d’altro se non il ruggito del mare e il fragore delle navi? Superavano, infatti, le grida del popolo e il suono di tutte le trombe. E la nostra nave, grandissima e solidissima, e molte altre navi cariche di frumento e di merci e di pellegrini che arrivavano e tornavano, pur trattenute fino a quel momento in profondità con ancore e con funi, quanto erano agitate dai flutti! Quanti alberi di navi erano abbattuti paurosamente! Quante merci erano gettate in acqua! Quali occhi tra coloro che guardavano potevano essere tanto duri e di pietra da riuscire a trattenere il pianto? Non restammo a guardare a lungo, che le ancore si spezzarono per la violenza dei flutti e delle onde, le funi si ruppero, e le navi, indebolite dalla forza delle onde, persa ogni speranza di salvarsi, ora sollevate in alto, ora abbattute nell’abisso, a poco a poco dal largo venivano gettate sugli scogli o sulla sabbia. Qui, poi, collidevano miseramente coi fianchi, qui erano fatte a brandelli dalla tempesta, né la ferocia dei venti le lasciava tornare illese al largo, né la bassa profondità della sabbia le lasciava giungere illese al lido.<sup>16</sup>

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*statim captus desiderio ascendendi navicula conduxī et cum omnibus meis ascendi. Me autem ascendente mare turbabatur, crevit commotio et facta est tempestas valida, sed ad litus divina gratia favente peveni illesus. Quid plura? Civitatem hospitandi causa intravimus et longo labore victi atque lassati refecti pausavimus”.*

La distruzione che si abbatte sulle grandi imbarcazioni, in totale balia delle onde, si scatena tanto più crudele e spietata sulle persone. Nell'estremo, disperato tentativo di salvarsi e di aggrapparsi alla vita, marinai e pellegrini o annegano, o vengono atrocemente mutilati, davanti agli occhi pieni di pianto di un impotente Saewulfo. Solo pochissimi riescono a salvarsi.

Ma perché dire con quanto pianto i marinai e i pellegrini, persa la speranza di salvarsi, si attaccarono chi alle navi, chi agli alberi, chi alle antenne, chi ai banchi dei rematori? Che aggiungere di più? Alcuni, presi dallo sbigottimento, annegarono in quello stesso punto. Alcuni, mentre io stavo a guardare, furono decapitati in quello stesso luogo dai legni della propria nave cui erano attaccati – il che a molti sembra incredibile –. Alcuni, strappati dalle tavole della nave, di nuovo venivano trascinati nel profondo. Alcuni, che sapevano nuotare, si affidarono spontaneamente ai

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<sup>16</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, pp. 62-63: “Mane vero, dum ab aecclesia venimus, sonitum maris audivimus, clamorem populi omnesque concurrentes atque mirantes de talibus prius inauditis, nos autem timentes currendo simul cum aliis venimus ad litus. Dum enim illuc pervenimus, vidimus tempestatem altitudinem superexcellere montium, corpora quidem innumerabilia hominum utriusque sexus summersorum in litore miserrime iacentia aspeximus, naves minutatim fractas iuxta volutantes simul vidimus. Sed quis preter rugitum maris et fragorem navium quicquam audire potuit? Clamorem etenim populi sonitumque omnium tubarum excessit. Navis autem nostra, maxima et fortissima, aliaeque multae frumento aliisque mercimoniis atque peregrinis venientibus atque redeuntibus oneratae, anchoris funibusque adhuc in profundo utcunque detentae, quomodo fluctibus iactabantur, quomodo mali metu incidebantur, quomodo mercimonia abiciebantur, qualis oculus intuentium tam durus atque lapideus a fletu se posset retinere? Non diu illud aspeximus antequam violentia undarum vel fluctuum anchorae lapserunt, funes vero rumpebantur, naves autem, severitate undarum laxatae, omni spe evadendi erepta nunc in altum elevatae, nunc in ima detrusae paulatim de profunditate tandem in arenam vel in scopulos proiciebantur; ibi vero de latere in latus miserrime collidebantur, ibi minutatim a tempestate dilacebantur, neque ferocitas ventorum in profundum reverti integras neque altitudo arenae sinebat eas ad litus pervenire illesas”.

flutti. E così per la maggior parte morirono e solo pochissimi, coscienti della propria capacità, giunsero a riva sani e salvi.<sup>17</sup>

Il bilancio finale delle perdite subite è tragico, sia per il numero di persone morte, sia per le imbarcazioni e le merci perdute.

Dunque, prima che io mi fossi allontanato dalla riva, delle trenta grandi navi, delle quali alcune popolarmente si chiamano *dromundi*, alcune invece *gulafri*, altre ancora invece *catti*, tutte cariche di pellegrini e merci, ne rimasero illese a stento sette e quel giorno morirono più di mille persone di entrambi i sessi.<sup>18</sup>

Eppure è proprio per tale ragione che Saewulfo chiude la drammatica descrizione della tempesta autunnale nel porto di Giaffa esattamente così come l'aveva aperta. Ossia con una lode e un ringraziamento a Dio per averlo scampato:

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<sup>17</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 63: “Sed quid attinet dicere quam flebiliter nautae et peregrini quidam navibus, quidam vero malis, quidam antennis, quidam autem transtris, omni spe evadendi privati, adhererunt? Quid plura dicam? Quidam stupore consumpti ibidem dimersi sunt, quidam a lignis, propriae navi, quod incredibile multis videtur, adhaerentes, me vidente ibidem sunt obruncati, quidam autem a tabulis navi evulsis iterum in profundum deportabantur, quidam autem natate scientes sponte se fluctibus commiserunt, et ita quamplures perierunt, perpauca quippe, propria virtute confidentes, ad litus illesi pervenerunt”.

<sup>18</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 63: “Igitur, ex navibus triginta maximis, quarum quaedam *dromundi*, quaedam *gulafri*, quaedam autem *catti* vulgariter vocantur, omnibus oneratis palamariis vel mercimoniis, antequam a litore discessissem vix septem illesae permanserunt, homines vero diversi sexus plusquam mille die illa perierunt”. Sulla tipologia delle diverse navi citate da Saewulfo J. H. Pryor, ‘The Voyage of Saewulf’ cit., pp. 49-50.

Mai occhi videro in un solo giorno una tragedia più grande di quella, ma il Signore, cui sia onore e gloria nei secoli infiniti, mi strappò con la sua grazia da tutto ciò. Amen.<sup>19</sup>

“Sed ab his omnibus sui gratia eripuit me Dominus”: sinteticamente queste parole davvero ben esprimono la cifra, la modalità di percezione e di rilettura che il pellegrino Saewulfo dà della propria esperienza di mare e di pericolo come prova evidente della protezione divina. Non è un caso che proprio la medesima formula (“sui gratia eripuit nos Dominus”), posta in chiusura all’episodio della tempesta nel porto di Giaffa, suggelli anche, come si vedrà tra pochissimo, il temibile attacco saraceno subito all’inizio del viaggio di ritorno. La *relatio* di Saewulfo non si limita ad essere una semplice cronaca di viaggio. Il viaggio di Saewulfo è un pellegrinaggio, un viaggio sacro. Ogni vicenda è, perciò, ricostruita, filtrata, riletta e spiegata dal protagonista stesso attraverso una precisa e pervadente prospettiva religiosa.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 63: “Maiorem etenim miseriam una die nullus vidit oculus, sed ab his omnibus sui gratia eripuit me Dominus, cui honor et gloria per infinita saecula. Amen”.

<sup>20</sup> Benché la tempesta di mare costituisca un perdurante, persino abusato, *topos* letterario, con ben solide radici omeriche e virgiliane, non si ritiene di poter individuare nella descrizione di Saewulfo tracce di interferenze con tali modelli. Sul motivo letterario della tempesta di mare si segnala, innanzi tutto, il recente volume C. S. Fern, *Seesturm im Mittelalter: ein literarisches Motiv im Spannungsfeld zwischen Topik, Erfahrungswissen und Naturkunde*, Frankfurt a. Main, Peter Lang, 2012 (Kultur, Wissenschaft, Literatur, 25). Tra specifici contributi esemplificativi sulla fortuna e la persistenza del tema si possono vedere Ch. Ratkowitzsch, ‘Vergils Seesturm bei Iuvencus und Sedulius’, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 29, 1986, pp. 40-58 e R. Franchi, ‘Il mare in tempesta nel “De autexusio” di Metodio d’Olimpo e nell’“Hexaameron” di Giorgio di Pisidia’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 102 (2009), pp. 65-82. Sull’affine motivo letterario del naufragio si segnala, invece, il volume collettaneo M. Di Maio (ed.), *Naufrazi*, Milano, Guerini, 1994.

## L'attacco saraceno

Terminata la propria devota visita ai luoghi santi mediorientali, Saewulfo, il 17 maggio del 1103, giorno di Pentecoste, dopo circa sette mesi di permanenza nell'area palestinese, salpava dal porto di Giaffa per fare ritorno in Occidente. Per timore di attacchi saraceni (“Sarracenorum metu”) la nave su cui viaggiava tenne, come già all'andata (“ut venimus”), la linea di costa. Nel proprio resoconto Saewulfo cita, perciò, puntualmente le città marittime costeggiate e nomina i signori che le tenevano, da poco terminata la prima Crociata:

Visitati e venerati i singoli luoghi sacri della città di Gerusalemme e dei suoi territori secondo la nostra possibilità, il giorno di Pentecoste ci imbarcammo a Giaffa per rimpatriare, ma per paura dei Saraceni e temendo la loro flotta, non osammo, così come all'andata, dirigerci in alto Mare Adriatico e così passammo davanti alle città marittime, alcune delle quali in mano ai Franchi, alcune ancora in mano dei Saraceni, i cui nomi sono: la più vicina a Giaffa è chiamata popolarmente Arsuph, ma in latino Azoto; poi vi è Cesarea Palestina, in seguito Caifa. Baldovino, fiore dei re, possiede queste città. Poi vi è la fortissima città di Acri, che è chiamata Accaron, poi Sur e Saegete, che sono Tiro e Sidone, e poi Giubelet e poi Beirut e quindi Tartus, che possiede il duca Raimondo, poi Gibel, dove si trovano i monti Gelboi, quindi Tripoli e Lice. Siamo passati per queste città.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 75: “Perscrutatis etenim singulis Ierosolimitanae urbis finiumque suarum sanctuariis pro posse nostro atque adoratis, die Pentecostes repatriandi causa Ioppen navim ascendimus, sed Sarracenorum metu per altum pelagus Adriatici Maris, ut venimus, classem illorum metuentes tendere ausi non sumus, et ideo civitates maritimas pertranseuntes, quarum quasdam Franci optinent, quasdam veri Sarraceni adhuc possident, nomina quarum haec sunt: proxima Ioppen vocatur Arsuph vulgariter sed latine Azotum, deinde est Cesarea Palestina, postea Cayphas: has civitates Baldwinus flos regum possidet. Postea vero est Acras civitas fortiissima, quae Accaron vocatur, deinde Sur et Saegete, quae sunt Tyrus et Sydon, et postea Iubelet, deinde Baruth et sic Tartusa, quam dux Remundus possidet, postea Gibel, ubi sunt montes Gelboe, deinde Tripolis et Lice: has civitates pertransivimus”.

Tuttavia il quarto giorno di navigazione, nonostante la scelta cautelativa della rotta costiera, la nave a vela di Saewulf venne attaccata da una temibile flotta saracena. Altre due imbarcazioni, ugualmente provenienti da Giaffa e cariche di pellegrini, poiché a remi riuscirono a sfuggire l'accerchiamento. Il *dromundo* su cui viaggiava Saewulfo restò, invece, bloccato, a fronteggiare solo l'impari attacco.

Ma il quarto giorno dopo la Pentecoste, mentre noi navigavamo a vela tra Caifa e Accaron, ecco davanti ai nostri occhi ventisei navi di Saraceni, dell'ammiraglio di Tiro e Sidone, dirette a Babilonia con l'esercito in aiuto dei Caldei per attaccare il re di Gerusalemme. Due navi, che giungevano da Giaffa con noi, cariche di pellegrini, lasciarono sola la nostra nave, poiché erano più leggere, e si rifugiarono a remi a Cesarea.<sup>22</sup>

La minaccia saracena incombeva con ben ventisei navi. Eppure i pellegrini, "pronti a morire per il Cristo" ("mori pro Christo parati"), si prepararono alla difesa armata ed ad oltranza, imperniandola nel *castellum* della nave. E dopo circa un'ora di posta, proprio tale determinazione ("costantia") avrebbe, infine, fatto desistere i Saraceni dallo sferrare l'attacco. Ancora una volta, anche in questa pericolosa vicenda e nel suo felice esito, Saewulfo riconosce la traccia certa dell'azione divina. "Così quel giorno il Signore ci strappò per sua grazia dai nemici", afferma, infatti, con fede il pellegrino inglese al termine del proprio racconto:

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<sup>22</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, pp. 75-76: "Sed quarta feria Pentecostes nobis inter Cayphas et Accaron velificantibus, ecce viginti sex naves Sarracenorum coram oculis nostris, amiraldi videlicet urbium Tyri et Sydonis, Babiloniam cum exercitu tendentes in adiutorium Chaldeis ad debellandum regem Ierosolimorum. Naves vero duae nobiscum Ioppen venientes, palmariis oneratae, nostram navim derelinquentes solam, quia leviores erant Cesaream remis confugerunt".

I Saraceni, invece, girando intorno alla nostra nave e tendendo insidie alla distanza di un tiro di freccia, gioirono di un così grande bottino. I nostri, in verità, pronti a morire per il Cristo, presero le armi ed essendo il momento favorevole riempirono il castello della nostra nave con uomini armati: vi erano, infatti, nel nostro *dromundo* circa duecento uomini difensori. Dopo circa un'ora, consultatosi, il capo dell'esercito comandò a uno solo tra i marinai di salire sull'albero della propria nave, che era grandissima, così che da lui potesse conoscere con esattezza la situazione della nostra azione. Quando comprese da quello la costanza della nostra difesa, spiegate le vele, si diressero in alto mare: così quel giorno il Signore ci strappò per sua grazia dai nemici.<sup>23</sup>

## Considerazioni conclusive

È noto come il pellegrinaggio medievale si offra a molteplici piani di lettura. Un buon indicatore di tale vivacità euristica è la bibliografia esistente: già amplissima e ancora in costante crescita.<sup>24</sup> Ciò non deve affatto sorprendere. Per motivazioni, implicazioni e modalità, il viaggio devozionale è, del resto, fenomeno complesso e sfaccettato. Altrettanto numerosi e plurali sono, quindi, i possibili approcci di ricerca su di esso applicabili.

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<sup>23</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 76: “Sarraceni autem, nostram navim circumquaque girando et quantum iactus est sagittae insidias alonge tendendo, de tanta preda gavisus sunt. Nostri vero, mori pro Christo parati, arma arripuerunt et secundum tempus castellum navis nostrae armatis munierunt: erant enim in nostro dromundo defendentium fere ducenti virorum. Post spacium autem quasi unius horae, inito consilio, princeps exercitus unum ex nautis malum navis suae, quia maxima erat, ascendere precepit, ut ab eo statum nostrae actionis omnino edisceret. Dum vero constantiam nostrae defensionis ab illo intellexit, extensis in altum velis alta petierunt maris: sic illa die ab inimicis sui gratia eripuit nos Dominus”.

<sup>24</sup> Per tale ragione ci si limita qui ad indicare solo alcuni testi basilari, quali l'imprescindibile lavoro di riferimento V. Turner ed E. Turner, *Il pellegrinaggio*, Lecce, Argo, 1997 (Mnemosyne, 13) e L. Vaccaro (ed.), *L'Europa dei pellegrini*, Milano, Centro Ambrosiano, 2004 (Europa ricerche, 9).



All'interno di tale estesissimo campo di indagine, le presenti brevi pagine si sono proposte – oltre che di contribuire a far conoscere una fonte non ancora abbastanza nota come invece dovrebbe essere – di mettere in rilievo, nelle parole dell'anglosassone Saewulfo l'atteggiamento di un pellegrino del XII secolo di fronte ai pericoli del mare. Si è voluto, cioè, aggiungere un frammento, che potesse in qualche modo lumeggiare ulteriormente il pellegrinaggio medievale in una sua dimensione percettiva-soggettiva.

Percorrendo la *Relatio de situ Ierusalem* si è visto che in mare per Saewulfo non sono mancati né i pericoli naturali, né gli attacchi dei nemici. Il pellegrino non si è però interrogato sulle cause originarie di questi mali e di queste minacce. Non si è registrata, insomma, in Saewulfo la preoccupazione di spiegarne l'origine – come, ad esempio, espressione violenta o manifestazione mediatrice della volontà divina. Saewulfo si è spostato, piuttosto, sull'interpretazione del loro superamento, in cui ha voluto riconoscere l'intervento divino, puntuale e protettore.

E quasi a suggello di ciò, proprio poche righe prima che la *relatio* bruscamente si interrompa, il pellegrino dichiara ancora una volta la propria fede profonda, incrollabile nella protettrice Grazia divina (“divina nos protegente gratia”), qualificante il proprio pellegrinaggio ai *loca sancta* – così come, probabilmente, l'intero pellegrinaggio della propria vita terrena:

Durante quel viaggio fummo spesso attaccati dai pirati, ma, protetti dalla Grazia divina, non perdemmo alcuna cosa con la forza, né per l'impeto dei nemici, né per la furia delle tempeste.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Peregrinationes tres*, p. 76: “In illo autem itinere a piratis saepe sumus invasi, sed divina nos protegente gratia neque impetu hostium neque motu tempestatum aliquid vi adhuc amisimus”.

## Biografia

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# **The dawn of astrophysics in Mexico: Mexican/American political affairs during second world war**

**Jorge Bartolucci**

**Abstract:** The creation of the National Astrophysical Observatory of Tonantzintla, Mexico, in 1942, sets the beginning of the later establishment of modern astrophysics in this country. What happened in the 1940s that made it possible to overcome previous obstacles? Finding answers to this question, the paper focuses on the historical and social circumstances under which it was possible to overcome the early situation and modernize local astronomy. According to the argument exposed here, it can be explained as a consequence of the interaction between Harlow Shapley, former director of the Harvard College Observatory and Luis E. Erro, member of the Mexican Government and amateur astronomer, in a very particular moment of the history of the relationship between Mexico and the United States. Since the story took place within the context of the Second World War, the influence of geopolitical affairs must be highlighted. As a case study it should serve to contribute to the knowledge of the development of science in developing countries and their integration into the international community. Additionally, the study offers some answers to the main questions that have stimulated the discussion among sociologists and historians of science: how and to what extent scientific activity is facilitated or inhibited by social and historical factors?

## **Introduction**

This essay attempts to clarify the historical circumstances that explain the late emergence in Mexico, around 1940, of self-sufficiency in the field of modern astrophysics. One could ask why

it is important to focus on Mexican science as a case study. Science, as it is often said, has no national boundaries. However, if science has no national boundaries it is also true that science is socially embedded. Scientists, like everyone else, are constrained by the forms of the particular society they belong to. Social and historical circumstances exert powerful influence on scientific work. Why has science flourished in one time and place and not another? Under which circumstances did the leadership in a certain field of science move from one country to another, and how did such a change affect the field elsewhere? Questions such as these would remain unsolved if science were to be considered only an international enterprise.

This is especially true in the field of History of Astronomy. As Stephen G. Brush shows, Germany enjoyed unquestioned leadership in astronomy during the first half of the nineteenth century, but suffered a precipitous decline thereafter, until Einstein's appearance. The British reached their astronomical peak in the 1860s and 1870s. The French lost their high standing in physical science after the death of Laplace (1827) and never recovered it. Italy provided some important work in the nineteenth century, and was overshadowed by Holland's.<sup>1</sup> The rapid growth of astronomy in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was so remarkable that by the mid-twentieth century the country had risen to world leadership. Starting from essentially zero, around 1930 the United States was ahead of all other countries and by mid-twentieth century consolidated its prominent role in contemporary astrophysics worldwide; an achievement that David W. Chambers considers as the establishment of a new scientific center in the world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. G. Brush, *History of Modern Science, a Guide to the Second Scientific Revolution, 1800-1950*, Iowa State University Press, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> A scientific center, as the locus of a particular set of strategies that have proved to be successful in establishing scientific authority and exercising professional control. D. W. Chambers, 'Does Distance Tyrannize Science?' in R. W. Home,

Historians and sociologists of science have produced fundamental work that explains why modern science first emerged in Europe and later made progress in the United States. Consequently, science usually is identified with those dynamic scientific centers around the world where great works are written, great discoveries are made, and great theories proposed. Instead, the importance of looking beyond the traditionally recognized scientific centers, turning to the establishment of modern science outside Western Europe and the United States, has been underestimated. As a result, the course followed by other regions of the world is one of the least understood aspects of the process of transference of modern science.<sup>3</sup>

This essay attempts to understand the process of transference of modern science to the wider world, taking into account the experience of Mexican astronomical community, that was at one time influenced by the important metropolitan center, France, and later became under the influence of a new scientific astronomical center, the United States. The paper illustrates how Mexican astronomy responded to these shifting patterns of intellectual authority over time, focusing on the establishment of the Tonantzintla Astrophysical Observatory, Puebla, Mexico, in 1942, institution that marked the beginning of a new stage of local science. Such an achievement was reached by a group of young Mexican scientists with the support of the Harvard College Observatory that made it possible to modernize astronomy and integrate it into the international scientific community. Since the story took place between 1938 and 1942, the influence of geopolitical affairs under the context of the entry of the United States into the Second World War deserves careful discussion. Alongside this process, political and diplomatic goals became inevitably intertwined with

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and S. G. Kohlstedt (eds.), *International Science and National Scientific Identity. Australia between Britain and America*, London, 1991, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

intellectual ones in the collaborative efforts of the astronomers from both nations.

## **The background**

The attempts to conduct astronomical observations in Mexico are referred to 1842 when the director of the Military College, General Pedro Garcia Conde, commissioned the famous architect Lorenzo of Hidalga to raise the height of the tower known as El Caballero Alto in the Castle of Chapultepec with the purpose of erecting an observatory, so that students of the College could develop astronomical and geodetic practice. The new building was equipped with three large instruments “of good and beautiful construction”,<sup>4</sup> one of which was a 15 cm refractor telescope in diameter and a focal length of 2.58 meters, specially designed to observe and pinpoint the moment when a bright star crossed the meridian of reference; fact of great importance for astronomical and cartographic works that were made at that time. This was the first truly professional telescope there was in the country and was in operation until 1847, when U.S. troops took the castle of Chapultepec at the end of the war between Mexico and the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of having an observatory died with its sponsor and the study of the sky was forgotten until 1862, when some instruments were set up again in Chapultepec Castle. Of the three instruments brought from Europe in 1842, only the refractor telescope was still working, thanks to the fact that it was in the hands of Francisco Diaz

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<sup>4</sup> F. Jiménez and A. Anguiano, *Memorias del Observatorio Astronómico Central*, Fondo Observatorio Astronómico Nacional, Archivo Histórico UNAM, CESU, Unidad Bibliográfica, Ciudad de México, 1877, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> M. A. Moreno Corral, ‘Una contribución astronómica fundamental en la vida de México’, in J. Bartolucci (ed.), *La saga de la ciencia mexicana. Estudios sociales de sus comunidades: siglos XVIII al XX*, UNAM, México, 2011, p. 84.



Covarrubias, “an astronomer who had appreciated its value”.<sup>6</sup> The meridian and the equatorial, victims of negligence, had become useless. This second attempt lasted for only a few months before the instruments again were taken away. In 1866, new instruments built by Troughton and Simms of London, arrived in Mexico for the purpose of reviving the concept of a National Observatory: a 1.16m focal length transit telescope, an astronomical pendulum and a chronograph. Unfortunately, “the lack of financial support and the difficulties caused by the civil war between liberal and conservative forces made it almost impossible” to start doing scientific work on regular basis during those early years in Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

During the Presidency of Porfirio Diaz, (1876-1880 and 1884-1911), conditions improved. Gen. Diaz was convinced that his government would be more effective if he could rely on good quality geographical maps. According to the opinion given by the experts in the field, for this purpose it was essential to have a good Astronomical Observatory. Sensitive to the expert opinion, one of the first government action was to ask the Secretary Vicente Riva Palacio to submit a project for the installation of an observatory in the Chapultepec Castle. Thus, on December 28, 1876, Riva Palacio requested astronomer Angel Anguiano to proceed with reconstruction of the National Observatory at the legendary Chapultepec Castle, providing the new scientific institution with splendid apparatus similar to the first quality observatories of the Old Continent.<sup>8</sup> On May 5, 1878, the National Observatory opened its doors with a solemn dedication and never closed them again.<sup>9</sup> In August 1878, the

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<sup>6</sup> Jiménez and Anguiano, op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.18b.

<sup>8</sup> J. Gallo, *Trabajos realizados por el Observatorio Astronómico Nacional*, Fondo Observatorio Astronómico Nacional, Archivo Histórico UNAM, CESU, Unidad Bibliográfica, UNAM, Ciudad de México, 1920, pp. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> The National Astronomical Observatory was founded by a presidential decree on December 18, 1876; J. Gallo, *Programa de Trabajo del Observatorio Astronómico Nacional*, Fondo Observatorio Astronómico Nacional, Archivo Histórico UNAM,

Observatory acquired a magnificent altazimuth, built by Troughton and Simms. A few months later a photoheliograph and a two-meter focal length Ertel telescope were acquired. In anticipation of the December 6, 1882 new transit of Venus (an event that would not be repeated until 2004), the Mexican government ordered the construction of a 15-inch Equatorial. In 1883, three new instruments were brought from Europe: a 38-centimeter Great Equatorial with a 5-meter focal length, a 20-centimeter Meridian with a 2.74-meter focal length and a 3.43-meter focal length Photograph Equatorial.<sup>10</sup>

The acquisition of first quality observational instruments allowed the new Observatory to start taking part in astronomical research, such as the *Carte du Ciel*, project proclaimed at the International Astrophotographic Congress met in Paris on April 16, 1887, with the consensus of sixteen countries, including Mexico. The participation in such a project gave the National Observatory the opportunity to acquire new equipment and to interact with the most important European observatories. However, the consequences of the commitment acquired by the Mexican government soon became a heavy duty for the local astronomers. Joaquín Gallo, director of the Observatorio Astronómico Nacional from 1915 to 1947, repeatedly complained that the *Carte* as well as the Catalogue were too overwhelming; in his opinion, the “Mexican colleagues who accepted the commitment of participating in such a magnificent work only measured its excitement.” In fact, pointed out Gallo, the activities involved in the projects were “so long and labored that they implied a lot of really simple operations.”<sup>11</sup> Even during the 1930s the National Observatory was still responding to the commitments established by the *Carte du Ciel*.

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CESU, Unidad Bibliográfica, Ciudad de México, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-5.

<sup>11</sup> J. Gallo, *Trabajos llevados a cabo en el Observatorio Astronómico Nacional de Tacubaya*, Fondo Observatorio Astronómico Nacional, Archivo Histórico UNAM, CESU, Unidad Bibliográfica, Ciudad de México, 1920, p. 7.

The episode is relevant because, on the one hand, shows that the political and financial support given by the government to the emerging field of astronomy, rather than to contribute to the advancement of science itself, served to strengthen the value of science as a symbol of progress. That is why it was always easier to acquire instruments than to create suitable conditions for doing scientific work on a continuing basis. On the other hand, this kind of symbolical interest in science was reinforced by intellectual factors. The case shows the consequences of following the influence of the European scientific environment at a time when leadership in the field of astronomy was moving to the United States. As happened in other countries whose astronomical activity was strongly influenced by European observatories, such as the case of Australia, the commitment acquired in the project *Carte du Ciel* was a major factor in the delayed development of local astronomy for more than fifty years.<sup>12</sup> Under such circumstances, the horizon of the first Mexican astronomers could never have exceeded the limits of the ancient astronomy of position, whose results were not significant at a time in which the borders of astronomical knowledge were being spread by the advance of modern astrophysics.<sup>13</sup>

## **The change**

The change came about at the end of the presidency of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), when Luis E. Erro, a distinguished politician and amateur astronomer, managed a project that led Mexican astronomy scientists toward their encounter with modern

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<sup>12</sup> S. C. B. Gascoigne, K. M. Proust and M. O. Robins, *The Creation of the Anglo-Australian Observatory*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bartolucci, *El desarrollo de la ciencia en México. De la antigua astronomía de posición a la astrofísica moderna*, EAE, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing GmbH & Co KG, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2011.

astrophysics. In the middle 1930s, Erro was a young revolutionary leader that collaborated closely to president Cardenas. Being the First Secretary of the Mexican Embassy in Washington he made frequent visits from Washington to the Harvard College Observatory, in Cambridge, and under the tutelage of Harlow Shapley and Leon Campbell he became an active amateur observer.

Upon his return to Mexico he built himself a small observatory for the study of variable stars, which he named the “Annie J. Cannon Observatory” in honor of the prominent Harvard’s astronomer. However, Erro had visions that went far beyond a modest private observatory in one of the suburbs of Mexico City. He keenly felt that the promotion of the study of pure science was one of the best ways for insuring the continual growth of Mexico’s system of public education. It was true that Mexico had a national observatory at Tacubaya, but since the activities of this institution had largely been limited to routine related to time and the calendar, it had done little toward enriching the scientific and cultural life of the nation as a whole.

Two years before leaving the government, General Cardenas felt that the time had come to reward Luis Enrique Erro for his services to the revolution. So he asked Luis Enrique what he wanted for himself. The reply was: “A National Observatory for Mexico”. Cardenas agreed, but he asked Erro right away how he was going to achieve this goal in his country, without technical expertise and with only one sleepy major observatory, Tacubaya Observatory, directed by Joaquin Gallo. Erro replied that he had good contacts at Harvard, where he had come to know, via Leon Campbell and the AAVSO, the great Harlow Shapley, one of the great leaders of the astronomical community in the twenty-century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> B. Bok, ‘Mexican Astronomy, 1930-1950’, *Symposium Dinner Honoring Guillermo Haro*, February 6, Tucson, 1983.

According to Owen Gingerich, eminent historian of astronomy, Shapley's career could be divided into two periods. During the first period, Shapley published over one hundred scientific papers, mostly thanks to his position as a staff astronomer at Mount Wilson, where he worked with some of the best quality instruments then in existence. After this highly productive period, Shapley became increasingly involved with administrative and political affairs. He became an honorary academician in twelve countries and a member of numerous scientific organizations. From 1939 to 1944, he served as president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences with Hudson Hoagland as secretary, and together they sought to transform the organization into something more than a local honorary society. They broadened the scope of its activities and encouraged fruitful communication among fellows representing diverse sections of the intellectual community. It was their inspiration and effort that foreshadowed the thrust of the Academy's post-war program and its emergence as a major center for the interdisciplinary study of important contemporary issues.<sup>15</sup>

This "second" career included the effort made to commit the United States Government to a program of continuing support for basic research, an effort that culminated in the establishment of the National Science Foundation in 1951. Don K. Price pointed out that at the time Shapley entered the political arena, few American scientists were openly concerned with questions of public policy. But the relation between science and politics changed radically in the United States and, according to Price, much of that change is reflected in the various political activities of Harlow Shapley. The first and principal concern underlying Shapley's public interest from the 1920's through the 1940's was "internationalism". It began with the attempt to bring German scientists back into the international astronomical community after World War I and

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<sup>15</sup> O. Gingerich, 'Harlow Shapley and Mount Wilson', *Bulletin of The American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, April 1973.

continued with his efforts on behalf of the international cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

So it came about that Erro turned up at the Harvard College Observatory in 1939, and it was not long before the plans for a new national observatory in Mexico began to take shape. Harlow Shapley used to organize at Harvard Observatory several informal meetings called the “Hollow Square”, to which astronomers Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, Fred Whipple, Donald Menzel, George Dimitroff and Bart Bok were invited. It was there where a basic plan emerged, and slowly led to the founding of Tonantzintla Astrophysical Observatory, in Puebla, Mexico, opened on February 17, 1942. In one of her essays, Paris Pismis, one of the closest collaborators of L. E. Erro, wrote:

After working in Harvard almost a year, Erro reappeared playing a new role: he seemed to be more active and forceful than during the preceding visit to Harvard. He came in and out of Shapley’s office joined by Carlos Graef; obviously something very important was being organized; as we knew afterwards it was the beginning of a new era for Mexico, the dawn of astrophysics in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

On December 18 1940, the establishment of an Astrophysical Observatory had been decided by the Mexican Government. Tacubaya should continue working on the Service of Time, the Anuario and the Ephemerides, whereas the new institution should be entirely devoted to astrophysical research. The budget available for the new proposed astronomical observatory would be between

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<sup>16</sup> D. K. Price, ‘The Scientist as Politician’, *Bulletin of The American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, April 1973.

<sup>17</sup> P. Pismis, ‘Semblanza de Luis Enrique Erro’, paper read on the 50th. Anniversary of the foundation of the Observatorio Astrofisico de Tonantzintla, México, 1893.

15,000 and 20,000 dollars.<sup>18</sup> The Observatory was being located on a hill near the village of Tonantzintla, 8 miles from the city of Puebla, and it was chosen because President Manuel Avila Camacho, a native of the State of Puebla and a longtime friend of L. E. Erro, urged that the new observatory be built inside his State. In this aim he was strongly supported by Governor Dr. Gonzalo Bautista.<sup>19</sup>

As stated in one of his letters, Erro was also counting on Shapley's support, "The question of what technical assistance we may expect from you I do not ask, because you see that I have already taken it for granted". With identical confidence in the success of the project, completed the letter assuring that they were going to show the "old Guard" in Mexico "what could be done when one has the right friends and the right spirit".<sup>20</sup> Shapley replied letting him know that he admired very much the vigor with which he and his closest friends went after the Observatory project. Concerning the budget available for it, he believed that much could be done in assembling powerful and useful equipment with \$20,000.00 US dollars. Some Harvard astronomers shared Shapley enthusiasm, and in the first days of January, Shapley would call a Junta to make preliminary plans for Erro's visit.<sup>21</sup>

The main instrument of the new observatory opened in February 1942, was a 27-31 Telescope, known as the Schmidt Camera, a brand new instrument identical to others that were built simultaneously by Harvard. Its name comes from an optician of the

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<sup>18</sup> L. E. Erro to H. Shapley, 'Mexican Conference 1939-1942', Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5, Box 1, December 18, 1940.

<sup>19</sup> B. Bok, 'Mexican Astronomy, 1930-1950', in *Symposium Dinner Honoring Guillermo Haro*, 1983.

<sup>20</sup> Erro to Shapley, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> H. Shapley to L. E. Erro, 'Mexican Conference 1939-1942', Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5, Box 1, December 25, 1940.

Observatory of Hamburg named Bernard Schmidt who, in 1932, released the benefits of a new type of telescope that brought together the best features of refractors and reflectors and allowed observing stars and nebulas at high quality. The rapidity with which the celestial photographs could be obtained by the prototype built by Schmidt, and the possibility of a single plate cover for large sections of the sky, opened new horizons for the development of astrophysics in those years. The technical characteristics of this device as its size, made the telescope installed at Tonantzintla the world's largest telescope of its kind for the time.

### **The geopolitical context**

Given this achievement, the following question must be asked: How was it possible that Mexico acquired a telescope of this size and would have been built so quickly, amid the general mobilization of American society due to the entry of its country into World War II? According to the analysis done here, it can be explained as a consequence of a complex process in which, factors such as personality, intellectual capacity and political position of the participants involved, wove a web that connected their life experiences with other major events, such as the local struggle for political power and the relationships between Mexico and the United States within the context of the Second World War. Let us consider, first, the local political situation. Indeed, at the end of the government of President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), public opinion was divided between those who wanted to go deeply into nationalism and socialism and those who wanted a change. So, the process of selection of the official candidate that will run for president was especially hard-fought in 1939-1940. After two years of struggles inside the governing party, a very violent election took place on July 7, 1940. In several districts the police and the army



had to intervene to stop the confrontation between the followers of the official party and the opposition.<sup>22</sup>

Under such circumstances, domestic political life began to be strongly influenced by the international situation. Almazan, leader of the opposition, wanted to conduct a revolt from the United States, whose interests had been damaged by the recent nationalization of the oil industry decreed years before by president Cardenas. According to Luis Medina, Elliot Roosevelt, son of President Roosevelt, seemed to have some preference for the Almazan's movement. Even when nationalism in Mexico had been always remarkable, given that the regime was considered illegitimate by the opposition, the group in power sought official recognition from the United States. Therefore, the elected President Avila Camacho accelerated the steps and sent an emissary to Washington,<sup>23</sup> communicating to President Roosevelt that the new government of Mexico was interested in solving in a friendly way the pending matters between the two countries.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the outbreak of the Second World War pushed the North American government to adopt the "Good Neighbor Policy", and in view of the geopolitical importance of Mexico, despite of the resentment caused by the nationalization of the oil industry, the White House and the Department of State, decided not to interfere in his political domestic affairs.<sup>25</sup> As a proof of the official wish of restoring the links of friendship between the two countries, the American Government sent Vice-President Henry

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<sup>22</sup> L. Medina, *Del Cardenismo al Ávilacamachismo*, México, El Colegio de México, Ciudad de México, 1978.

<sup>23</sup> On August 6, Miguel Aleman interviewed to Summer Wells, Undersecretary of the State. *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> A. J. Contreras, 'Estado y sociedad civil en las elecciones de 1940' in C. Martínez Assad, *La sucesión presidencial en México*, México, Nueva Imagen-UNAM, 1981, pp. 124-128.

<sup>25</sup> According to Luis Medina, the son of the president Roosevelt, Elliott Roosevelt seemed to have some preference toward the Almazan's movement. *Ibid.*

Wallace to the ceremony of the installation of President Avila Camacho. In a speech made at the Chamber of Deputies in January 1941, Wallace pointed out that the most practical goal for this hemisphere was Pan Americanism, because without solidarity in the hemisphere the peace needed for prosperity in agriculture, work and business could not be assured.<sup>26</sup> The words expressed by Wallace, predicted the establishment of a new era in the relationship between Mexico and the United States, within which the astronomical project very soon would start to have a remarkable position.

The relevance of geopolitical role played by the new scientific institution was underlined by President Avila Camacho, on December 5, 1941, in the calling of an Inter-American Astrophysical Congress to be held in Mexico, from February 15 to 26, 1942, celebrating the dedication of the new observatory. He made it clear that the purpose of the Mexican Government was to contribute to the maintenance in the American continent, of the progress of science and culture, and thus counteract as much as possible the paralyzation of scientific and cultural activities in the countries devastated by war. The presidential invitations to the participants in the Congress were sent out a month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. According to Harlow Shapley testimony, after December 7, many of the American astronomers were in doubt about the relevance of taking part in an international congress during the war, however:

We decided to go through with the plan when both Mexican and United States officials pointed out that, since our entry into the war, it was more than ever necessary for the United States and Mexico to make it known to the world that they were side by side in the defense of human liberties and free research.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Medina, *op.cit.*

<sup>27</sup> H. Shapley to G. R. Harrison, 'Mexican Conference 1939-1942', Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, Harvard College Observatory, UA V 630. 22. 5 Box 1, February 8, 1943.

Other evidence in this same line of thought, is the message transmitted by Vice President Wallace, who on behalf of the U.S.A Government, sent a telegram to Harlow Shapley, letting him know that “Franklin D. Roosevelt and the White House would appreciate it if the U.S.A astronomers invited to the Dedication of the new Mexican Observatory would all go to Mexico for the occasion, war or no war”.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that both countries have agreed to give utmost importance to a scientific event, actually points to the causes that enabled the two countries to pass from a latent confrontation to close cooperation. According to Lorenzo Meyer, diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States after the Mexican Revolution suffered constantly due to the stress caused, firstly, by the need for local government to have the recognition of the United States Government and, secondly, to support their nationalist principles.<sup>29</sup> Overcoming the differences at the end of the decade of the thirties was due, on the one hand, to the strategic significance of Mexico under the precautions taken by the United States before the advancing Japanese and Nazi expansionism. On the other hand, because Mexico, more than any other country in Latin America needed a guarantee of non-intervention by the United States because of the threat posed by American interests affected by the oil nationalization decreed during the presidency of Cardenas.

The advent of World War II accelerated the approach of the United States to Latin America and the objective of securing the American

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<sup>28</sup> B. Bok, ‘Astronomía Mexicana, 1930-1950’, in M. A. Moreno Corral (ed.), *Historia de la Astronomía en México*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 210.

<sup>29</sup> L. Meyer, ‘Nacionalismo revolucionario e imperialismo: una convivencia difícil (1920-1940)’, in J. S. Vázquez and L. Meyer (ed.), *México frente a Estados Unidos. Un ensayo histórico (1776-1980)*, México, El Colegio de México, 1982.

markets was reinforced by the “hemispheric defense”. The dominance of Hitler in Europe and the growing aggressiveness of Japan, made the U.S.A Government began to express serious concerns about their own safety and that of the rest of America. Consequently, the political and military coordination with Latin American countries was placed above any question of a private nature.<sup>30</sup> The good neighbor policy intended to govern American foreign relations worldwide but in Latin America, especially.<sup>31</sup> In previous years, some Latin American countries had provided building materials for weapons to Germany and Italy. Furthermore, fascist groups and Nazi propaganda, designed to create antagonism against the United States, found support in reactionary groups in these countries.

Another concern was to strengthen political stability on the continent, as if altered, could be fertile ground for the Axis activities and propaganda. Much more urgent it was for the Americans to ensure the loyalty of Mexico, since the Mexican public opinion in those years did not share the official enthusiasm for collaboration with the United States. In fact, within the population there were strong currents of affinity towards the Axis, fueled by nationalist sentiments against the United States and Great Britain that had claimed so hard during the Mexican Revolution. Reaching consensus on such close relations with the neighboring country was not easy for the Mexican Government, because in left and right political forces there was a deep and ancient anti-American sentiment.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> OIAA, History of the OIAA, passim OIAA Papers, (Office of Interamerican Affairs) Files, National Archives, Washington, U.S. Government Print Office, 1947, p., 5. cited in M. Rivero, ‘La política económica durante la guerra’, in R. Loyola, *Entre la guerra y la estabilidad política*, Grijalbo, México, 1990, p.20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> B. Guerra, ‘La guerra y la posguerra en las relaciones de México y Estados Unidos’, in Loyola, *Entre la guerra y la estabilidad política*, 1990, p. 69.

Evidence that reflects the delicate situation that kept the international political equilibrium within this context, is that as a result of the blockade decreed against Mexico by the British and American oil companies affected by the expropriation of the oil assets of the March 18, Mexico had entered into business dealings with Italy and Germany.<sup>33</sup> In addition, to mitigate the boycott fostered by oil companies expropriated in the procurement of equipment and renting transportation, Mexico resorted to barter oil for these and other products with Germany, Italy and Japan.<sup>34</sup> The point of view of Bart Bok in this regard is highly revealing. On August 9, 1941, he wrote to Harlow Shapley from Puebla City, Mexico, the following paragraph:

The cooperation from Harvard is greatly appreciated and your offer to have the Schmidt built at Harvard is one of the best goodwill gestures that could have been made. If you ever get into difficulties with priorities, etc. for materials for the Mexico Schmidt you ought to point out to the powers that a pound of aluminum for the new Schmidt, or a completed worm wheel would mean just as much for national defense as a ton of steel for a battleship, or a propeller shaft. I have so far only bumped into one bit of very affective Nazi propaganda in Mexico. In spite of the blockade the Germans have succeeded in delivering three giant transformer for the new Polytechnical Institute in Mexico. They arrived a few weeks ago in a Swedish ship. The successful completion of the Schmidt camera would be a real boost to American prestige.<sup>35</sup>

On behalf of hemispheric solidarity and the need to ensure the loyalty of Mexico to the Allied Forces, good neighbor policy

<sup>33</sup> Vazquez and Meyer, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>34</sup> SER, 39-10-2 (III) 'Informe presentado al presidente Cárdenas, 18 de julio de 1940', cited in M. E. Paz Salinas, 'México y la defensa hemisférica', in Loyola, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-63; B. Guerra, 'La guerra y la posguerra en las relaciones de México y Estados Unidos', in Loyola, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> B. Bok to H. Shapley, 'Mexican Conference, 1939-1942', Puebla, Mexico, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5 Box 1, August 9, 1941.

crystallized into a trade agreement signed in July 1941, by which Mexico agreed not to provide strategic products to the fascist countries, and the United States, guaranteed its absorption by the U.S.A market. In December 1942 another agreement was signed between the two countries, which stipulated a clause of “most favored nation” to Mexico. In response to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Mexico condemned Japan, and four days later did the same with Italy and Germany. The entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 was followed by the declaration of war by the Mexican government to Axis countries in June 1942. This convergence came to strengthen further relations between the two countries.

### **The Mexican project at Harvard**

In the spring of 1941 it was easy enough for Harvard to design a Schmidt telescope but it was quite a different matter to have it constructed in a reasonably short time. Building a telescope of that caliber so quickly, within the circumstances given by the entry of the United States into World War II, wasn't an easy enterprise. Even with Shapley's personal interest, strongly aimed by government priorities, such a piece of work would not have been possible without the participation of some random factors that proved to be decisive. I refer to the complex changes that the war brought to the research community at Harvard. World War II challenged astronomers loyalty to an international community and scattered the observatory staff in a dozen directions.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, there was a distinction between the experience of Harvard astronomers devoted to national defense and those most concerned with continuing astronomical research and communication.

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<sup>36</sup> P. A. Kidwell, 'Harvard Astronomers and World War II. Disruption and Opportunity', *Science at Harvard University: historical perspectives*, Bethlehem, pp. 287- 289.

Attitudes changed in the course of war, especially after Pearl Harbor. The government of the United States made contracts with the Harvard University to carry out research in optical design, measurement of stealth submarine warfare, acoustics and other areas. Bart Bok was training navigators for the invasion of Europe and Japan. Even Harlow Shapley, who favored international cooperation, opposed U.S.A intervention in World War II up until Pearl Harbor, and differed about how much the Observatory should rely on contracts from the Department of Defense, encouraged funding for projects at Harvard Observatory, such as the Mark I computer and the Optical Shop of Harvard, which became the Government funded Optical Research Laboratory with Harlow Shapley as the main researcher.

It was one of the first defense projects undertaken by observatory staff and the largest wartime program directed by the Observatory itself. By April 1941, Harvard University had signed a contract with the U.S. Army Air Corps to produce four prototype lenses. Under Shapley's general supervision, the Optical Research Laboratory delivered its first lenses in the summer of 1942. The Army much appreciated the quality of the product, and urged the Office of Scientific Research and Development to fund an expanded program. The shop soon moved into larger quarter, and by April 1943 the initial group of about a dozen people had grown to twenty-nine. The turnover was high: more than a hundred people would be associated with the laboratory in the course of the war.<sup>37</sup> Given the facts, the benefits obtained by projects like the Mexican Observatory during the war are understandable. On the one hand, it was possible by virtue of the support given by people like Shapley, particularly interested in strengthening international links among astronomers. On the other hand, it received the benefits of being supported by the largest wartime program carried out by the Harvard College

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Observatory. On March 13, 1941, Shapley wrote to the Mexican Consul General:

I suggested in the conversation and especially in a long letter to Dr. Erro, it might be much better for us to use some of the patterns we have here available and get a considerable part of the telescope made by our own shop. Such procedure would much expedite the completion of the telescope, and also save a good deal of money.<sup>38</sup>

Shapley assured that there was no chance at all to have a telescope mounting made in a reasonable time by any of the American manufacturers. Over all that at a later time there was a possibility that the government would not allow private enterprises to use aluminum of good quality. Shapley pointed out that if they were authorized to proceed immediately, they would have made for Mexico at the best bargain possible the fundamental castings. He assured that for a short while, aluminum castings could be obtained at prices that were not exorbitant, and concluded: "If after consulting your colleagues in Mexico you authorize us to proceed, we can within two days have the patterns in the foundry".<sup>39</sup> On May 5th, Erro gave to the Press the news concerning the "generous cooperation received for the construction of the Schmidt Camera from the Harvard Shop".<sup>40</sup>

The inauguration of the modern observatory, in February 17, 1942 was a majestic occasion/event. High-level politicians from around the country came to the opening, representatives of different Mexican Universities, students, and businessmen, members of the

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<sup>38</sup> H. Shapley to R. de la Colina, Mexican Conference 1939-1942 Esquire, Mexican Consul General, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5, Box 1, March 13, 1941.

<sup>39</sup> Shapley to Erro, 'Mexican Conference 1939-1942', op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> L. E Erro to H. Shapley, 'Mexican Conference 1939-1942', Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5, Box 1, April 27, 1941.



armed forces, press correspondents and local farmers. Although there were many absences because of the war, among the international guests were Harlow Shapley, director of Harvard Observatory, Henry Norris Russell, director of the Observatory of Princeton, W. S. Adams, director of the Mount Wilson Observatory, Otto Struve, director of the Yerkes Observatory of the University of Chicago, J. A. Pearce, director of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory in Canada and astronomers like Robert Mc. Math, Joel Stebbins, Donald Menzel, Fred. L. Whipple, spouses Gaposchkin, Bart Bok and mathematician George D. Birkhoff.

### **Geopolitical significance**

The spirit of the emergence of Tonantzintla Astrophysical Observatory in the international scientific map was best expressed in the closing words of the dedication ceremony by Governor Bautista's address:

Because we share the same ideals and because we all realize the transcendental importance of this day, there will remain engraved in our hearts a supreme conviction that the triumphs of the forces of violence are transitory. We shall have to carry the sacrifices imposed on us by the aggressions of murderous madness. But the day will arrive in which all men will realize fully that their final mission is to achieve an empire of peace and justice by dedicating themselves to the search and knowledge of Truth.<sup>41</sup>

Political significance of this scientific fact was reported in detail by several foreign astronomers, and reflected in all their writings. In December 1941, Bart Bok referred to the Mexican project in the following terms:

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<sup>41</sup> B. Bok, 'Good Neighbors: Harvard and Tonantzintla. Our astronomers recent pilgrimage to Mexico', *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, 44 (12), 1942.

Tonantzintla Observatory is significant for many reasons. First of all represents an important addition to the list of American observatories. In Mexico stands as a symbol of New Mexico, which is taking its place among the world's strongest independent nations. For us in the United States, represents in some way a symbol of Pan Americanism, that's why, more than any other observatory, an institution whose creation has been allocated the best efforts of Mexican and American astronomers.<sup>42</sup>

Astronomer Donald Menzel noted that the speech given by the governor of Puebla, Gonzalo Bautista, to the audience, had stressed the importance of a united hemisphere in every field, from defense to education and scientific research. His words, said Menzel, left no doubt that Mexico was with the United States and against the aggressive forces. From his point of view, the international situation had intensified the significance of the meeting since it served to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries in one of the most critical periods of all time. "Friendship, is a word too neutral; fellowship, slightly better expresses the spirit of the meeting", he concluded. Bart Bok signed the words expressed by Menzel, in a letter to Erro:

It is great thing in these difficult times to be part of a project in which the advance of science goes hand in hand with a strengthening of ties of friendship between two countries that have many reason to be friends.<sup>43</sup>

Reporting the Inter-American Astrophysical Congress to the Secretary of State, on March 3, 1942, Edward G. Trueblood, Second Secretary of Embassy wrote:

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<sup>42</sup> B. Bok, *Mexican Conference 1939-1942*, Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Pusey Library, UA V 630. 22. 5, Box 1, December 1941.

<sup>43</sup> B. Bok to L. E. Erro, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Marzo 9, 1942.

The Observatory itself stands as a symbol of close cooperation between the two countries, and its use will entail still closer cooperation in the years to come.<sup>44</sup>

On behalf of the Department of State in Washington, Charles A. Thomson, Chief of Division of Cultural Relations, wrote to Harlow Shapley on March 24, 1942:

In sending you the attached copy of the Embassy's report, I wish to reiterate the Department's interest in furthering Inter-American scientific relations and its desire to be appropriate assistance in this field.<sup>45</sup>

The importance of Tonantzintla as a symbol of the political alliance between Mexico and the United States was reinforced a year later, on the occasion of the celebration of a new physics conference in the city of Puebla, organized by Luis Enrique Erro and the Government of the State of Puebla. Despite the value declared by the Governor Bautista about the study and practice of physics in modern society, the documentation of this event reveals the presence of extra-scientific reasons. The exchange of letters referred to the Conference, constantly alludes to the enormous interest of the Mexican Government to have the physicists presence of all latitudes, because of its intention to lay a clear ideological and political position before the world. In a letter dated January 11, 1943, the closest collaborator of Erro, Carlos Graef Fernandez wrote to Harlow Shapley:

Sr. Erro and Governor Bautista are extremely interested in Einstein's and Chandrasekhar presence in the physical conference. They want to

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<sup>44</sup> E. G. Trueblood to the Secretary of State, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAN, Marzo 3, 1942.

<sup>45</sup> Ch. A. Thomson to H. Shapley, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Marzo 24, 1942.

emphasize the fact that USA and Mexico know how to appreciate human values, regardless of race, religion and beliefs. Sr. Erro thinks that it is of the utmost importance that USA and Mexico tell officially to the world at this moment this democratic axiom. We hope that you can convince Einstein of the necessity of this coming to Mexico for the welfare of so many refugees in our countries.<sup>46</sup>

Harlow Shapley assumed the task entrusted with such conviction that appointed himself as “an informal Good Neighbor Agent of the Mexican Government”, position under which he did his best to achieve the presence of Einstein and other luminaries of science, to the Physics Congress. A few days later, on January 19, 1943, Harlow Shapley sent Erro a proposal list of physicists whom he thought would be appropriate to invite to the Conference.<sup>47</sup>

- a) Albert Einstein
- b) Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar
- c) Enrico Fermi
- d) Percy W. Bridgman
- e) Robert A. Millikan
- f) Arthur H. Compton
- g) George R. Harrison
- h) William Swann

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<sup>46</sup> C. Graef to H. Shapley, ‘Correspondencia’, Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Enero 11, 1943.

<sup>47</sup> H. Shapley to L. E. Erro, ‘Correspondencia’, Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Enero 19, 1943.

- i) James Baker
- j) Ernest Lawrence
- k) Lyman J. Briggs

In the same letter, appear the following names and paragraphs handwritten in pen:

Supplementary or alternative names

- l) James Franck
- m) Carl Anderson
- n) Phillip Franck
- o) John Tate
- p) Isidor Rabi
- q) Peter Debye
- r) Ira Bowen
- s) Robert Wood
- t)

Roseland

Robertson

Stewart

V. Hess

I could wish that there were a distinguished Chinese physicist, or a suitable Russian.

On January 23, 1943 Harlow Shapley wrote to Carlos Graef:

Last night I wrote letters to about ten of the leading physicists, acting under the direction of Señor Duhart, (Mexican ambassador in USA) who said: I need not to wait for a written statement.<sup>48</sup>

In the letters to Robert A. Millikan, Ernest O. Lawrence, Enrico Fermi and James Franck, dated on January 23, 1943, Harlow Shapley told them:

I hope that you realize, on thinking it over, that a vacation of ten days in a sunny climate, in beautiful surroundings, would be good for your health and your work and your spirit. It happens that such a vacation early in May this year would also be of value in the Inter-American Good Neighbor program. I am assured that the State Department would approve your vacation, if it could be arranged, and the government of Mexico would be pleased and honored.<sup>49</sup>

At the bottom of the draft letter to Enrico Fermi, Harlow Shapley wrote to his assistant, also in pen, the following indication:

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<sup>48</sup> H. Shapley to C. Graef, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Enero 23, 1943.

<sup>49</sup> H. Shapley to R. Millikan, E. Lawrence, E. Fermi and J. Franck, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Enero 23, 1943.

In the last paragraph of Fermi letter write the sentence:

“The fact that you are an Italian recently established in America, makes the Mexican Government especially interested in your attendance, since they want to demonstrate liberality of attitude toward races, creeds, colors. Einstein will be invited also, and A. H. Compton, E. O. Lawrence”.

On February 8, 1943, Shapley sent letters to George R. Harrison, Ernest Lawrence, James Franck, Victor Hess, with the following message:

I have been asked through the Mexican Embassy in Washington to inquire if you would be able to accept an invitation from President Avila Camacho and Governor Gonzalo Bautista of Mexico to attend a scientific conference in Puebla during the first week of May of this year.

As an informal Good Neighbor Agent of the Mexican Government, I have been asked to help them organize a party of about a dozen physicists, which would go to Mexico at the expense of the Government of the State of Puebla.

At first thought it might seem both odd and impossible to hold even a rather informal conference in Mexico next May when the physicists are so deeply involved in the war effort. But in the first place this is an itself a war effort- a move in continuing to build up good relations with the Mexican Government, and as such the conference has the blessing of the State Department in Washington, and especially of Vice-President Wallace.<sup>50</sup>

Speaking about the physicists invited to the Mexican Conference, on February 23, 1943, Harlow Shapley wrote to R. A. Millikan:

That particular selection may surprise you in some points, but there were very definite reasons back of each choice – for example, Briggs of the

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<sup>50</sup> H. Shapley to E. Lawrence, J. Franck, G. Harrison and V. Hess, ‘Correspondencia’, Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Febrero 8, 1943.

Government, Hess the catholic, Franck, the Jewish exile, Chandrasekhar the Hindu, and so forth. For you see this is to be a demonstration not only of friendliness toward American eminence, but a publicized gesture of tolerance regardless of race, creed, or color.<sup>51</sup>

In a letter written by the Department of State to Harlow Shapley on March 30, 1943, appears that:

The Department is confident that the participation of your group not only will contribute notably to the advanced of the spirit of friendship, understanding, and cooperation among the scientists of the two countries.<sup>52</sup>

On January 23, 1943, Franck Aydelotte wrote to Shapley, about Einstein invitation, telling that:

He feels very strongly that for reasons of health he ought not to undertake the trip to Mexico, and I am convinced that he is right. He has for a year been having a good deal of trouble with digestion, has been compelled to live on a very strict diet. He therefore asks me to send you his regrets. I am glad you are taking Chandrasekhar and I hope you will be able to get some Jewish physicist in Einstein's place.<sup>53</sup>

The Ambassador of Mexico in the United States, Francisco Castillo Najera, on behalf of the President of Mexico wrote Einstein:

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<sup>51</sup> H. Shapley to R. A. Millikan, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Febrero 23, 1943.

<sup>52</sup> D. of State to H. Shapley, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Marzo 30, 1943.

<sup>53</sup> F. Aydelotte to H. Shapley, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Enero 23, 1943.



The government and people of Mexico would feel very proud to have you as a guest of honor, and no effort would be spared to make your trip as comfortable as possible. Let me say that we urge you to accept the invitation, not only by the great admiration for his great wisdom and [ their ] contributions to the world in the field of science , which are well recognized by the government of Mexico and assure success of the Congress , but also by the desire of the President of Mexico and Puebla Governor greet you and give you a warm welcome as a distinguished representative of today's notable personalities whose scientific achievements have been ignored by the forces backward , in a totally harmful and discriminatory.

The Mexican government and the government of the State of Puebla are very pleased to extend an invitation to your doctor , to accompany, with the certainty that climate change will be beneficial for your health.<sup>54</sup>

His letter, in response to Einstein's decision not to travel to Mexico for health reasons, is revealing the behind-prevailing political and ideological background in scientific approach between the two countries: On February 2, 1943 Harlow Shapley wrote to Albert Einstein:

I am very sorry to learn through Dr. Aydelotte that your health is too uneasy to justify your risking a trip to Mexico in May. The scientists and Government of Mexico will be very unhappy to hear of your necessary decision. They have definitely counted on the power of your name and personality in demonstrating to themselves and their people, and to the world, that the new Mexico is decidedly not anti-Semitic, and that in all fields of intellectual and cultural development the government stands for tolerance of race, religious creed, color, political beliefs.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> F. C. Nájera to A. Einstein, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Febrero 1943.

<sup>55</sup> H. Shapley to A. Einstein, 'Correspondencia', Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Febrero 2, 1943.

Lost hopes that Einstein would attend the congress, Shapley found a way to make the eminent scientist endorse the ideals of the Mexican government and its program of refuge for exiled academics, without leaving his home. In mid-April Shapley wrote him a letter asking him to send through it a message of friendship to the people and the Mexican government, to be read on May 3 at the opening ceremony, adding that he was “sure that if you join my effort, we can keep the spirit of tolerance that prevails in academic circles of our neighboring republic”. In response to this request, Albert Einstein sent a message to Shapley, dated April 16, begging him to be good enough to transmit the Governor Bautista that his health would not allow him to accept the invitation, but he wanted to send a written acknowledgment to the Government of Mexico. He concluded by saying: “I am sending you enclosed a letter”.

The text prepared by Albert Einstein was read at the Mexican Conference:

In this time of brutal lust of power and barbaric persecution, which have debased the continent of Europe, Mexico is performing an important work of salvage. We are grateful to her for offering to European intellectuals a new home and an opportunity for new and fruitful work. In addition Mexico has- more than any other country- opened her doors to the Spanish soldiers of freedom, and rescued many from shocking end. And Mexico, preserving her complete independence and her free traditions, has associated herself with United Nations in their struggle against fascist oppression.<sup>56</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This essay has been an attempt to understand the process of modernization of science in Mexico, focusing on the establishment

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<sup>56</sup>A. Einstein to H. Shapley, ‘Correspondencia’, Archivo Histórico de la UNAM, Abril 16, 1943.

of modern astrophysics.<sup>57</sup> In this particular case, the influence of social and historical circumstances was most dramatically visible. The local astronomical community that was at one time influenced by the important metropolitan center, Paris, later came under the influence of another scientific astronomical center, the United States. The essay illustrates how Mexican astronomy responded to these shifting patterns of intellectual authority over time.

Between 1842 and 1874, political instability and civil war prevented the government from creating minimal conditions for doing any scientific work at all. As a result, the excellent instruments brought from Europe were damaged, lost or destroyed. During the Porfiriato, conditions improved and thanks to official support — both financial and political— to scientific activities, the Observatorio Astronómico Nacional was founded in 1876. From the very beginning, the new Observatory received first-quality observational instruments and started taking part in astronomical research, even at international level, such as its participation in the *Carte du Ciel*. However, the kind of astronomical activities could never go beyond the limits of the early astrometry.

At the end of the government of General Lazaro Cardenas, (1934-1940) new political circumstances directed Mexican astronomy along the path of modern astrophysics. On previous occasions, it was necessary to turn to one person with political influence and interest in astronomy to achieve this project. But on this particular occasion, Erro's political and astronomical experience moved him to seek help in the United States and to count on the assistance of Harlow Shapley, who was particularly sensitive toward the projects for the modernization of science, such as the Mexican Tonantzintla Observatory. Simultaneously, the particular situation of the Mexican political arena at the end of the 1930s and the entry of the

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<sup>57</sup> G. Basalla, "The Spread of Western Science", in S. Restivo (ed.), *Comparative Studies in Science and Society*, Charles Merrill Publishing Co., Columbus, Ohio, 1974, pp. 359-381.

United States into the Second World War, made political and diplomatic goals become inevitably intertwined with intellectual ones in the collaborative efforts of the astronomers from both nations.

From a scientific point of view, the construction of the Astrophysical Observatory proved to be highly successful; but equally significant were its effects on good-neighbor relations. On the one hand, the Good Neighbor Policy affected the relationship between Mexico and the United States, turning a specifically scientific project into an object of geopolitical interest. On the other hand, the war-time transformation of Harvard in general, and Shapley's position in Harvard's Shops in particular, made it possible for the war-time program to be carried out by the Harvard College Observatory and to produce an excellent scientific instrument: the Mexican telescope.

## **Biography**

**Jorge Bartolucci** is a Ph.D. in Sociology and Senior Researcher at the Institute of Research on University and Education, both from the UNAM. He is professor of the Graduate Division at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences and of the Division of Graduate Education at the UNAM. Member of the National System of Researchers of the National Council of Science and Technology of Mexico. For his academic work he has received numerous awards, including The Nature of Higher Education Award, ANUIES, Mexico, 1981; Francisco Javier Clavijero Award, INAH, Mexico, 2001; Herbert C. Pollock Award, Dudley Observatory, New York, 2005; and German Somolinos D' Ardois , SMHCT, Mexico , 2006. Among his publications are the books: The modernization of

science in Mexico. For astronomers, 2002; The development of science in Mexico. From ancient astronomy of position to modern astrophysics, 2011; The saga of Mexican science. Social Studies of their communities: XVIII to XX centuries, 2011. He has also written several book chapters and articles, among which are: Astronomical observatories in Mexico, included in the book The institutionalization of scientific disciplines in Mexico, 2013; The reforms to the mining industry and the foundation of the Real Seminar Mining: 1765-1783, in *Silver. Forging Mexico*, 2011; and Developing Science in Developing Countries: The Harvard College Observatory and the Establishment of Modern Astrophysics in Mexico, in the journal *Mexican Studies*, 2005.

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# “S’ode ancora il mare”: la scultura monumentale di ispirazione marina in epoca contemporanea

**Maria Beatrice Giorio**

Hai viso di pietra scolpita

Sangue di terra dura,

Sei venuta dal mare.

Cesare Pavese, *La terra e la morte*,

5 novembre 1945

**Sommario:** Il presente lavoro intende analizzare in che modo il mare abbia ispirato la scultura monumentale, in particolare quella di epoca contemporanea. Attraverso lo studio di diverse tipologie di complessi monumentali di ispirazione marina, da quelli di concezione più tradizionale a quelli più moderni e innovativi, si rifletterà sul ruolo di protagonista/antagonista incarnato da questo elemento naturale, soffermandosi su come sia l'arte a gettare un ponte tra il mondo umano e quello degli abissi. Per confermare tale interpretazione della scultura monumentale marina in termini di “riconciliatrice estetica”, il presente lavoro si chiuderà presentando un tipo monumentale più recente, quello dell'installazione scultorea sommersa: attraverso l'immersione dell'opera d'arte nelle profondità degli abissi, il mare, sostituendosi allo scultore, diventa elemento attivo della creazione artistica e creatore di un'esperienza estetica unica, destinata a cambiare per sempre il legame millenario tra uomo e natura.

## Introduzione

Nella storia dell'arte, soprattutto nel campo della pittura, il mare ha da sempre rappresentato una tematica centrale dal momento che il carattere cangiante di tale elemento naturale, in termini luministici ed espressivi, ben si è prestato a molteplici sperimentazioni e ricerche su tela. Se è vero che tale soggetto ha fatto la sua comparsa già nelle più antiche opere pittoriche di epoca greca e romana, soltanto a partire dal Cinquecento il pubblico e la critica hanno iniziato ad apprezzare singole vedute e scorci marini, parallelamente alla rivalutazione del paesaggio inteso come materia degna di rappresentazione, anche in assenza di una scena figurata o di una storia narrata. Fino ad allora, infatti, la rappresentazione esclusiva di soggetti marineschi era stata considerata meno nobile rispetto alle più diffuse pitture di storia e religiose; di conseguenza, la diffusione del cosiddetto genere della «marina» aveva tardato ad imporsi e ad assumere caratteri propri e riconoscibili<sup>1</sup>.

Lo studio e la riproduzione di tale tema iconografico nel corso delle epoche storiche ha interessato in misura minore il campo dell'arte

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<sup>1</sup> I pittori di marine o “marinisti” ebbero grande fortuna nei Paesi Bassi, dal momento che l'arte fiamminga, soprattutto nel corso del Seicento, rivalutò notevolmente la pittura di genere, concedendo ampio spazio alla rappresentazione della natura e del paesaggio. Anche in Inghilterra, questa volta alla fine del Settecento e all'inizio del secolo successivo, le vedute marinesche trovarono ampio riscontro, a tal punto da incoraggiare alcuni artisti, tra cui il celebre paesaggista romantico Turner, a specializzarsi proprio nella pittura di marine, su ispirazione diretta di alcuni dei più grandi maestri fiamminghi come Willem van de Velde il Giovane. Nell'Ottocento il mare divenne protagonista della pittura sperimentale degli impressionisti che ne esaltarono i diversi aspetti in termini luministici. Per una bibliografia generale della pittura marinista attraverso i secoli si vedano J. Taylor, *Marine Painting: images of Sails, Sea and Shore*, London, Studio Editions, 1995, H. F. Isham, *Image of the sea: oceanic consciousness in the romantic century*, New York, Peter Lang, 2004, e i due recenti cataloghi dedicati ai pittori del Mediterraneo e del Tirreno.

plastica (intesa come l'arte del modellare), innanzitutto per le evidenti difficoltà riscontrate dagli scultori nel riprodurre, in materiali duri e resistenti, come il marmo e il bronzo, ma anche più morbidi e refrattari, quali la terracotta, la natura incorporea del mare. Se infatti per i pittori impressionisti, quali Turner e Monet, la mobilità delle grandi masse d'acqua offriva spunti infiniti di espressione, per gli artisti plastificatori l'approccio a un simile soggetto era sottoposto a regole e dettami ben più rigidi. La scultura si è sempre espressa tramite generi artistici figurativi e descrittivi, per farsi comprendere e apprezzare ha dovuto, cioè, far ricorso alla rappresentazione della figura umana o alla narrazione di una storia in cui l'uomo ne fosse il protagonista. Se pensiamo ad una qualsiasi realizzazione scultorea del passato, sia a carattere pubblico che privato, vediamo come tale condizione appaia soddisfatta senza eccezioni, dall'antichità all'epoca contemporanea: negli innumerevoli bassorilievi di epoca antica, ad esempio, il mare, spesso in tempesta, connota la scena da un punto di vista ambientale, ma in nessun caso risulta essere il punto focale della scultura, rappresentato invece dalla nave, con a bordo il suo equipaggio<sup>2</sup>. Questa esigenza di caratterizzare la raffigurazione dal punto di vista umano, è testimoniata anche dalla rappresentazione dell'ambiente marino in termini allegorici: attraverso un reale processo di umanizzazione, mari e oceani del mondo antico sono da sempre stati presentati in veste di divinità e numi tutelari, senza alcuna connotazione naturalistica, ma con rimandi alla dimensione del mito e alla narrazione fantastica<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Si veda, ad esempio, il celebre "Rilievo Torlonia" risalente al III secolo d. C. in cui il mare è raffigurato quale porto sicuro per le attività mercantili dei suoi abitanti. Per approfondire si consideri quanto detto in P. Janni, *Il mare degli Antichi*, Bari, Dedalo 1996, p. 339, nota 45.

<sup>3</sup> L'allegoria più celebre del mondo antico è sicuramente quella del dio greco del mare Poseidone, poi conosciuto presso i Romani con il nome di Nettuno; accanto a questa figura, i Greci ne avevano create delle altre, tutte legate all'elemento naturale simbolo della fortuna e dello sviluppo della civiltà ellenica. Nereo rappresentava, ad esempio, una divinità primitiva, strettamente connessa al Mar

Da quanto detto risulta evidente come gli scultori non abbiano goduto di quella libertà concessa invece ai pittori e si siano ritrovati nella necessità di trasformare i soggetti tratti dalla natura e dal mondo inanimato, per adattarli al proprio linguaggio espressivo. Un caso esemplare è quello offerto dalle sculture e medaglie a rilievo destinate agli acquari e ai musei annessi, dove il mare, finalmente protagonista assoluto, appare connotato nuovamente con un'immagine simbolica o per mezzo dei suoi stessi attributi, attraverso, per esempio, la rappresentazione dei suoi "abitanti", pesci, molluschi e altre creature, come nei tondi decorativi dell'Acquario civico di Milano<sup>4</sup>. In questo caso, però, non si può parlare di manufatti artistici concepiti come opere d'arte autonome, ma soltanto di elementi accessori, pensati per meglio definire la destinazione dell'edificio: il loro esempio rinvia, infatti, ad una storia diversa, quella della scultura ornamentale, dove architettura e decorazione plastica si fondono in un tutto organico.

Il presente articolo si occuperà, al contrario, esclusivamente di scultura monumentale, analizzando i casi più rappresentativi della plastica di tema marino di grandi dimensioni.

Per meglio procedere con la nostra analisi, lo studio è stato

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Egeo, ed era il progenitore delle ninfe marine, le Nereidi. Considerata l'importanza del mare in tutta l'antichità, nella mitologia greco/romana vennero ben presto create delle divinità minori, in qualità di numi tutelari di tutti i mari e gli oceani allora conosciuti. Per approfondire si veda, in particolare, Alys Caviness, 'Sea', in Scott Littleton, C., *Gods, goddesses, and mythology*, New York, Marshall Cavendish, 2005, pp. 1267-74.

<sup>4</sup> L'Acquario civico di Milano venne progettato dall'architetto Sebastiano Locati per l'Esposizione internazionale del Sempione del 1906; la decorazione venne realizzata in cemento dallo stabilimento dell'artista Giovanni Chini, che diede vita ad un complesso coerente e unico, riprodotto il dio del mare Nettuno e il mondo sottomarino in tutte le sue espressioni. Per un'analisi dettagliata del padiglione architettonico e della storia dell'Acquario si consulti E. Canadelli e P. Zocchi, *Milano scientifica. 1975-1924. 1. La rete del grande Politecnico*, Milano, Sironi, 2008, pp. 143-56.

suddiviso in blocchi tematici, in cui le differenti problematiche legate all'argomento della discussione saranno trattate prendendo ad esempio opere più o meno note dello scenario artistico italiano ed internazionale.

## **I navigatori**

La prima categoria analizzata fa riferimento a tutti quei monumenti dedicati a personaggi storici, popolari e simbolici legati al mare; una delle figure più fortemente connesse a questo ambiente naturale, e pertanto più adatta a figurare in un complesso scultoreo d'ispirazione marinaresca, è di certo quella del navigatore. Questi ha riempito, fin dall'antichità, le cronache e i racconti di diverse culture, a testimonianza di un desiderio forte e insopprimibile di scoprire nuovi orizzonti e di andare oltre il lecito. Nella fattispecie, Cristoforo Colombo rappresenta, ancora oggi, uno degli esploratori più celebrati nel mondo dell'arte e in quello della plastica monumentale; nella maggior parte dei complessi commemorativi in sua memoria, lo scopritore delle Americhe si erge quale protagonista assoluto, mentre la rappresentazione del mare risulta accennata o più semplicemente sottintesa, dal momento che la notorietà relativa alla sua storia permette di tacere alcuni elementi della rappresentazione. L'elemento naturale è percepito, infatti, come protagonista/antagonista dell'opera scultorea, alla stregua del navigatore genovese, e non ha bisogno, di conseguenza, di essere ribadito, risparmiando agli scultori di rappresentarlo con mezzi spesso ordinari e tecnicamente insufficienti. Nel *Monument a Colón* a Barcellona, realizzato per l'Esposizione Universale del 1888, la distesa marina è suggerita in un rilievo decorativo alla base della struttura celebrativa; al contrario, il mare, quello reale, entra a far parte direttamente del memoriale: lo scultore Rafael Atché, infatti, ha sfruttato in maniera perfetta la localizzazione scelta per l'opera, all'estremità della rambla barcellonese, e rivolgendo il complesso

monumentale direttamente verso il Mediterraneo, ha chiamato lo stesso paesaggio a far parte integrante della scultura<sup>5</sup>. La statua di Colombo, di conseguenza, non resta confinata nello spazio chiuso della colonna e del suo basamento, ma si apre all'esterno, in un dialogo attivo ed infinito con l'ambiente circostante e, dettaglio più importante, proprio con il paesaggio marino. In questi termini, il gesto del navigatore, che punta l'indice della mano destra verso un punto ideale al di là della distesa sconfinata dell'orizzonte, risulta estremamente significativo, richiamando alla mente il viaggio transoceanico compiuto dal genovese e ribadendo ancora una volta come proprio l'oceano sia stato il vero artefice della sua fortuna.

Non dissimile per concezione è un altro monumento alla navigazione eretto a Lisbona, nel 1960, dallo scultore Leopoldo de Almeida, sul fiume Tago, non lontano dalla sua confluenza nell'Atlantico; la scultura in pietra bianca rinvia nuovamente al mondo delle scoperte e ai suoi protagonisti, da Enrico il Navigatore, a Vasco de Gama, a Ferdinando Magellano, rappresentati a bordo di una caravella stilizzata pronta a salpare<sup>6</sup>. Il *Padrão dos*

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<sup>5</sup> Oltre al rilievo descritto, anche il piedistallo accoglie un riferimento al mare attraverso la rappresentazione di quattro prue di navi a chiara valenza architettonica e decorativa. Per una storia esaustiva del monumento si veda J. M. Dickey, *Christopher Columbus and his monument Columbia, being a concordance of choice tributes to the great Genovese, his grand discovery, and his greatness of mind and purpose. The testimony of ancient authors, the tributes of modern men adorned with the sculptures, scenes and portraits of the old world and the new (1892)*, Chicago/New York, Rand, McNally & Co., 1892, pp. 81-84.

<sup>6</sup> L'opera venne eretta nel cinquecentenario dalla morte di Enrico il Navigatore per celebrare non soltanto i navigatori portoghesi, ma anche tutti i semplici marinai e uomini di mare che parteciparono alle grandi scoperte. Il monumento attuale è, in realtà, la seconda versione di un primo esemplare realizzato nel 1940 in occasione dell'esposizione universale, e demolito nel 1958 perchè costruito con materiali scadenti. Diversi elementi fanno riferimento al mare e all'arte della navigazione, come la piccola caravella sorretta da Enrico il Navigatore, e diversi strumenti di bordo. Sull'opera, si veda lo studio monografico T. Cottinelli et al., *O padrão dos descobrimentos, Belem, 1960*, Lisboa, Ministério das Obras Públicas, Comissão Administrativa do Plano de Obras do Império, 1960.



*Descobrimentos*, anch'esso rivolto verso l'ambiente marino, instaura con quest'ultimo un legame indissolubile rendendolo protagonista non più di un'unica vicenda storica, come nel caso del Monumento a Colombo, ma della storia di un intero popolo, quello portoghese, limitato fisicamente dall'esiguità dei propri confini geografici, ma proiettato spiritualmente ben al di là di tali limiti. Il memoriale supera, pertanto, la contingenza delle singole esperienze umane rappresentate e assurge ad una dimensione universale, presentando l'arte della navigazione quale atto eroico privilegiato che allontana l'uomo dalle caducità della vita terrena, nobilitandone lo spirito<sup>7</sup>.

## **I caduti del mare**

Se per navigatori ed esploratori il mare incarna un mondo foriero di conoscenza e di una vita nuova, esso può ugualmente rappresentare il dubbio, il timore e, infine, il non ritorno: pensiamo alle migliaia di soldati morti nelle battaglie navali o nei naufragi, non soltanto nel corso della Prima e Seconda Guerra Mondiale ma anche nelle vicende belliche più recenti.

Una morte negli abissi significa innanzitutto un difficile rimpatrio delle spoglie dei caduti e, cosa ancora più grave, una tomba vuota, perchè, come ha detto Joseph Conrad, «il portento più sorprendente del profondo mare è la sua insondabile crudeltà»<sup>8</sup>. Al contrario della terraferma, il luogo di una tragedia marina non è identificabile con

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<sup>7</sup> Sul concetto di mare come metafora del limite umano si studi G. Cacciatore, 'Il mare metafora del limite e del confine', in Amendola, S., e Volpe, P. (eds.), *Il Mare e il Mito: Positano Myth Festival, Li Galli, 5-6 settembre 2009*, Napoli, D'Auria, 2010, pp. 39-66. Alle pagine 48-50, in particolare, l'autore riflette sul duplice significato di questo elemento naturale in termini di confine sconosciuto e imperscrutabile da una parte, e di nuovo mondo, dall'altra, in cui si realizza il viaggio della scoperta e, di conseguenza, la nascita delle relazioni umane e degli incontri.

precisione, perchè l'oceano inghiotte e si richiude su se stesso, facendo sparire nell'oblio uomini e cose; a questa mancanza di *pietas* da parte della natura soltanto l'uomo può tentare di sopperire, attraverso l'erezione di monumenti e complessi commemorativi sul continente.

Uno degli esempi più rappresentativi di questa resistenza nei confronti dell'«irresponsabilità del mare»<sup>9</sup> si trova a Marsiglia dove, davanti al vecchio porto di fronte al forte *Saint-Jean*, è stato costruito il *Monument aux héros et victimes de la mer*, inaugurato nel 1923<sup>10</sup>.

Il comitato della confederazione dei sindacati marittimi, formatosi alla fine della guerra, si rivolse per la sua realizzazione allo scultore André Verdilhan, che seppe esprimere perfettamente le attese dei suoi committenti, desiderosi di vedere fuso nel bronzo «*les vaincus de la tempête*», nell'estremo tentativo di mettersi in salvo dalla furia delle onde. La scultura rappresenta, infatti, due naufraghi su un relitto di imbarcazione in preda all'uragano e il corpo ormai senza vita di un terzo sfortunato: uno dei due uomini ancora in vita sostiene le spoglie esanimi del compagno, ergendosi sulla prua in un disperato, quanto estremo, gesto di soccorso.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Conrad, *Lo specchio del mare; Cronaca personale; Racconti tra terra e mare*, Milano, Bompiani, 1954, p. 167.

<sup>9</sup> R. Pogue Harrison e A. Zanzotto, *Il dominio dei morti*, Roma, Fazi, 2004, pp. (15-17).

<sup>10</sup> Il memoriale era stato pensato ed elaborato già nel 1914, ma la sua realizzazione venne posticipata non soltanto a causa dello scoppio della Prima Guerra Mondiale, ma anche su viva richiesta del *comité des gens de la mer*, insoddisfatto della rappresentazione artistica proposta dallo scultore Augusto Carli. Fortunatamente il rinvio del progetto permise di dedicare il complesso scultoreo anche ai marinai morti durante il conflitto appena conclusosi, dotando la città di un monumento alla sua storia più recente. Per una bibliografia completa si veda la rassegna stampa relativa al 1914, P. Échinard, *Marseille au quotidien: chroniques du XIXe*, Marseille, Édisud, 1991, p.11 e A.-L. Robin, *La diariste rouge*, Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, Book It, 2000, p. 59.

Il richiamo al mare risulta presente con insistenza, innanzitutto nell'interpretazione plastica proposta dallo scultore, attraverso quell'onda gigantesca fusa nel bronzo che sta per inghiottire la barca e il suo equipaggio: si tratta di una superficie mossa dai venti, tormentata, tutt'altro che pacifica, che ben si accorda con la tensione tragica vissuta dalla coppia di superstiti. Eppure a questa dimensione luttuosa sembra quasi rispondere il luogo isolato e tranquillo scelto per collocare la scultura, rivolta, di certo non casualmente, verso il placido Mediterraneo<sup>11</sup>; la quiete successiva alla tempesta consente, infatti, quel raccoglimento interiore necessario all'elaborazione del lutto e della successiva preservazione della memoria. In questo senso l'estremo gesto del naufrago assume un significato più ampio, esulando dalla singola vicenda rappresentata: nel rivolgersi verso l'infinita distesa marina, esso testimonia, ugualmente, la sorte comune condivisa da tutti i caduti del mare, di ogni epoca e luogo geografico.

Vicino per spirito e concezione è anche il più recente *American Merchant Mariners Memorial*, collocato nel newyorkese Battery Park, a ridosso del molo A; si tratta ancora una volta di un bronzo dedicato ad un naufragio che risulta, in questo caso particolare, storicamente documentato, anche attraverso impressionanti testimonianze fotografiche. Nel corso del secondo conflitto mondiale, un sottomarino tedesco attaccò una nave mercantile, immortalando l'affondamento imminente della piccola imbarcazione; questo fatto di cronaca fece scalpore, al punto da incoraggiare, nel 1976, la creazione di un comitato per l'erezione di

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<sup>11</sup> Il concetto di Mediterraneo in termini di mare pacifico e tranquillo è da intendersi non tanto per l'assenza di pericoli per i naviganti, quanto piuttosto facendo riferimento all'accezione datagli dagli antichi Romani. Per costoro, infatti, il "*Mare Nostrum*" era sinonimo di superficie conosciuta, in ragione delle innumerevoli conquiste che ne avevano fatto un luogo familiare e civilizzato. A questo proposito si veda S. Guarracino, *Mediterraneo: immagini, storie e teorie da Omero e Braudel*, Milano, ESBMO, 2007, p. 116.

un monumento a ricordo della tragica vicenda<sup>12</sup>.

Il monumento, inaugurato nel 1991, rappresenta la poppa stilizzata del mercantile, già parzialmente inabissata; su di essa, due naufraghi sono colti nel disperato tentativo di mettersi in salvo, chi invocando aiuto, chi gettandosi in ginocchio quasi ad implorare l'intervento della provvidenza. Un terzo uomo, sempre a bordo del natante, cerca di portare aiuto a uno dei compagni ormai caduto fuori bordo e prossimo all'annegamento; proprio a quest'ultima figura è affidato l'intero carico di *pathos* e di drammaticità, dal momento che il mare ha già inghiottito metà del suo corpo e attende di chiudersi per sempre sul naufrago sfortunato. Nonostante l'opera abbia tratto ispirazione da un evento storico preciso, anch'essa rimanda ad una dimensione universale, visto che il comitato costituitosi per la sua erezione decise di dedicare simbolicamente il complesso a «*those merchant mariners who lost their lives on our ocean frontiers*», incidendone i 6700 nomi all'interno della nave bronzea<sup>13</sup>.

Come già per il *Monument aux héros et victimes de la guerre*, anche in questo memoriale l'elemento naturale rappresenta una minaccia, un nemico esterno contro cui resistere, pena la perdita della vita. A differenza però dell'esempio marsigliese, non vi è alcuna separazione tra la distesa marina riprodotta dallo scalpello dello scultore e quella reale che fa da sfondo al complesso celebrativo: qui le acque del fiume Hudson, prossimo alla confluenza nell'Atlantico, agiscono all'interno dell'opera d'arte in tutta la loro fisicità, lambendo una delle figure e circondando con fare

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<sup>12</sup> Per la realizzazione del monumento venne indetto un concorso; la vincitrice risultò l'artista Marisol Escobar, che elaborò un progetto di memoriale partendo dalle fotografie d'epoca prese dai nazisti. Si veda il riferimento contenuto nell'articolo anonimo 'Artist and Sites Names for National Memorial for Merchant Seafarers', in *The Lookout: annual report issue*, voll. 80-81, 1988, s. n.

<sup>13</sup> Per ulteriori dettagli sul monumento si vedano *Sea History* vol. 13, 1979, p. 47, e L. Fink, *Sweatshops at sea: merchant seamen in the world's first globalized industry, from 1812 to the present*, Chapel hill, University of North Carolina, 2011, pp. 164-66.

minaccioso il relitto in bronzo che ospita i sopravvissuti. Il variare delle maree, a sua volta, contribuisce quotidianamente ad accrescere l'espressività e la forza di comunicazione dell'opera, visto che la figura immersa a ridosso del molo risulta alternativamente più vicina alla salvezza o alla morte, a seconda del livello dell'acqua che ne sommerge il corpo.

Sempre nel corso del secondo conflitto mondiale, uno degli episodi più luttuosi della storia dell'esercito alleato è ancora oggi rappresentato dal D-Day, giorno del celebre sbarco in Normandia. In occasione di questa fondamentale operazione militare anfibia, il mare aveva giocato un ruolo paradossale, visto che nei giorni precedenti l'attacco le pessime condizioni metereologiche e le intense mareggiate sulla Manica avevano impedito di lanciare l'offensiva, costringendo le truppe ad attendere a largo. Solamente all'alba del 6 giugno 1944 era stato possibile avvicinarsi alla costa e l'Atlantico da elemento disturbatore era diventato piuttosto complice della missione, favorendo con la sua alta marea l'effetto sorpresa lanciato contro le armate tedesche. Come è noto, l'operazione *Overlord* registrò perdite considerevoli, in termini di vite umane: le spiagge normanne, scelte per lo sbarco, si trasformarono in veri e propri campi di battaglia e cimiteri di fortuna per coloro che vi avevano perso la vita. Per ricordare l'atrocità di quella giornata, vennero eretti diverse steli e placche commemorative in tutti le località francesi scelte per l'operazione offensiva<sup>14</sup>.

Uno dei litorali su cui l'esercito americano perse il maggior numero

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<sup>14</sup> La Normandia appare oggi come un vero e proprio museo a cielo aperto che comprende cimiteri militari americani, tedeschi ed inglesi, i luoghi in cui si svolsero le vicende belliche, e diversi memoriali e musei a ricordo della storia dello sbarco. Per approfondire si studino O. Cirendini, et al., *Normandie - La Normandie du débarquement*, Paris, Lonely planet, 2011, e P. Ferlin, D. Auzias, e J.-P. Labourdette, *Guide des lieux de mémoire: champs de bataille, cimetières militaires, musées, mémoriaux*, Paris, Nouvelles éditions de l'Université, 2005.

di vittime, si trova a Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer, ed è meglio conosciuto con il nome in codice datogli nel corso dello sbarco, *Omaha Beach*, (più tardi ribattezzata *bloody Omaha*). Su questa spiaggia, nel 2004, nel sessantesimo anniversario del D-Day, proprio di fronte al bagnasciuga è stato inaugurato un complesso scultoreo originale e d'impatto visivo considerevole: si tratta di un complesso monumentale dal titolo estremamente significativo de *Les Braves*, costituito da tre parti distinte, tutte in inox<sup>15</sup> (Figura 1). La struttura principale (*Debout de la Liberté*), che raggiunge l'altezza massima di 9 m, si sviluppa nello spazio attraverso due colonne monche mastodontiche, possibile riferimento ai soldati americani periti nello sbarco e alla loro strenua resistenza, nonostante le vite spezzate; la verticalità può facilmente rinviare al cielo come luogo simbolico in cui l'esperienza terrena dei caduti si è esaurita attraverso la liberazione da tutte le sofferenze e le atrocità della guerra. Alle linee rette e inscalfibili dei due pilastri corrisponde una maggiore licenza al movimento e alla spazialità, espressa, innanzitutto, nelle cinque lastre in inox, piegate in direzione del mare, tanto sottili da suggerire la fragilità dell'esistenza umana. I corpi laterali della scultura, intitolati rispettivamente *Les Ailes de l'Espoir* e *Les Ailes de la Fraternité*, rinviano nuovamente all'idea di liberazione e di salvezza, già espresse nella struttura mediana, ma veicolano ugualmente il vero significato del memoriale: si tratta ancora una volta di un messaggio universale offerto dall'esempio delle migliaia di soldati caduti nel 1944 e rivolto all'intera posterità, affinché il loro sacrificio in nome della libertà non risulti vano. Le due strutture alate forgiate in inox rappresentano, infatti, secondo la volontà dell'artista, la speranza di un mondo privo di conflitti, unico e vero fondamento dell'umana fratellanza<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Sull'argomento si consultino P. Ferlin, *Guide des lieux de mémoire*, pp. 249-50, e D. Dalemont e A. Ughetto, *Les sculpteurs du metal*, Paris, Somogy éditions d'art, 2006, p. 346.

<sup>16</sup> Si consideri l'articolo online G. Badoufle, *Visiter: les Braves*, [6juin.omaha.free.fr/braves/121\\_braves.php](http://6juin.omaha.free.fr/braves/121_braves.php), (consultato il 12 maggio 2013).

L'ubicazione del monumento è stata scelta attentamente, dal momento che l'autrice dell'opera ha tenuto conto del livello variabile delle maree nei diversi momenti del giorno e della notte, in modo che il complesso celebrativo venga letteralmente lambito dalle onde, in ricordo di tutti quei corpi esanimi bagnati dall'Atlantico. Il mare agisce, pertanto, con due modalità ben distinte: da una parte, entra a far parte della composizione in termini paesaggistici, come sfondo e ambiente privilegiato scelto per collocare la creazione artistica, in ricordo del luogo in cui si sono svolte le vicende storiche. Dall'altra, opera all'interno del complesso scultoreo quale elemento attivo, bilanciando l'immobilità della scultura. Quest'ultima, grazie alle maree, assume nuovi e più profondi significati, non si costituisce di soli materiali inanimati come il metallo, ma al contrario può contare tra le sue componenti intrinseche anche uno degli elementi naturali essenziali. Sempre in questa stessa ottica, di conseguenza, *Les Braves* rappresentano perfettamente un'opera propria del movimento artistico della *Land art*, visto che il memoriale di Omaha Beach «*incorporated the landscape not merely as subject or setting for the artwork but as an integral part of it*»<sup>17</sup>.

## **Gli immigrati clandestini**

Come accennato precedentemente, nel mare gli uomini hanno sempre proiettato la loro emotività, caricandola di sentimenti positivi, quali la speranza e il cambiamento, o negativi, tra cui la paura e la morte; in alcuni casi particolari questo elemento naturale

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<sup>17</sup> A. Toland e G. Wessolek, 'Merging Horizons – Soil Science and Soil Art', in Landa, E., Feller, C., e Descola, P. (eds.), *Soil and culture*. Dordrecht/London, Springer, 2010, p. 46. Sulla *Land Art* si consultino gli scritti fondamentali J. Kastner e B. Wallis, *Land and environmental art*, London, Phaidon Press, 1998, e U. Weilacher, *Between landscape architecture and land art*, Basel/Boston, Birkhäuser, 1996.

ha offerto una nuova vita e la libertà tanto agognata, in cambio, però, di un prezzo piuttosto elevato, come nell'esempio degli immigrati clandestini. I memoriali a loro dedicati rappresentano una tipologia del tutto nuova, molto diversa da quella tradizionale del monumento ai popoli migranti, ideata per omaggiare quelle vere e proprie fiamme umane che scelsero di abbandonare in massa le proprie terre, dando vita a fenomeni di portata storica e sociale<sup>18</sup>.

I primi complessi monumentali sorti in onore dell'immigrazione clandestina sono nati in Medio Oriente negli anni Sessanta, al fine di ricordare i *Ma'apilim*, le migliaia di profughi morti nel tentativo di entrare illegalmente in Palestina, dapprima durante il secondo conflitto mondiale per trovare scampo alle persecuzioni naziste, e successivamente, tra il 1945 e il 1948, nella speranza di stabilirsi definitivamente nella terra promessa<sup>19</sup>. Buona parte delle 120 navi che intrapresero questo viaggio vennero bloccate non soltanto dagli inglesi, che allora controllavano il territorio palestinese, ma ugualmente dalle forze armate tedesche e sovietiche. Nella città israeliana di Ashdod lo scultore Baruch Wind ha realizzato nel 1991 un memoriale in bronzo a ricordo dell'affondamento di due di queste navi a largo della costa: l'artista ha scelto di rappresentare

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<sup>18</sup> Il monumento all'emigrante è un genere scultoreo divenuto ormai tradizionale, considerata la sua ampia fortuna già a partire dal primo Novecento, subito dopo i fenomeni di migrazione di massa del secondo Ottocento. Gli Italiani furono una delle popolazioni migranti più numerose, ed è per questo motivo che ancora oggi vengono promossi in grandi e piccoli centri moltissimi progetti di memoriali. I più recenti prevedono di dedicare opere monumentali non soltanto ai migranti fuoriusciti, ma anche a coloro che arrivano dall'esterno, in nome di una democratizzazione del fenomeno dell'immigrazione. Per una veduta generale del fenomeno si consulti C. G. Pooley e I. D. Whyte, *Migrants, emigrants and immigrants: A social history of migration*, London, Routledge, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Per una storia dettagliata si vedano A. J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2011, e F. Liebreich, *Britain's naval and political reaction to the illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine, 1945-1948*, London/New York, Routledge, 2005.



un'imbarcazione, simbolo del naufragio, e alcune steli ricavate da pannelli bronzei logori e volutamente sfregiati, a suggerire i resti dei poveri relitti affondati. Non diverso per concezione risulta la *Memorial Sculpture for the illegal immigrants*, eretta sulla spiaggia di Achziv nel 1968 e ottenuta saldando diversi pannelli in acciaio, a suggerire, anche in questo esempio, le linee stilizzate di una nave naufragata. L'autore, lo scultore israeliano Yehiel Shemi, si è sempre riferito a quest'opera definendola "sea sculpture", nella consapevolezza come ancora una volta il mare entri a far parte integrante dell'opera, non soltanto in termini di paesaggio, ma ugualmente come protagonista e sfortunato luogo di sepoltura per le vittime dell'affondamento<sup>20</sup>.

Più di recente, la tipologia del memoriale all'immigrazione clandestina si è arricchita grazie all'erezione di originali complessi scultorei sulle coste italiane del Meridione. Le comunità di Lampedusa e di Otranto, infatti, hanno percepito la necessità di commemorare un'altra storia, meno conosciuta e storicamente marginale rispetto alle citate vicende della Diaspora ebraica. Si tratta di una narrazione in sordina che racconta di tanti morti, spesso anonimi, annegati durante le lunghe traversate a bordo di imbarcazioni di fortuna, partite dalle coste africane e colate a picco a largo di Malta o di Tripoli. La *Porta di Lampedusa, Porta*

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<sup>20</sup> R. Ben-Haim, *Facts about Israel*, Jerusalem, Israel Information Center, 2004, p. 222, A. Schwartz, *Israele: arte contemporanea*, catalogo della mostra [Torino, Palazzo Bricherasio 22 giugno - 02 settembre 2007] Cinisello Balsamo, 2007, p. 364, e M. Sgan-Cohen, *Yehiel Shemi*, Tel-Aviv, Muze'on Tel-Aviv le-omanut, 1997. Un altro esempio di questa tipologia di monumento è presente a Haifa: si tratta di una scultura in marmo donata dall'artista Soraya Nazarian all'università della città: non diversamente dai due casi analizzati, anche quest'opera rappresenta una nave, dove lo scafo, questa volta intatto, simboleggia la terra promessa e le vele in forma di libri impilati gli uni sugli altri la conoscenza e la cultura del popolo ebraico. *Sculpture recalling illegal immigration to Israel unveiled in Haifa*, <http://www.sdjewishworld.com/2010/01/13/sculpture/recalling/illegal/immigrati on/to/israel/unveiled/in/haifa>, (consultato il 20 maggio 2013).

*d'Europa*, eretta sull'isola, è opera di Mimmo Paladino, una delle firme più prestigiose della plastica italiana del Novecento, che ha scelto di orientare la creazione artistica in forma di varco in direzione della Tunisia e della Libia; la scultura diventa, pertanto, un simbolo e una sorta di *stargate* per rendere giustizia e un meritato omaggio alle migliaia di vittime, tra cui innumerevoli dispersi, che le onde hanno inghiottito per sempre. Il Mediterraneo sembrerebbe pertanto essere un luogo pericoloso, portatore di morte e di lutto, andando quasi a smentire la definizione romana di “*Mare Nostrum*”, ovvero di una superficie a lungo solcata durante l'espansione imperiale e, pertanto, conosciuta e familiare fin nei suoi più reconditi angoli. Soltanto attraverso la presenza del monumento, e l'esperienza estetica che esso ci offre, il significato del mare viene completamente ribaltato, quale sinonimo di salvezza e speranza: il complesso monumentale offusca l'aspetto più cupo e doloroso di tutti i naufragi, e lascia trapelare, al contrario, soltanto le attese degli immigrati, salpati con nella mente il sogno di una vita migliore. Non casualmente la *Porta d'Europa* è stata concepita per essere vista da lontano, da chi in futuro sarà spinto a intraprendere un altro viaggio della speranza verso le coste italiane; grazie all'utilizzo di una speciale ceramica refrattaria che riflette tutte le fonti luminose, diurne e notturne, la struttura plastica si trasforma assumendo la funzione di un autentico faro, la costruzione umana che più di ogni altra è prossima al regno degli abissi e tenta di instaurarvi una possibile comunicazione<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Si consulti A. Bolzoni, 'La porta che guarda l'Africa in ricordo di chi non è mai arrivato', *La Repubblica.it*, 26 giugno 2008, <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/06/sezioni/cronaca/sbarchi-immigrati-1/porta-immigrati/porta-immigrati.html>, (consultato il 10 aprile 2013). Sull'opera di Paladino e il profilo completo dell'artista si veda il volume di De Martino; sulle interpretazioni discordanti riguardo il vero significato da attribuire alla scultura si vedano U. Pallua, A. Knapp, e A. Exenberger, *(Re)Figuring human enslavement: images of power, violence and resistance*, Innsbruck, University Press, 2009, p. 16, e G. Visetti, *Ex-Italia: un viaggio nel paese che non sa più chi è*, Milano, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2009, p. 201. A Otranto sorge un altro memoriale

## I pescatori

Il volto contraddittorio e promiscuo del mare continua ad influenzare con forza le vite di tutti quegli uomini che di esso vivono e si nutrono, come i pescatori, chiamati a confrontarsi ogni giorno con le sue profondità e con l'imprevedibilità della natura. A questo mestiere millenario sono dedicati monumenti in tutto il mondo, a testimonianza di come le diverse civiltà abbiano realmente compreso la dimensione eroica di un'attività quotidiana umile e mai sufficientemente ripagata<sup>22</sup>.

A Viareggio, su di un molo, denominato "scoglio di Tito", posto di fronte al Tirreno, sorge *L'Attesa*, una scultura in bronzo, derivata da un originale in legno, opera dell'artista Inaco Biancalana, realizzata nel 1947<sup>23</sup> (Figura 2); il gruppo rappresenta figure di età differente, ma tutte legate da un profondo vincolo di parentela, come si evince dall'intimità che le unisce. Si tratta della famiglia del pescatore partito al largo e non ancora rientrato: la moglie con il figlio tra le braccia, la bimba più grande, la sorella e il vecchio marinaio, ripiegato su se stesso, in una posa religiosa che ricorda quella della michelangiolesca *Pietà Rondanini*. Il titolo del monumento rimanda al significato intrinseco dell'opera, ovvero alla speranza che

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all'immigrazione clandestina, dedicato al naufragio della motovedetta albanese *Kates I Rades*, affondata il venerdì santo del 1997; la scultura non è altro che una rielaborazione artistica del relitto recuperato ad opera dell'artista greco Costas Varotsos. Si veda a questo proposito M. Bortone, 'Un monumento alla memoria. La Kater "riprende" il suo viaggio', *Lecceprima*, 29 gennaio 2012, <http://www.lecceprima.it/cronaca/un-monumento-alla-memoria-la-kater-riprende-il-suo-viaggio.html>, (consultato il 10 aprile 2013).

<sup>22</sup> La *conditio sine qua non* per l'esecuzione di tale tipologia di monumento è, come è logico, la vicinanza alla costa. Tutti i memoriali dedicati ai pescatori e agli uomini di mare sorgono, pertanto, in paesi, come l'Italia e le nazioni nord-europee la cui storia è stata influenzata dall'elemento marino.

<sup>23</sup> Si veda M. Malfatti, *L'attesa di Inaco Biancalana*, Viareggio, Pezzini, 2007.

accomuna i cinque personaggi, intenti a scrutare l'orizzonte. Il mare entra ancora una volta a far parte della scena rappresentata, e ne diventa, anzi, il punto focale, dal momento che da esso dipende il ritorno dell'imbarcazione. Differentemente da quanto affermato per i memoriali ai soldati caduti, però, qui gli abissi non vengono interpretati aprioristicamente dallo scultore, il quale ne sospende il giudizio, focalizzando tutta la sua attenzione sulla dimensione intimistica del piccolo gruppo familiare<sup>24</sup>.

Ben diverso è il momento rappresentato nel *Monumento al pescatore* sul litorale di San Benedetto del Tronto: un'unica figura, un lupo di mare, immobile di fronte alla spiaggia. Il suo autore, lo scultore Cleto Capponi ha deciso di rinunciare alla dimensione familiare che caratterizza il gruppo de *L'Attesa* e di presentare la scena da un punto di vista filologico, vestendo l'uomo con la tenuta tipica indossata durante le tempeste, costituita da un impermeabile e da un cappello in cerata. Se prestiamo attenzione alla rappresentazione plastica, ci accorgiamo che il personaggio è colto nell'atto di suonare un corno per avvertire i compagni già a largo dell'arrivo della nebbia e del conseguente approssimarsi della mareggiata. Il mare si mostra, pertanto, nell'immaginario dell'artista nuovamente come una minaccia, una forza naturale incontrollabile di cui l'uomo è in balia ma di cui ne accetta il carattere volubile. È di nuovo Conrad a spiegarci il vero significato di questa condizione e il ruolo fondamentale attribuito alle profondità marine, interpretate come metafora perfetta

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<sup>24</sup> Il *Monument to seaman's wife*, eretto sul litorale di Odessa nel 2002 è stato concepito con la medesima sensibilità e rinvia, come nell'esempio italiano, all'idea dell'attesa e soprattutto alla purezza dell'anima infantile, incarnata dal figlioletto che attende il ritorno del padre e sembra già rivolgergli un gesto di benvenuto con la piccola mano levata verso l'orizzonte. Nuovamente il mare costituisce un elemento essenziale della composizione artistica, con cui si instaura addirittura un dialogo possibile. Per quest'ultimo esempio si veda *Monument to Seaman's wife*, [http://www.ukraine3d.com/en/The\\_seaman's\\_wife](http://www.ukraine3d.com/en/The_seaman's_wife), (consultato il 15 maggio 2013).

dell'esistenza umana: «e il mare immortale si stendeva all'infinito, immenso e caliginoso, simile all'immagine della vita, scintillante in superficie e scuro negli abissi: promettente, vuoto, ispiratore, terribile». Agli oceani lo scrittore attribuiva, infatti, un autentico “potere di significazione”, affidato alla forza distruttrice delle tempeste e delle mareggiate, durante le quali l'uomo trovava un senso alla sua condizione, perchè solo in quegli attimi di «lunga, eterna tensione» riusciva veramente ad «avvinghiarsi alla vita [...]»<sup>25</sup>. Proprio questo sentimento di rassegnazione nei confronti del proprio destino, qualunque esso sia, ispira buona parte delle rappresentazioni scultoree di pescatori e marinai nei monumenti a loro dedicati: figure fuse nel bronzo rivolgono lo sguardo a largo, certe di imbarcarsi ma non altrettanto sicure di far ritorno a casa, come si legge nelle espressioni delle madri e delle mogli che spesso li accompagnano<sup>26</sup>.

## **I Monumenti alla sirene e alle bagnanti**

Proprio la donna diventa protagonista in un'altra tipologia di monumento «marino», quello dedicato alla personificazione femminile, che si esprime, nella maggior parte dei casi, attraverso le sembianze di una sirena o una bagnante. L'esempio più celebre è senza dubbio quello della notissima statua bronzea nel porto di Copenhagen, dedicata alla celebre fiaba di Hans Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Si veda quanto affermato a questo proposito da Filippo La Porta nell'introduzione a Conrad, *Lo specchio del mare*, s. n.

<sup>26</sup> La tipologia di questi monumenti risulta spesso codificata: la figura maschile porta con sé la propria sacca di viaggio, in previsione di una traversata che lo terrà lontano da casa per lungo tempo; seduto su una bitta del porto o in piedi con le mani in tasca, egli è sereno e non sembra preoccuparsi dell'incertezza del proprio destino. Si vedano a questo proposito la *Lone Sailor Statue* nell'*United States Navy Memorial* di Washington D. C. (1991), il *Jacksonville Navy Memorial* (1987), in Florida, la statua del marinaio canadese, eretta sul litorale di Sackville, Halifax.

Handersen, *Den lille Havfrue*. L'elegante creatura degli abissi sembra vivere letteralmente a contatto con l'ambiente naturale circostante, anche grazie alla sua collocazione su uno scoglio di fronte al porto della capitale danese: l'assenza dell'elemento acquatico suonerebbe, anzi, come un'imperdonabile sottrazione per una scultura che è diventata ormai il simbolo della città e l'incarnazione plastica più perfetta di questa figura mitologica<sup>27</sup>.

L'artista locale Edvaed Eriksen ricevette la commissione nel lontano 1909 per la realizzazione di un'immagine della sirenetta proprio nell'attimo della sua metamorfosi; l'esempio di Copenhagen sembra quindi voler proporre un rovesciamento rispetto all'abituale attitudine dell'uomo di fronte alla natura. Se, infatti, tutti i protagonisti dei monumenti citati finora erano rivolti alle sue profondità, o addirittura minacciati dalla sua forza incontrollabile, nel caso della Sirenetta di Danimarca è il mare a tendersi verso la terraferma. La piccola abitante degli abissi realizza infatti il suo sogno e abbandona per sempre il regno delle acque, per iniziare una nuova vita in mezzo agli umani. La trasformazione è tanto definitiva quanto irreversibile e simboleggia come non si possa assurgere a far parte di entrambi questi mondi, così diversi e inconciliabili. Come abbiamo visto per i marinai e i pescatori, la loro attività quotidiana li porta ad abitare l'oceano soltanto in superficie, perennemente in bilico tra due terre inconciliabili, ma prossimi al senso più profondo dell'esistenza.

Questo rapporto conflittuale tra uomo e natura può essere però risanato grazie al potere dell'arte, come nel caso degli esempi scultorei analizzati finora: solo nella dimensione dell'estetica, infatti, è possibile trovare un punto di intesa tra il regno naturale e il mondo civilizzato, dove si realizzi una comunicazione e uno

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<sup>27</sup> La forte valenza simbolica del monumento danese è alla base dei numerosi atti vandalici subiti nel corso di un intero secolo, spesso per motivi ideologici del tutto indipendenti dal valore artistico dell'opera. Si consideri l'articolo 'Pray tell, little mermaid, who took your pretty head', *Life* 56, n. 10, 8 May 1964, pp. 28-33.

scambio reciproci.

L'espressione artistica di figure femminili legate al mare veicola perfettamente questa ricerca di intesa, come nel *Monumento alla Bagnante di Vasto*, sulla costa abruzzese: una fanciulla in bronzo, opera dello scultore Aldo d'Adamo, si allaccia il bikini prima di bagnarsi nel mare circostante il piccolo scoglio su cui si trova. Nonostante la scultura possa essersi liberamente ispirata alla Sirenetta di Copenhagen, ben diversa risulta la finalità per cui l'immagine scultorea è stata concepita. Si tratta, infatti, di un'aperta celebrazione nei confronti di uno dei simboli della località balneare, dove il mare rappresenta una risorsa fondamentale e l'oggetto di un affetto profondo da parte degli abitanti. Nessuna visione contraddittoria traspare dal monumento e il Mare Adriatico che fa da sfondo alla composizione plastica sembra aver definitivamente perduto l'accezione negativa conferitagli in epoca classica, in termini di distesa marina minacciosa e portatrice di morte (*raucus et inquietus Hadria*)<sup>28</sup>; le città che vi si affacciano contribuiscono, al contrario, a diffondere in epoca moderna unicamente la sua immagine gioiosa e confortante propria del periodo estivo, attraverso figure giovani e piene di vita<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Per i riferimenti all'Adriatico negli autori classici si veda E. Pianezzola, 'Adriatico e altri mari, un'immagine simbolo per la Graia Camena di Orazio', in Braccesi, L., e Luni, M. (eds.), *I Greci in Adriatico/1*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002, pp. 11-24.

<sup>29</sup> Sul monumento, si consulti L. Spadaccini, *Storia della nostra spiaggia: il Monumento alla Bagnante di Vasto*, <http://www.histonium.net/notizie/tradizioni/24458/storia-della-nostra-spiaggia/il-monumento-alla-bagnante-di-vasto-marina>, (consultato il 20 maggio 2013). Un altro monumento dedicato alla bagnante (*La Mula*) sorge a Trieste ed è opera dello scultore locale Nino Spagnoli. Sul monumento triestino si vedano 'Vernice stamane a Barcola per la «mula de Trieste»', *Il Piccolo*, Trieste, 03 giugno 2005, p. 23, e N. Spagnoli, A. Krekic, e M. Messina, *Nessun maestro cade dal cielo: arte e lavoro nella scultura di Nino Spagnoli*, catalogo della mostra [Trieste, Palazzo Gopceovich, 15 aprile - 13 maggio 2007] Trieste, Civici Musei di Storia ed Arte, 2007.

## I monumenti sottomarini

Il presente articolo sulla scultura di soggetto marino non sarebbe completo se non analizzasse un'ultima tipologia monumentale di recente invenzione, quella delle creazioni plastiche sottomarine: si tratta di una forma estrema di inserimento di un'opera d'arte all'interno di un paesaggio, dove manufatto artistico ed elemento naturale si fondono letteralmente in un tutt'uno. Uno dei primi esempi di installazione subacquea, dal titolo di *Ocean Landmark*, è stato realizzato dalla canadese Betty Beaumont tra il 1978 e il 1980, a largo dell'Oceano Atlantico: supportata da un'equipe scientifica, l'artista ha immaginato di creare un nuovo ecosistema per la fauna marina riciclando ben 500 tonnellate di cenere di carbone altamente tossica che a contatto con l'acqua perdeva il proprio potere inquinante e poteva essere utilizzata per creare una nuova barriera corallina. Ben 17.000 moduli contenenti i rifiuti risanati sono stati disposti sul fondale oceanico tenendo conto di un piano prestabilito, finalizzato non soltanto ad offrire una soluzione pragmatica ad un problema ambientale di prima importanza, ma a creare ugualmente un lavoro di arte concettuale, assolutamente invisibile, «*a flourishing environment no one can see*»<sup>30</sup>.

Sempre a partire dagli anni Ottanta, i fondali marini italiani si sono popolati di statue e simulacri, che nulla hanno a che vedere con le transavanguardie e forme artistiche innovative, ma sono, al contrario, sculture sacre tradizionali, che affondano le proprie radici nella devozione popolare, diffusa soprattutto nell'Italia Meridionale.

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<sup>30</sup> Dichiarazione di B. Beaumont (1980). Su quest'opera si studino A. Boetzkes, *The ethics of earth art*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, pp. 31-34, J. A. Isaak, 'Trash: public art by the garbage girls', in Adams, S., e Gruetzner Robins, A. (eds.), *Gendering landscape art*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2011, pp. 179-80, e S. Wilson, *Information arts: intersections of art, science, and technology*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002, p. 144.



Questi manufatti artistici possono rappresentare la Madonna, il Cristo o i santi e patroni protettori delle profondità del mare e di chi le solca, come pescatori e subacquei; da nord a sud si contano decine di statue “affondate” che trasformano letteralmente i mari italiani in un immenso santuario sottomarino. Uno degli esempi più conosciuti è, di certo, il *Cristo degli abissi* in bronzo, collocato nel 1954 a largo di San Fruttuoso di Camogli, in Liguria, in memoria delle vittime del Tirreno e a protezione dei sub. La creazione artistica è stata ideata dallo scultore Guido Galletti ed è attualmente il simulacro sommerso ad aver esser stato più volte replicato, andando ad arricchire anche i fondali dell’Oceano Atlantico<sup>31</sup>.

L’idea di connotare artisticamente l’ambiente marino ha recentemente ispirato un progetto unico al mondo, quello del primo parco di sculture sottomarino, pensato dall’artista britannico Jason deCaires Taylor; l’installazione si trova a largo di Moliniere Bay, vicino a Grenada, nelle Indie Orientali, e comprende 65 pezzi divisi in sette gruppi tematici distinti, alcuni dei quali ispirati a persone reali e a caratteristiche fisiche tipiche degli abitanti della zona (Figura 3). Non diversamente dall’opera concettuale *Ocean Landmark*, anche questa colonia di sculture è stata pensata per apportare dei benefici all’ecosistema che la ospita, nel rispetto della barriera corallina minacciata dal turismo di massa. In questo senso, i materiali impiegati non contaminano la flora e la fauna marine e le figure scolpite offrono le loro superfici alla proliferazione

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<sup>31</sup> Una prima replica dell’opera è stata donata a Grenada nel 1961 e collocata all’asciutto, per commemorare il naufragio della nave da crociera Bianca C distrutta dalle fiamme nel porto della città caraibica. Un’altra copia è stata offerta nel 1962 all’*Underwater Society of America* per essere immersa, tre anni più tardi, nella località di Key Largo, in Florida. Per ulteriori dettagli, si vedano G. Galletti e M. T. Orenco, *Arte a Palazzo: il Cristo degli Abissi: dai fondali di San Fruttuoso di Camogli: ed altre opere di Guido Galletti*, Genova, Regione Liguria, 2004, P. Crask, *Grenada, Carriacou, Petite Martinique. The Bradt travel guide*, Chalfont St Peter, Bradt Travel Guides, 2009, p. 102, e P. D. Ward, Peter, *The flooded earth: our future in a world without ice caps*, New York, Basic Books, 2010, p. XIII.

vegetativa, quasi fossero degli scogli naturali<sup>32</sup>.

Il successo e la genialità di questo progetto unico nel suo genere ha ispirato la creazione, da parte del medesimo scultore, di un altro parco acquatico sommerso, presto ridefinito il primo museo d'arte subacquea; il numero di pezzi esposti, ben 450, ridefinisce interamente i fondali messicani attorno a Cancun e offre una nuova tipologia di opera d'arte monumentale appositamente pensata per dialogare con il mare<sup>33</sup>. Nel caso della scultura sottomarina, i limiti tra creazione umana e natura sembrano, infatti, annullarsi del tutto in una dimensione estetica pura, dove la creazione artistica continua all'infinito: l'artista affida il proprio lavoro plastico all'acqua, ben consapevole di come questo elemento naturale si sostituisca all'uomo e inizi a levigare e a smussare le superfici del manufatto immerso negli abissi. Le onde e le correnti agiscono come le mani di uno scultore, in un inaspettato quanto affascinante processo di trasformazione dell'opera, destinata a mutare progressivamente e dinamicamente nel corso del tempo. In questa nuova forma arte, che potremmo definire "arte subacquea", il mare entra a far parte della creazione artistica non soltanto in termini paesaggistici o accessori,

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<sup>32</sup> Il complesso scultoreo comprende 7 soggetti distinti: *Vicissitudes*: un girotondo di bambini, simbolo dell'adattabilità a qualsiasi situazione, condizione tipica dell'infanzia; *The Lost Correspondent*: un impiegato d'ufficio seduto alla scrivania con tanto di macchina da scrivere e vecchi giornali facenti riferimento alla cronaca locale; *Grace Reef*: 16 figure femminili sdraiate sul fondale sabbioso, modellate sull'esempio di una donna di Grenada; *Sienna*: un'ulteriore figura femminile già parzialmente abitata da conchiglie e altre incrostazioni marine; *TAMCC Faces*: diversi volti plasmati nelle fenditure del fondale, realizzate coinvolgendo alcuni studenti di un college locale; *Still-life*: una natura morta posta su un tavolo ancorato alle profondità marine, anch'essa colonizzata dalla flora e dalla fauna; *Man on a bike*: una scultura a grandezza naturale che recupera una bicicletta usata per rappresentare un ciclista degli abissi. Su quest'opera si vedano: C. Ladd, 'Frozen in time. Grenada's underwater sculpture gallery', *Sport Diver* XV, n. 10, Nov.-Dec. 2007, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> B. Black, D. M. Hassenzahl, e J. C. Stephens, *Climate change: an encyclopedia of science and history*, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2013.

ma determina il risultato finale in modo sostanziale. E' come se lo scultore, dopo aver sbizzato una figura in un blocco di marmo, affidasse a un suo collaboratore il compito di levigarla, di smussarne le linee fino ad elevarla al rango di incontestabile capolavoro artistico. L'azione delle acque, solitamente disprezzata per i suoi effetti erosivi ed aggressivi nei confronti di tutte le costruzioni umane, di ogni epoca e luogo, viene quindi rivalutata positivamente ed apprezzata in termini puramente estetici, aprendo la via a futuri progetti, inediti ed originali e ridefinendo per sempre la scultura monumentale di soggetto marino<sup>34</sup>.

## Biografia

**Maria Beatrice Giorio** è una studiosa di arte contemporanea, affiliata all'Università degli Studi di Trieste. Nel 2008 ha vinto una borsa di studio per trascorrere un periodo come *visiting scholar* all'università Charles de Gaulle-Lille III, in Francia. Nel 2012 ha concluso le sue ricerche dottorali, ottenendo il doppio titolo di dottore in Italia, a Trieste, e in Francia, a Parigi, con una tesi in cotutela sulla presenza degli scultori italiani nella capitale francese nella prima metà del Novecento. I suoi interessi di ricerca comprendono gli scambi artistici a livello internazionale nel corso del Ventesimo secolo, le relazioni tra la scultura italiana e francese

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<sup>34</sup> Sempre di più gli artisti sfruttano l'azione estetizzante del mare nelle loro opere: un esempio è quello dello scultore barese Frank Sisca che riutilizza il legno portato a riva dalle onde per realizzare manufatti e mobili d'arredamento. Per approfondire l'argomento E. Signorile, *Frank Sisca: scolpire il legno portato a riva dal mare*, Bari, Barinedita, <http://www.barinedita.it/giovani-artisti-crescono/n210-frank-sisca-scolpire-il-legno-portato-a-riva-dal-mare>, (consultato il 20 aprile 2013).

della prima metà del Novecento, e la comunità di artisti italiani immigrati all'interno della cultura americana contemporanea. Maria Beatrice Giorio ha al suo attivo varie pubblicazioni, tra cui “Arte italiana e transizione istituzionale: il contributo della scultura alla difficile rinascita”, *Nemla Italian Studies*, XXXVI, 2014, pp. 39-67; “Scultori Italiani e Italo-Americani negli States: Attori di un'Identità Nazionale (1920-1930)”, *Arte in Friuli Arte a Trieste*, 30, 2012, pp. 145-68; “La produzione sacra” e “Le medaglie commemorative”, in *Marcello Mascherini l'Acrobata gioioso che parla e scrive*, a cura di M. De Grassi, Mariano del Friuli: Edizioni della Laguna, 2006, pp. 186-98 e pp. 199-210. Nel 2012 ha partecipato alla seconda edizione del Festival Nazionale di Storia dell'Arte a Fontainebleau; nel corso del 2013 e del 2014 è stata più volte invitata a New York per presentare *in absentia* alcuni interventi, in occasione del bicentenario della nascita di Verdi, alla New York University e alla conferenza internazionale dedicata alla storia e all'identità del Calcio, organizzata dalla Hofstra University.

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Figura 1: *Les Braves*, Omaha Beach, Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer, 2004  
(Photo mat's eye/Flickr)



Figura 2: *L'Attesa*, Viareggio, 1947 (Photo Elena Torre/Flickr)



Figura 3: *Vicissitudes Ring*, Moliniere Bay, 2006 (Photo SunCat/Flickr)

# **“Bo Me Truo”: A Female-Centred Sun Fire Nudity Dance Ritual of Fertility of the Sehwi People of Ghana.**

**Awo Abena Amoa Sarpong**

**Henrietta Emma Sarpong**

**De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway**

**Abstract:** This paper examines Bo Me Truo, a rite whose performance aspect of an amalgam of dancing, singing and drama is generally done in the nude by females, of the people of Sehwi (Sefwi). The Sehwi is an ancillary of the Akan *ethnie* in Ghana. What prompts the Sehwi to execute such a ritual during a festival dedicated to the special dead – the ancestors? What are the deep meanings encased in its choreographic elements and actions, and material and chromatic props and ornaments? This essay interrogates the rite from historical and philosophico-choreographic and artistic perspectives, and proceeding through a review of the indigenous cosmovision of the Sehwi, it explains the practice as an indigenous art. The discussion in the essay transcends the exteriority of the enacting part of the rite as a shocking cultural item to an “untrained eye”, and elucidates this powerful female nudity ritual, functional to avert disasters of all kinds from the society and to spiritually charge and hone the fertility energy of the soil, for agrarian purposes, and fecundity of the people.

## **Introduction**

Every African community has a communally-owned ritual or ceremony of a sort, and each, as Turner observes, “has its own special drum rhythm, . . . ‘theme song’ . . . combination of

medicines, and . . . stylized behaviour, expressed in dancing and gestures and its own type of shrine and ritual apparatus . . .”<sup>1</sup> Details of such rites commonly entail the establishment of new patterns of social relationships and artistic expressions among the communities and participants.

It is uncertain when the agrarian Sehwi or Esahie or Sefwi,<sup>2</sup> of the Western Region of Ghana, West Africa, first ritualized and used the visual and performing arts as agents of fertility, especially for their land. However, cave dwelling humans and pre-historic hunter-gatherer communities danced and sang as rituals, and depicted them in pictures and carvings, at least 15,000 years ago, as art magic to subject the natural world and phenomena to humankind’s control and purposes.<sup>3</sup>

[I]f a hunt was to take place, special dances were performed, representing the pursuit and killing of a quarry . . . to ensure the success of the hunters by means of magic. If rain was needed, the tribe would tirelessly do a rain-making dance in which the constant beating of feet upon the ground raised dust . . . into a rain cloud; thunder . . . by the beating of drums, lightning by the crackle of twigs; . . . [T]he witch doctor would perform frenzied steps and gestures . . . to frighten the devils out of the sick man’s body.<sup>4</sup>

The utilisation of dance, songs, and art objects in art magic and rituals manifested in post pre-historic cultures. For example priests/tesses of Khmet (Pharaonic Egypt) performed special dances

<sup>1</sup> V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols, an aspect of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, as cited in F. Nii-Yartey, “Dance Symbolism in Africa” in *Africa in Contemporary Perspective*, Takyiwaa Manuh and Esi Sutherland-Addy (eds.), Accra, Sub Saharan Publishers, 2013, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> *Sefwi* and *Esahie* are alternative spellings. *Sehwi* would be used hereafter.

<sup>3</sup> A.H. Brodrick, “The Creative Spirit” in *Man’s Creative Imagination*, Gerald Barry, et al. (eds.), New York, Doubleday & Company Inc., 1965, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Clarke, “Dance” in *“The Doubleday Pictorial Library of The Arts, Man’s Creative Imagination*, ed. Gerald Barry et al., New York, Doubleday & Company Inc, 1965, p.174

with dedicated art objects to invoke the deity Isis and her magic of fertility and healing.<sup>5</sup> Similar ritualistic dances exist in some communities in the so-called modern (contemporary/present) era. These communities, like human ancestors that graphed cave walls some millennia ago, believe that their dance performances and art objects possess occult energies, releasable by sympathetic rites, of ritual specialists, to regulate events and operations of nature. The indigenous Sehwi possess such belief. The natural world and its phenomena, to them, are domains mutable by the force of sympathetic art – ritual singing, dancing and dramatic performances that operate with the law of reciprocity.

This study discusses a female controlled ritual ceremony of the Sehwi, purposed at controlling land and, by extension, human fertility, and preventing social calamities. Popularly called “Bo Me Truo”, it is performed in the nude, and characterized by special dance, drama, songs, sculpture and body ornamentation. It forms a major facet of the annual Alue festival of the Sehwi. Oral traditions and few existing works of scholars like Meyerowitz, Holtsbaum, Daaku, Boni, Roberts, and Ofori,<sup>6</sup> about aspects of Sehwi history, help the essay to briefly review Sehwi origins. The study explains the spiritual worldview/cosmovision impetus of the sympathetic/magical nudity ritual. The ceremony’s key actions, songs, chromatic classifications and props are examined to illustrate

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>6</sup> E. Meyerowitz, *Sacred State of the Akan*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1951; E. Meyerowitz, *Akan Traditions of Origin*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1952, p. 117-118; H. P. Holtsbaum, “Sefwi and Its Peoples”, *Gold Coast Review*, Vol. I, 1925, p. 76-94; K. Y. Daaku, “A History of the Sefwi: A Survey of Oral Evidence”, *Research Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1971, p.32-47; K.Y. Daaku, (ed.), *Oral traditions of Sefwi*, Legon, Institute of African Studies, 1974; S. Boni, “History and Social Structure: A Study of the Sefwi Residential System (Ghana)”, *Ethnology*, vol. 37, no. 3, 1998, p. 239-262; P. A. Roberts, “Sehwi Wiawso Riots of 1935: The Deposition of an Omanhene in the Gold Coast”, *Africa*, vol. 53, no. 21, 1983, p. 25-46; H. H. Ofori, *Sehwi History: Wiawso Traditional Area*, Kumasi, Ghana, Bennis Printing Press, 2004.



the multidimensional significance of the ritual as a guard of society and fertilizer of the land. These set the background for a philosophical discourse that unveils the multivocal deeper meanings of Bo Me Truo.

### **The Sehwi: A Brief History and Ethno-cultural Composition of an Akan People**

Located in both Ghana and La Cote D'Ivoire, the Akan form the largest ethnies in Ghana. Several ancillary groups – indigenous state/community systems – known as *aman*, (sing. *Oman*), form the Akan. They are categorised as coastal Akan, primarily made up of the Fante, and forest Akan, which feature groups like Asante, Akyem, Akwapim, Assin and the Sehwi.

Sehwi can be used to denote the people, their territory, and their language. On the east, north, west and south of Sehwi land are Asante, Brong, Aowin and Wassaw respectively. The Sehwi share a common language, a tutelary god – Sobore, and a festival – Alue, yet Sehwi is not a homogenous political group. It is a league of three distinct yet connected sectional *aman*, namely Anhwiaso, Bekwai, and Wiawso. They consider themselves as essentially one people – Sehwi – and thus constitute what can be called greater Sehwi nation, whose cultural heritage they partake in. Bo Me Truo, central to this essay, is therefore a bona fide cultural item of the Sehwi nation; however, it is the females of Kesekro, a section/suburb of Wiawso that are deemed the traditional custodians and performers of this heavily symbolised activity.

The genesis of Sehwi, like other Akan groups, precedes through narrations of population explosion, migration, wars, settlement and, kingship systems revolving around certain families.<sup>7</sup> According to

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<sup>7</sup> See Holtsbaum, op.cit.

tradition, Sehwi's present settlement was first occupied by proto-settlers called Aowin.<sup>8</sup> Gradually, new immigrants joined them.<sup>9</sup> Years of miscegenation, cultural interaction and political innovation characterised the evolution of the Sehwi nation from the 1500s. Daaku, after analyzing oral traditions, suggests that among the three sectional *aman* Anhwiaso was probably the first to evolve.<sup>10</sup> A wave of migrants from the Pra-Ofin basin where the progenitors of most southern Akan states lived for sometime in the 15<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>11</sup> were key in the creation Bekwai. According to tradition some Akan migrants from Takyiman, key point of Akan dispersion, were led by Boa Angye and his sister Adua Mmereku to where the Sehwi reside today. They settled along the Sobore River. In search of lebensraum they settled at Assaman, found domains around Anhwia and Aboduanu, and spread through Bosomoiso and Amafie to the base of the Wiawso hills.<sup>12</sup> Neighbouring Akan Twi groups knew them as *Sa Wie Fo* meaning "those who had successfully overcome hardships and settled". Sehwi, and its variants, is the corruption of *Sa Wie Fo*.<sup>13</sup> While Daaku claims that another tradition links the name to Sahie, a powerful Aowin hunter and chief who was in charge of lands, which the Sehwi occupies today, he alternatively suggests that *Esa awie* or *Esa hie* meaning "war is over" are probable roots to the name.<sup>14</sup> Around the latter part of the 1600s, Kwasi Bumangama, the sixth chief of the Sehwi, who ruled around 1680,<sup>15</sup> founded Wiawso, whose etymology is *Eyia wo so* or *Wia wo so*, meaning a place of abundant sunshine. Strategically elevated by a hill and thus ideal for politics and defence, particularly against

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<sup>8</sup> Daaku, "A history of the Sefwi: a survey of oral evidence", p. 32

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>11</sup> G.T. Stride and C. Ifeka, *Peoples and Empires of West Africa: West Africa in History 1000-1800*. Nigeria, Adeyemi Press Ltd. 1986, p. 240.

<sup>12</sup> Ofori, op.cit. pp. 3-9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Daaku, op.cit. p. 33, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

the imperial ambitions of the Denkyera state, many people in its environs relocated to *Wia wo so*. The migrant would-be Sehwi nation must have initially been political subordinates of the Aowin whose influence extended into parts of present day La Cote d'Ivoire, and whose legendary leader Ebiri Moro, controlled the area where Sehwi eventually consolidated. The emerging Sehwi allied with Asante, in a war against Aowin in the 1700s, perhaps to rival Aowin and assert its political autonomy. Aowin suffered defeat and disintegrated into small autonomous isolated forest communities. The initial Aowin-Sehwi cultural interaction yielded the prevailing Sehwi language, an amalgam of Aowin and Twi, similar to Agni, spoken by the Aowin and in eastern La Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>16</sup> Emerging Sehwi became a tributary state of the Asante kingdom, however, Wiawso rebelled in 1874 and accepted British protection, "but for the next thirty years, it was subject to only the most infrequent visitations by the Colonial Government whose interest was restricted to policing the frontier with the Ivory Coast and controlling the rubber collectors on its borders".<sup>17</sup> Technically, therefore, from about 1715 to 1887, when the Sehwi fully came under the British, Asante maintained some hegemony over them.<sup>18</sup>

Like other societies in Ghana, colonialism planted Christianity into Sehwi, while Islam from circa 16<sup>th</sup> reached the area through migrant traders from the early Islamised West African Sahel regions. Christianity as the European missionaries started took off slowly, however, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the mission started to gain a strong foothold in Sehwi because of increasing interest in Western style formal schooling on the part of the Sehwi. Today many Sehwi feel affiliated to a Christian church. A considerable number also professes Islam, yet some continue to maintain links with Sehwi indigenous spirituality. Therefore, the Sehwi today is not a

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<sup>16</sup> Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Daaku, *op.cit.* 39.

religiously homogenous group and it can be expected that opinions on Sehwi cultural practices such as Bo Me Truo will differ. However, the missionary and colonial language and even Islamisation, have been so strong that words such as “pagan” and “fetish” are still commonly used to refer to non-Christian and even non-Islam practices, and to Bo Me Truo in particular.

Today Sehwi, apart from its majority indigenes, contains a mixed population of migrants from the Akan, Guan, Ga, Ewe and Mole-Dagbani ethnic groups. The Sehwi accommodate a chieftaincy system, centralised and pyramidal in structure. The system of inheritance and descent reckoning is matrilineal.

In general, in the past, the indigenous economy thrived on agriculture, hunting and small-scale gold mining. There was, as there is today, domestic trade with neighbouring states.<sup>19</sup> Presently, most of the people work in the informal sector and mainly in self employed farming, petty processing and retail trade. Sehwi has a rapidly expanding and youthful population like other people and places in the Western Region of Ghana.<sup>20</sup> The general gendered divisions of labour in homes, markets and farms in Sehwi have traditionally been fairly cut-out. Women and men play distinct roles and responsibilities for activities and face very different constraints. Women bear primary responsibility for bearing and rearing children, much food production and food processing, food preparation, washing, and water and fuel wood collection. They are also in charge of certain spiritual rites like Bo Me Truo. Polygyny is traditionally allowed in the society and it remains a desired form of marriage for many men.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nana Afro Kwaw, Chief of Sehwi Dabiso, interviewed by authors, 2014, Chief’s Palace, Sefwi Dabiso. Sehwi.

<sup>20</sup> See Ghana Statistical Service. *2010 Population and Housing Census, National Analytical Report*. Accra, Ghana Statistical Service, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Nana Afro Kwaw, interview, op.cit.

## **Bo Me Truo Nudity Ritual: Cosmivision as Context**

Sehwi is popularly known for its agrarian exploits, which have made the Western Region a bread basket in Ghana. Sehwi is also popular for its annual 8-day Alue festival celebrated at Wenchi, in Sehwi Anhwiaso, Kojina, in Sehwi Bekwai, and Kesekro in Sehwi Wiawso.<sup>22</sup> It is dedicated to honouring and ritualistically feeding the ancestors (special dead),<sup>23</sup> petitioning them and Sehwi deities for blessing and protection, and celebrating Sehwi agricultural work. It attempts “to bring back the dead as [reincarnated] children in the *nton* (clan); to effect fertility in agricultural endeavours; and to seek victory not only in warfare but in any other life crises”.<sup>24</sup> Its rites seek “to make life meaningful for the people, by providing them children, food and total peace”<sup>25</sup> – the three-fold ancestral blessing.

The Bo Me Truo “special” rite is performed at the end of each day of the Alue. Interestingly, this nocturnal ceremony draws more spectators than the daytime feeding of ancestors rites. Consequently, Donkor observed: “. . . the Alue nights are nights people in such villages can hardly let fade away from memory. The ‘Bo Me Truo’ rites are so much enjoyed that people have even designated the Alue festival ‘Bo Me Truo’”.<sup>26</sup> Combining nakedness, explicit bawdy songs and sexually suggestive dances, and gesticulations with handcrafted phalluses and vaginas by females of all forms, the spectacle is at once amusing and cathartic for Alue celebrants at the close of each hectic day of religious

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<sup>22</sup> T. J. K. Donkor, “The Alue Festival of the Sefwi People”, B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed. Long Essay, Religious Studies Department, University of Cape Coast, 1980, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

activities, and a sacred rite, deeply embedded in Sehwi ancestral veneration and fertility cults.<sup>27</sup>

Mbiti and Parrinder were apt when they described the indigenous African mind as “notoriously”<sup>28</sup> and “incurably”<sup>29</sup> religious – connoting that religio-spiritual notions condition all aspects of life of the African, of which stock the Sehwi belong. The conviction that Bo Me Truo yields fertility and agrarian productivity comes from certain assumptions in indigenous Akan spirituality and cosmivision. Many of the ideas and concepts about the management of nature found in Sehwi Indigenous Knowledge (I.K.)<sup>30</sup> systems, such as Bo Me Truo, have been labelled as primitive and unscientific because they are steeped in the frame of the indigenous spirituality. Hence certain endogenous technological, scientific, religious and economic ideas advanced by colonialism-supported Western knowledge, epistemic values and social-cultural mores including Eurocentric Christianity, and Arabo-Islamic cultural influences have antagonistically sidelined or hybridized/adulterated many. Although old and new ideas of colonialism and globalization have persisted, vestiges of Sehwi I.K.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>28</sup>J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann, 1969, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, New York, Harper and Row, 1962, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> The complex set of knowledge, constituting the mental and spiritual concepts, beliefs and practices, skills, and technologies of indigenous populations and communities, which arose overtime from their deep thoughts (philosophical reflections), experiences and experiments from long term occupancy of a particular area. They guide, organise, and regulate their ways of living and serve as the basis for their livelihood including agriculture. See “Introduction” to D.D. Kuupole and De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway (eds.), *Polishing the Pearls of Ancient Wisdom: Exploring the Relevance of Endogenous African Knowledge Systems for Sustainable Development in Postcolonial Africa*, Cape Coast, University of Cape Coast and Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development, 2010, p.1-15.

like sympathetic rituals to bridge the natural and spiritual worlds to mediate land management strategies persist.

Sehwi people “do not have any belief system different from the rest of the Akan communities”.<sup>31</sup> Sehwi spirituality cosmovision is very Akan in essence. It contains knowledge and pragmatic interventions, beliefs, values, and symbols derived from human, spiritual and environmental considerations for harmony between the human, spiritual and natural worlds, and for human survival and environmental conservation. Cosmovision embodies and determines the moral basis for human intervention in nature. It dictates the way and how humans should behave, relate to the cosmos, use nature’s agricultural lands, its water, plants and animals, take decisions, solve problems, undertake experiments and organise themselves.<sup>32</sup> Some main categories of understanding of the Akan about the composition of the world inform the approach the Sehwi take to matters relating to land and its productivity. “Where does it all come from?” is the cardinal cosmological question in Sehwi cosmovision. The Akan derived cosmology posits that the world (*ewiase*) including the earth (*asase*), plants, animals and humans, and minerals without biological life were created by a transcendental intelligent self-creating Creator – *Nyame* or *Onyame*. This intangible force is symbolized by fire, and anthropomorphized superficially as a He-God, but above all It is a nurturing Mother, because It “birthed” all that exists, and it is only the feminine species give birth. It is in fact a God/Goddess creator-parent. All that exist are children – extensions and manifestations – of this power. They contain an aspect – *sunsum* (the undying ideal essence/spirit) – of the God/Goddess. The creator spirit created *abosom* (divinities), and appointed them as custodians and

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<sup>31</sup> G.K. Kobiri, *Esahie Culture versus Christianity*, Sehwi Wiawso and Kumasi, God City Multi Ventures, 2014, p. 25

<sup>32</sup> B. Haverskort and W. Hiemstra, (eds.), *Food for Thought; Ancient Vision and New Experiments of Rural People*, London: Zed Books/Bangalore, Books for Change, 1999.

protectors of human beings and their lands and properties, and guard aspects of creation such as the earth and sea whose spiritual principalities are called Asaase Yaa and Bosompo respectively. The Sehwi believe in the existence of ancestors and venerate them like the abosom. All acts and intentions of worship are given to the Ultimate Reality but mostly channelled through the abosom and ancestors. The Sehwi believe in life after physical death on earth because the divine essence in humans reconnects with its spiritual source. Death is therefore a passage to and beginning of another existence, a metaphysical one. The belief in ancestors comes from this notion. Ancestors have a specific meaning. They are the “special” dead – men and women who have physically died and transmigrated to the spiritual world (adjoining the physical) where they continue to be active members of their living relatives. Thus, not all dead people become ancestors. Instead the “special” dead led exemplary lives when they were alive. The living continue to venerate and pray to them for their spiritual blessings. The Sefwi believe that ancestors can reincarnate, born as children to grow, perpetuate life, and help society to develop. Moreover, natural things are either inhabited by a deity and/or have their own inherent spirits, derived from the ultimate creator-parent spirit. Nature is therefore not just physical. Nature shares this in-built spirit with humankind.<sup>33</sup> This gives humankind a kinship with nature. Furthermore, there are three dimensions or worlds of reality – spiritual, human, and natural, which are interconnected. None exists in isolation. These interactive worlds: human-human and human-

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<sup>33</sup> Mbiti, *op.cit.* pp. 50-57; K.A. Busia, “The Ashanti of the Gold Coast,” in *African Worlds*, Darryl Ford, (ed.), London, Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 194; R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, London, Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 2.



sacred relationships,<sup>34</sup> and human-nature association,<sup>35</sup> and human-sacred-nature relationship, give humans physiological and spiritual insights both about what to do (right thought and action) and what not to do (wrong thought and action), and understanding and explanation for phenomena. Comprehension of phenomena and survival of humankind are situated in the harmonious holistic combination/interaction between the human (social), spiritual and natural worlds. Understanding and answers to all questions reside in this space of balance/harmony. The spiritual component i.e. God/Goddess part of nature is the activating/life principle in nature. Consequently, priority is given to the spiritual aspect because it is prior in existence and function.<sup>36</sup> The existence of the sacred is anterior to the creation of nature, but nature is the arena where the sacred manifests (nature temple). Thus the spiritual dimension of all existence is not limited in anyway by the physicality of nature. The notion of relationality and idea that the essential character of all creation is the sacred aspect the Ultimate Reality endowed in creation makes a Sehwi a being-in-relation with the Creator, deities, fellow humans, and nature – plants, animals, minerals, Sun, Moon, rivers, lakes, rocks, and environment, and all creation. The physiological/natural definition of phenomena, therefore, cannot stand alone; it must be complemented by the spiritual/metaphysical. Due to this notion of relationality the Sehwi believes that every action draws consequences from the natural or spiritual world or both.

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<sup>34</sup> D. Westermann, *The African Today and Tomorrow*. London, International African Institute, 1949; J. Omosade Awolalu, "Sin and Its Removal in African Traditional Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 44, no. 2, 1976, p. 275-287.

<sup>35</sup> Y. S. Agyemang and B. Quashigah, "African Communalism: An Asante Religious Reflection," *Oguaa Journal of Religion and Human Values*, 1, 2011, p. 55-66.

<sup>36</sup> Y.S. Agyemang, "The Influence of some Akan Religious Thought on the Lives of the Akan: A Case Study of the Sekyere," MPhil Thesis, Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, 1994, p. 202-203.

We deem Bo Me Truo as special sympathetic performances in accordance with a law of reciprocity, which the Sehwi employ to coax the spiritual world where their ancestors also reside to release specific reciprocal actions over the two other worlds. Because the ancestors own the land and are considered part of the living family (*abusua*) and clan (*nton*) and their affairs and welfare, special days are devoted to fete and venerate them. The Sehwi re-enact the historical deeds and actions of creativity of the ancestors in ritual drama and dance and songs to remind them about their experiences and, importantly, their unique authoritative spiritual standing within the cosmic order. The deeds and actions of the ancestors are physical and spiritual ones that sustained and preserved their generation. By re-enacting such symbolic actions, the living finds the meaningful life the ancestors found, and make theirs through their discovery and practice of these actions governing a successful life. Bo Me Truo as a rehearsal of sacred ancestral actions is a life transmission ritual, undergirded by the belief that the spiritual “fiery” energy of Nyame, which Meyerowitz describes as “the life-giving fire of the sun . . .”<sup>37</sup> which Sehwi ancestors elicited with specific sacred symbolic acts would be negotiated for womb and soil fertility, and protection during wars and crises. Eliade’s<sup>38</sup> postulation that rituals have mythical models, and his description of them as repetition of the acts of a god, a hero or an ancestor, performed at the beginning of time, by a people to achieve the same result as the ancestor, hero or god, is significant in the light of the meaning and end of the Bo Me Truo; it frames a context within which the rehearsed sacred Bo Me Truo may find definition – correctly, as a ritual intended specifically to invoke the meaningful life of the ancestors into present time and space. Whether the ends desired by the Sehwi are actually achieved or not is a matter left to their faith and belief. Let us now describe the ritual event and the

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<sup>37</sup> Meyerowitz, *Sacred State of the Akan*, p. 70.

<sup>38</sup> M. Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return of Cosmos and History* (Bollingen Series), Princeton University Press, 1954, p.1-49.

sacred symbolic actions, chromatic apparatuses, choral compositions, and body adornments that characterise the occasion and analyse their significance.

## The Ritual Event

Alue is celebrated between April and May. The three epicentres are the Asona clan villages of Wenchi, in Anhwiaso, Kojina, in Bekwai, and Kesekro, in Wiawso. Initially celebrated by the Asona, other clan and villages came to celebrate it their own way. The observation of special signs in nature,<sup>39</sup> terrestrial and celestial, by ritual specialists determines the date for Alue to commence. Citizens converge in the celebrant village at an appointed time to feed the ancestors *nzamanuane* (sacred ancestor meals), prepared from their farm crops in special earthen pots. The meals are placed on special platform-life wooden altars erected in and around the village.<sup>40</sup> Artists craft paraphernalia such as wooden and cloth vaginas and phalluses, and other provocative models of the genitalia, for the women performers of Bo Me Truo. The *ohemaa*, i.e. female counterpart of the male chief of the community, commissions all females, excluding babies and menstruating, barren, pregnant, menopausal, and frail old women, as legible performers of the imminent ritual. Females known to fall during the rite are disqualified. Days to meet and rehearse sacred bawdy songs set. The lyrics are considered potent and must be mastered assiduously and articulated well during the Bo Me Truo. The females need certain basic material things for the ceremony: *nwera* (white shawl), white headkerchiefs, waist beads, *ewule* (white kaolin) and red cloth for their *asiaa*. *Asiaa* is a strip of red cloth that is worn with rows of thick waist beads, as a veil over the genital

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<sup>39</sup> Donkor, op.cit. p.52.

<sup>40</sup> J. K. Otchere, indigene of Sehwi Beposo, interview by authors, University of Cape Coast, 2014.

area. Husbands buy them for their wives. Mothers provide for their young daughters. Spinsters procure their needs. The females groom themselves and eat special diets to tone their skin and beautifully accentuate the size of their breasts, the hips and buttocks.

Bo Me Truo closes each day of the festival. It typically commences on the night of the first day, after the ceremonial feeding of the day. Citizens converge at the village outskirts for it. The female participants bath in cold water to firm their muscles, smear white kaolin on the body, fasten the *asiaa* with rows of big, heavy beads, so tightly to make the buttocks and pubic appear swollen to the gaze and supple to the touch, swathe white shawls over their breast and pelvic area, and cover their hair with the kerchiefs. Brandishing symbolic phalluses and vaginas and wooden dolls bearing male and female sexual organs, and wielding *ammumu nyaa* (leafy branches of the *Mimosa piduca*) and corn leaves, the female congregation prepare for a procession of singing and dancing and acting. The observers, especially the men, eagerly wait. Summoned by drum beats the females, led by the Ohemaa, parade and sing through the village and converge at outskirts around 7 pm. Fearlessly and shamelessly, they strip and stand nude, save for their *asiaa*. The parade is opened with a special farewell song to the ancestors. The song and subsequent ones tell the ancestors to return to *eboro*, their spiritual abode, without taking along any of the physically living who desire to live and nurture their children and great grandchildren and enjoy the blessings of Nyame. The songs also request ancestral guidance. Behaving manly, at times imitating the actions and demeanour of warriors, the women run back and forth through the streets, from one outskirt to the other, singing explicitly bawdy songs popularly known as Alue songs, because they are performed only during the Alue. They shout “hooo, hooo” to symbolically hoot at hunger and crises to leave the community each time they reach the outskirts. This repertoire of movement, singing and hooting, is performed thrice, after which the women wrap their torsos and

pelvic zones again with their white cloth.<sup>41</sup> This does not end the rite. There is more. In fact, this prelude ceremony is similar to the crises averting *Momome* custom, which women in most Akan societies, beset with a calamity or crises perform to seek help from the spiritual world to cleanse the society.<sup>42</sup> Akin to Boni's observation about *Momome*, the Bo Me Truo, which sees women undertaking certain actions to bring social security, can be also "seen as the public recognition of female autonomy and importance or as a space of reversal of the established gender order."<sup>43</sup>

The singing continues simultaneously with a number of choreographic and dramatic antics of a sexual nature, which a culturally "other" or alien may find vulgarly outrageous and shocking. The women brandish their crafted objects of sex, excessively and energetically thrusting them forward and backward, and rubbing them against each other and on their persons to simulate the act of coitus. Onlookers are left in a state of ambivalence – shocked and/or amused. The masculine sexual pleasures which brave warriors who have successfully returned from war seek are enacted, by poking artificial vaginas with phalluses, imitative of sexual intercourse. Verbal invectives fly easily, at this time, at sexual weakness. Masculinity and virility are exhorted and male impotence is sneered at in song. Some male spectators often get surrounded by these empowered women. Daringly, they attempt to stimulate the libido of the men by tickling them with corn leaves, while singing. The men who know such songs may have a part, which they know they are required to sing. One of such male libido targeted songs contains these words:

"We are divining".

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<sup>41</sup> G.K. Kobiri, indigene of Sehwi Wiawso, radio presenter and author of Sehwi cultural issues, interviewed by authors, Sehwi Wiawso, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> S. Boni, Female Cleansing of the Community. The Momome Ritual of the Akan World, *Cahiers d' etudes Africaines*, 2008, pp. 765-790.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 765.

“Stop divining, the penis will die o oo  
The penis will certainly die.”

“We are only divining.  
So how will the penis die?”

“Stop divining, the penis will die o oo . . . the penis will really die” is the part the males sing in protest of their manhood being subjected to the coercive act – stimulation – of the audacious women. The stimulation act is likened to divination – a divination to see the virility or otherwise in a male. Consequently, the interfering females boldly respond: “We are only divining. So how will the penis die? Defiantly, they continue with their act of “divination” because contrary to the men’s view, they believe that the power of life, resident in an aroused penis, and life, which a penis is meant to assist a vagina to bring forth, will be made potent and created from the ritualized stimulation act. The women monopolise the singing. Men only have brief responses to some of the songs.

At other times the females, holding *ammumu nyaa*, sing slow tempo songs and dance slowly in imitation of the slow, graceful, and bashful rhythm and movement of the creeping herb. The compound leaves of the herb are deemed to be “shy, “sensitive”, and “sleepy” because they fold inward and droop when touched or shaken. This has therefore made the plant a metaphor and symbol of feminine patience, lushness, modesty, and dignity. It seems a contradiction that the females accompany this *ammumu nyaa* choreography with a rather bawdy song whose lyrics are as follows:

Mother Akua Asomaa e [or any other anonymous female name]! (This is a solo call)

We are going out (chorus)

When you climb the hill

Take your time to widen (expose) your vagina

Otherwise a stick will pierce it!

What am I to do o oo? What am I to do o oo? (Repeated wailing chorus of remorse)

Despite the apparent obscenity of the song, its verses are not literal but symbolic celebration of the sacred-natural functional act of sex and a call to female mindfulness/vigilance and moderation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Otchere, interview, op.cit.

Indubitably the climax of the show is the ritual uncovering of the female body to the shouts of “Bo Me Truo”, and “Tu nu Ngyee!” by the spectators. Onlookers, both locals and visitors, who desire to view the “beautiful” naked female figure, are given the opportunity to “procure” their wish, at a fee, of course. They do so by shouting “Bo Me Truo!” (lit. “Prepare me Soup!”) to any female participant. At this request she, married or unmarried, will whisk off her clothes and show her buttocks and back to the requester. Others simply raise their clothes to afford the requester an eyeful of their body, after which the requester obligatorily parts with a gift, especially money. An Oliver Twist can say, “To nu Ngyee!” (lit. “Put salt in it!”) and the female, if willing, will turn around for the requester to momentarily glimpse her intimate front parts. Consequently, a gift, bigger than the one for the first request, is compulsorily given. The singing, dancing and dramatic transactions continue till about midnight, when the performers repeatedly sing the *Osee Dompuyiwa* song to end the nocturnal ceremony. A frenzy dance involving running, jumping, carousing and jester-like actions accompany the singing. Falling is forbidden, for it is believed that whoever falls will not see the New Year. The victim will join the ancestors in *eboro*. Fatigued by the night’s activities especially the last euphoric dance, both the performers and spectators retire to await the next day’s activities.

The Bo Me Truo orgy-like dancing and ritual actions crescendo intensely on the night of the eighth and last day. There are a lot of shouts and requests of “Bo Me Truo!” and “To nu Ngyee!” When fatigue sets in for the performers they proceed to the village outskirts, where they sing a few songs, and offer verbal prayers to seal and end the rite of Bo Me Truo. There will be no more singing, no more Bo Me Truo, until the next Alue.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kobiri, interview, op.cit.

## **Symbolism of key actions, paraphernalia, songs, and chromatic classifications**

We now advance to explore the symbolism of certain key actions, paraphernalia, and colours that feature in the performance, and their functional relationship with two principal cosmic forces: Nyame, the primeval Mother Goddess and *greater metaphysical sun*, and Asaase Yaa, the Mother Earth Goddess, both of whom occupy a central place in fertility and productivity in Akan cosmology.

Several actions and material items in the Bo Me Truo event are highly nuanced with symbolic/coded meanings. Symbols, found in both intangible experiences of music, poetry and drama, and dance, and tangible art forms like paintings, textiles, sculpture, and pottery, play important roles in the life of the Sehwi. They are cultural expressions of their consciousness, very real to them, and anchor to their spiritual survival and social wellbeing. They wield great power over their collective psychology, and their material existence. The Bo Me Truo is a peoples' representational use of the woman as a Sun- and fire-personifying symbol, to display movement and rhythm to mediate a renewal of their corporate spirit and mind, and create a fertility filled society. Why does Sehwi bind its spiritual security so strongly to such a symbolic yet real event? Symbols, whether visual entities, forms of speech, actions, like games and/or dance, or manipulated bodily gestures like kissing, and saluting, are specific to people and their experience. A symbol can be contained in a relatively small visual or auditory package, yet it can speak volumes and/or soundlessly shout its meaning. Symbols carry compacted messages pertaining to the origin, identity and survival of individuals and groups. The messages are distilled from the conscious levels of the human brain and reduced to their essence in the subconscious where they are stored and continuously referred to



for existence and survival.<sup>46</sup> A person who has such symbol in the subconscious uses it with high frequency and may have little or no necessary conscious understanding of its meaning.<sup>47</sup> Symbols communicate from one person's subconscious to that of another who shares the same identity and survival necessity.<sup>48</sup> The actions, colours and items in Bo Me Truo are powerful symbolisers of those of the *greater metaphysical sun* and Asaase Yaa, and magical invokers of their powerful spiritual vitality and fertility essences for increase in the human realm. As above so below, as in the heavens, so on earth. This is core to Sehwi belief.

Women, not men, dominate the ritual and the entire magical performances because woman represents terrestrially the two key spiritual mothers – Nyame and her daughter Asaase Yaa – that are beseeched. It is the heat/fire rays of the former, the greater metaphysical sun, which energises and empowers earth, the domain of the latter, who is the custodian of fertility and procreation, to spawn and sustain life there.

The idea of Nyame as a greater sun and female predates the position of the prevailing Akan idea of a male sun and female moon, represented terrestrially by the *ohene* (male chief), and *ohemaa* (female chief) respectively. From narratives from Danquah<sup>49</sup> and Meyerowitz<sup>50</sup> about the Akan, and Markale<sup>51</sup> on European and other non Akan societies, the nature of the Ultimate Reality, was feminine, in the distant past, until it was challenged by a male-dominated society and subsequently changed to masculine. Deemed

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<sup>46</sup> F. C. Welsing, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors*, Washington DC, C.W. Publishing, 1991, p. xi.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1944.

<sup>50</sup> Meyerowitz, op.cit.

<sup>51</sup> J. Markale, *The Great Goddess: Reverence of the Divine Feminine of from the Palaeolithic to the Present*, Rochester, Vermont, Inner Tradition/Bear and Co. 1999.

feminine and luminous, the essential nature of Nyame, the originator, the *primum mobile*, according to Danquah, was revealed in the sun.<sup>52</sup> Markale shows such a belief among different European societies, and explicates how the *female* god was overthrown by a male one.<sup>53</sup> Meyerowitz mentions a male coup d'état in the distant past and a consequent masculinisation of the sun, which has remained to date among the Akan. Nevertheless, even the Akan male chief is customarily required to possess some *rounded* body features that exude some femininity, to aesthetically depict the *female* essence of the original *persona* he represents.

The woman performer in the Bo Me Truo ritual stands as the vital conduit for the spiritual life energy from the deities. She is therefore a highly charged ritual symbol, for she stands in the stead of the great spiritual mothers, who are the spring of life and regeneration. She becomes the physical embodiment and projector of the spiritual into the human physical habitation.

Nyame is ante-universe and all in the universe derived their genesis and sustenance from her essence as a primeval luminous life-giving incubating fluid Sun-Fire. It was her life-rays, shot into nothingness, which birthed all celestial, terrestrial, and marine things. This act is repeated in visible rhythmic cycles in earth's natural phenomena. Her rays are associated with fertility, at the beginning of each planting season, with death when they dry up the fields at the harvest, and with rebirth when they energise the earth and causes green shoots to appear in the fields<sup>54</sup>. Bo Me Truo symbolically re-enact the acts of Nyame by women who the Sehwi deem as significant points of contact to Nyame and her energy which also manifests through her daughter Asaase Yaa,

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<sup>52</sup> Danquah, op.cit. p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> Markale, op.cit.

<sup>54</sup> H. Sarpong, "The Humanistic Values of the Dance in the Akan Society", M.A. Thesis, African Art, University of Science and Technology, Ghana, 1990, p. 33.

The convergence of women, led by the ohemaa (Female chief), outside the community, where they bare their bodies and sing songs to the ancestors, is symbolic. So are the outskirts space, the being of the Ohemaa, and the song acts. As head protector of women, the ohemaa is more than a political leader. She is the first sacred created being – woman that represents the essence of Nyame. The outskirts, periphery of the domicile of the society, associates with death, a place where gloom rules. The event that manifests there bid last respect to the ancestors and the farewell songs signal the living's departure from the journey with death (ancestors). Antithetical to death, it signifies new life, and expectation of it. The nude women associate with life-giving; their songs express a communal desire to embrace new life. The glory of their nudity symbolically reveals the uncovered brilliance of Nyame, which may best be understood as awesome energetic beauty – the very character of the Sun. The arrival of this representation of the life-giving *Sun* obliterates/disperses a season of gloom of death and danger and invites a season of fertility and rebirth. As projections of a new fire, Nyame's fiery presence and solar essence, ushering community into a new day, a season, of life, their song arrest death, and pushes it behind the community. They mediate Nyame's illuminating dawn on the community. Their performance signifies and projects into the physical, the activity of Nyame in her metaphysical and natural aspect as Amowia, (giver of the sun),<sup>55</sup> i.e. provider of life force. This entrenches in the community's collective consciousness the beginning of the strong belief and anticipation that productivity in land, animal, human life, work, etc, will be activated.

Their uncovered body is also a symbol(s) carrying symbol, which the trained eye can detect and decipher. The skin canvases a language of symbolic signs and figures of lines, spirals, and dots painted in white kaolin. The most common are vertical arrow-like

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<sup>55</sup> Meyerowitz, op.cit. p. 70.

streaks and the Akan popular sign for fire. The face is mostly smeared all white, and the pubic is veiled a red *asiaa*. The women carry models of phalluses and vaginas. The chromatic choice of white and red represents very powerful notions. Among the Sehwi, and the Akan in general, white (*fiufuo*) as a ritually auspicious colour, stands for victory, health, success, spiritual purity and joy. The white kaolin, shawls and kerchiefs used ritually “whitens” persons chromatically and conceptually to indicate triumph and success of the intentions of the Bo Me Truo ceremony. A glimpse of the white items, deemed to confront failure, gives a sensory and psychological hope and assurance to the community.

The colour of the *asiaa* underwear is significant. Red, (*kokore*) symbolizes blood, (*mogya*). The Akan word *Mogya*, according to Meyerowitz, derives from *gya* (fire) so that *mogya* is the liquefied solar fire of life of Nyame, the greater Sun, shot into the veins of humans. The ritual establishes a connexion between red and sun-fire and all emanations, which possess the nature of the latter, such as heat, warmth, sun likeness, and light. It is carried on the body of the woman to invoke the power which supports spring and regeneration into the community. Red also signifies defiance, and it is a symbol of war.<sup>56</sup> The women ritualistically use this colour of violence and threat, to symbolically violate all that is evil, and threaten the threats of infertility and crises. The spiritual energy of solar life and strength of war of red is what the women use their symbolized bodies to invoke to defy malevolence and menace evil in the spirit realm. The “flashing” of red underwear in the Bo Me Truo ceremony is to be understood as a symbolic chasing away of death, coldness, infirmity, decrease, impotency and infertility, which may seize human and plant life and usher in famines and droughts in the land. It is spiritual warfare by colour symbolism!

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<sup>56</sup> Rattray, op.cit. p. 29-34; Boni, op.cit.

What about the art objects and drawings? The rite is female dominated, yet the complementary role of male energy in creating new life in society is acknowledged in the symbolic poking of hand-carved vaginas with wood carved phalluses. The use of sculptures of human genitalia clearly emits eroticism, but they are significant symbols of the fertility power that the ritual seeks to invoke.

Moreover, the graphed figures on the skin symbolise Nyame's life-transference qualities. The fire sign denotes and invokes her aspect as Amaomee (the supporter or sustainer of life), i.e. giver of life fire to continue mankind.<sup>57</sup> The streaks mimic the life-giving arrow rays of the greater metaphysical Sun. They symbolise transference, a shooting, of life energy to all that behold the woman's nude state, just as life and fertility flows out of Nyame in her aspect as Atoapoma (the ever ready shooter).<sup>58</sup> As Atoapoma, the greater metaphysical Sun is believed to consistently shoot her fiery life giving arrows into all her creatures, renewing their life verve and increasing their numbers. Descending down the women's bodies, the vertical arrow figures, which run down to their soles, which touch the ground, another dimension of the feminine self, emanations from a higher source, descending towards earth where humans, and the soil, which yields plant life and vegetation, dwell. They illustrate the transfer of solar vitality into earth. The woman's body is deemed a microcosmic earth because it is associated with Asaase Yaa. Thus, when it is graphed with the signs of Nyame's essence it is anticipated that such qualities would be sealed on that "biological" earth, an extension of Nyame, and simultaneously made manifest in the terrestrial earth. It is the desire to unleash sacred life-giving properties and cosmic rhythms upon the earth by sympathetic means, which inspires the making of the fertility glyphs.

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<sup>57</sup> Meyerowitz, op.cit. p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

Apart from arranging various symbolic designs as embodiments of religious concepts, the Akan also philosophically relate them to the rhythm of celestial bodies and their cosmic influence. It is by the same token of symbolising that they created dances to imitate certain rhythms and movements of the universe with the vision of generating a stirring of those properties and dynamics in the cosmic and invite such into society for different purposes. For example, the circular rotating movement, symbolising the turning universe, is basically characteristic of many Akan dances, especially the energetic priestly Akom dance. The priest/priestess whirls several times to signify “the perfection, wholeness and oneness of God” and Nyame as “source of physical strength”<sup>59</sup> energy and power.<sup>60</sup> Similarly the circular rotating movement has a practical meaning, i.e. universal rhythm and energy, elsewhere too. For example, marriageable girls of the Mbem of Cameroon, dance in a ring, beating the earth with wooden clappers, in anticipation of energising it for abundant harvest.<sup>61</sup> The Matakén dancers of Cameroon stamp hard on the ground “to pay homage to Mother earth and the ancestors as they carry pruning hooks to symbolise renewed fertility of the soil and the future abundant crops”.<sup>62</sup>

The mimicry of the ritualised acts of cosmic movements and rhythms are meant to psychologically increase and uplift human’s sense of moral, mental and physical power. The group performances assure humans of their collective security. In the African’s everyday activities, including planting, harvesting, fishing, etc, performances tuned to cosmic rhythm are instinctive. With group participating rhythmic activities that manifest libation or offering or sacrifice, praying, dancing, and singing, the Akan commemorate special events like birth, puberty, marriage, death, harvest, and festivals. The breaching of a community taboo, which

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> Sarpong, op.cit. p. 53.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>62</sup> Nii-Yartey, op.cit. p. 422.

defiles the deities and social purity, also invites life-giving propitiatory and extirpation ritualised activities attuned to cosmic designed dynamics to “recharge” the deities and social sanctity and thus repair the breach.

The conviction that occult energies are rechargeable for human use through ritual means is very real in African communities. From the simplest ritual of wearing rings, touching, rubbing and caressing pendants and ‘figurines’ of ancestors, to elaborate ones like pouring libation and sacrifices, the objective is to maintain and/or expand certain sacred vital forces. For example Laye’s *The African Child* reveals how his father’s simple ritual of rhythmic stroking of the snake of his family was a means of strengthening himself as a goldsmith.

This was the moment when his work as a goldsmith really began. I noticed that before embarking on it he never failed to stroke stealthily the little snake coiled up under the sheep-skin; . . . this was his way of gathering strength for what remained to be done, and which was the most difficult.<sup>63</sup>

Several physical movements of the female performers of the Bo Me Truo ceremony are rhythm acts intended to generate Nyame’s vital energies for land fertility. The three times trip they make from one outskirt to the other, and the accompanying running, dancing, spinning, gyrations, and jumping, are with signification. Three is a sacred number of Nyame.<sup>64</sup> Deemed as carrying the force of the deity, the number three is rehearsed by the trips as a symbolic sealing of the deity’s presence and essence upon the ritual. Moreover ritualised running, jumping, and dancing come from the Akan belief that they stir Nyame’s kra (soul) and titillate the earth so that the energy of the metaphysical greater sun will consequently charge the earth. Thus the Akan art form of bodily gestures finds

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<sup>63</sup> C. Laye, *The African Child*, Fontana Books Art, Britain, 1965, p. 27.

<sup>64</sup> Meyerowitz, op.cit. p. 95.

currency as increasers of earth fertility in the ceremony. On bodily gestures in indigenous dances, Sarpong's classic, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, elucidates them as infused with ritualistic symbols and figurative meanings ranging from praise to insult, to the erotic.<sup>65</sup> Gesticulation with bodily parts including the genitalia may convey religio-spiritual codes about human supplication and communion and dependence on transcendental Providence. The raising of the index and middle fingers to form a V congratulates a polished dancer among the Akan. Pouting in a certain way can connote disrespect or insult to certain people. Striking the chest or breast with one's fingers and thumb joined together says something like, "Can you beat me?", "I did it" or "I am supreme".<sup>66</sup>

The spiralling of the women during the Bo Me Truo signals birth and children, and the gyrating bodies are expected to generate and release reproductive energies into the earth. Moreover, when the women encircle observing men, and tickle them with leaves, they signal sacred functional concepts. The circle formation depicts the encompassing soul of Nyame, and the circle of her sun around which the universe revolves. This group participatory movement is an energy invoking act, and like the other movements, it is believed that the energy increases as the number of performers increase.

Moreover, the songs in the ceremony are energy themed, believed to stir and channel reproductive vigour into the land: *Osee Dompuyiwa* is a song that evokes the spring of life. The male libido targeted song invokes phallic energy. The ones that accompany the mimosa choreography are about erotic energy and the purposeful expending of such sexual power. Occult life believed to reside in the songs and accompanying movements gets released through singing and dancing. For example, *Osee Dompuyiwa*

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<sup>65</sup>P. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Accra-Tema, Ghana Publishing Company, 1974, p. 114-115.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



alludes to youthfulness and vigour of life, which the greater sun confers. Osee is a common Akan battle/war cry, which announces a sudden breaking forth. Dompuyiwa means young girl/maiden in her prime. Similar to the boons within the female greater sun, the gifts of regeneration abound in the loins and womb of a young female in her sexual prime, therefore the invocation of girlish youthfulness with a ritual song symbolises the conferment of such power on land and body.

## Conclusion

Both Bowie<sup>67</sup> and Adjaye<sup>68</sup> rightly avers that rituals are multifaceted and multifunctional, both on the level of the individual and for groups or societies. This study has provided understanding about the original relevance of the Bo Me Truo ceremony to the indigenous Sehwi collective mindscape and society, and discussed the significance of the artistic performances and hitherto undocumented symbolic art objects of the ritual to fertility and social security. Despite great transformations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ritual has survived, even though with reduced participation by women, the main ritualists, and dwindling conviction in its efficacy.<sup>69</sup> Odotei, has observed that generally the indigenous religious content of festivals in Ghana, is being undermined by other foreign faiths. For example as a compromise to Christianity a church service is most often held on the final Sunday to round off the celebrations of festivals.<sup>70</sup> The triple heritage of Christianity-Western culture and Arabo-Islamic influences and indigenous

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<sup>67</sup> F. Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*. Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 151-152.

<sup>68</sup> J.K. Adjaye, "Rituals, Postmodernity and Development", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, No. 6, 2001, pp. 1-15.

<sup>69</sup> Kobiri, interview, op.cit; Otchere, interview, op.cit.

<sup>70</sup> Irene Odotei, "Festivals in Ghana", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, No. 6, 2001, p. 32.

African spirituality has made Sehwi a contested space where ideological clashes about the appropriateness and usefulness of the rite abound. It is criticised by many Christians and Muslims for assumed “demonic”, “immoral”, “backward” and “pagan,” aspects of the rite, which can attract the wrath of their God, and also make Sehwi women descend into prostitution and the “sins of the flesh”. This type of current perspective shows striking parallels with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western missionaries’ bigoted reasoning about African cultural practices.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, others, influenced by Western scientific and technological notions, assert that it has no scientific basis to the development and advancement of Sehwi.<sup>72</sup> However, adherents and sympathizers of indigenous African spirituality deem it useful and proper. In this field of continuous tension – conflict between “tradition” and “modernity” – the observance of Bo Me Truo has gradually been losing its original intensity and frequency. Even when it is performed, in recent times, it seemingly assumes the character of a touristic spectacle, as part of a burgeoning cultural tourism agenda of the country. Thus, to this, it can be said that the gradual and prevalent commodification of festivals in Ghana, which has tended to emphasise on the non-ritual and entertainment features, is a major factor.<sup>73</sup> The problem of alienation of the natural participants by the hegemony of exogenous religious and cultural notions is partly responsible for the wane in the verve of the rite. Additionally is the intensive migration of young Sehwi from their

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<sup>71</sup> See for example the Basel missionary Johannes Zimmerman reasoning about the Krobo in Ghana in *Der evangelische Heidenbote*, March 1852, No. 3. p. 19; Report of Reverend T. Laing as quoted by C.C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Basel, Basel Mission, 1895, pp. 242–243, as mentioned in D. Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 153. T. Kanango, “Mission impact on women in colonial Kenya” in *Women and missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and historical perspectives*, F. Bowie, et al. (eds.), Providence, Oxford, Berg, pp. 165-186, also describe similar attitude of missionaries to Kenya’s Kikuyu cultural practices.

<sup>72</sup> Kobiri, interview, op.cit.

<sup>73</sup> Odotei, op.cit., p. 27.

hometowns and centres of their culture to the bigger metropolises in search of “better opportunities”. This continues to isolate them from a deeper understanding about the rite and its usefulness and thus diminish their interest in preserving it. Presently, circles of “traditional” women who maintain their cultural right and continue to take an active part in the ritual still believe in its benefits to the land and the community. Even so, such “traditional” women who are less involved in Church and Mosque activities lament the weakening of the ritual by the lack of utmost seriousness on the part of some of the young “modern” females and participation of some menstruating females – a taboo – when it is held. Accordingly, many attribute attacks of disease and infirmity in the land to the failure of women to attend, in their numbers and in all seriousness, to the performance of the ritual during *Alue*. They, rather than deeming it anachronistic, believe that the ritual is still relevant to current and future necessities, and, thus, advocate the need for a greater invigoration of its performance, and understanding of its functionality and sanctity, especially for the younger generation, so that I.K. embedded in Sehwi cultural formations may well provide a fine foundation for development.

And what, finally, of the future of Bo Me Truo from us? The short answer is, we do not know. For now it has not been obliterated from Sehwi culture. We can only express gratitude that we have been able to highlight a remarkable ritual and its ontological quiddity, to a larger body of scholarship, with the impetus of aesthetics, and historical and ethnographical exemplifications.

## **Biographies**

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# Agua e imaginarios territoriales *Wixárika*: representaciones de la naturaleza sagrada

**Adolfo Benito Narváez Tijerina**

**Resumen:** El trabajo aborda la concepción que ha construido el pueblo *Wixárika* (huichol) del occidente de México sobre su territorio, a través de la cosmovisión que han desarrollado sobre un elemento fundamental de la naturaleza: el agua. Se estudian los componentes mitológicos sobre su concepción de los valores asociados a este elemento, para desarrollar la hipótesis de que es a través del espacio mítico que se desarrolla su concepción territorial, en la que el agua es un elemento fundamental de delimitación y marcaje territorial. Se presentan las asociaciones del agua con diferentes elementos del sistema mítico *Wixárika*, para trazar una comprensión estructural de su imaginario. Se estudia especialmente el ciclo mítico anterior al surgimiento de los antepasados en *Haramara*, el peregrinaje a *Wirikuta*, el papel del desierto y la iluminación de *Kauyumari*, así como la zaga de *Tukutsi Nakawé* como explicación del simbolismo del agua entre los *wixaritari*.

Este artículo pretende mostrar cómo el elemento agua se representa en la mitología *Wixárika* y cómo contribuye a establecerse como componente de los imaginarios sobre el territorio de esta cultura, a la vez siendo un elemento que delimita al espacio territorial, otorgándole sentido mítico a las localizaciones, que siendo en sí un permanente protagonista de todos los ciclos míticos de este pueblo. Las reflexiones que se presentan en este trabajo surgen tanto de una

revisión crítica de fuentes bibliográficas y documentales, como del trabajo de campo desarrollado por el autor desde el 2009 en la región *Wixárika*, alrededor y con la ayuda del *maarakame* Don Jesús de la Cruz.

El agua entre los *wixaritari*, habitantes de las serranías del norte de Jalisco, de la costa nayarita y del desierto de la mesa central en México es un elemento fundamental para comprender su visión sobre su propia historia, su territorio y el cosmos en el que se desarrolla su vida. Como cultura han sido el interés de investigación de importantes antropólogos, entre los que podemos citar al noruego Carl Lumholtz<sup>1</sup>, al alemán Konrad Preuss<sup>2</sup> (1908), y a numerosos investigadores de diversas partes del mundo<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> C Lumholz, *El arte simbólico y decorativo de los wixaritari*, INI, Serie de Artes y Tradiciones Populares, México, 1986 [edición original 1900]; C Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico (Vols. 1 y 2)*. Charles Scribner, New York, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Preuss, Konrad Theodor, *Ein Besuch bei den Mexicano (Azteken) in der Sierra Madre Occidental*. Reisebericht V (Schluss) von K. Th. Preuss. "Globus, Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Länder- und Völkerkunde", n. 93, Brunswick, pp. 189-194, 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Cabe destacar entre estos los trabajos de P Furst & B Myerhoff, 'Myth as History: The Jimson Weed Cycle of the Huichols of Mexico'. *Antropológica* vol 17, 1966, pp. 3-39; P FURST & N Salomón (eds.), *Mitos y arte wixaritari*, Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP Setentas 50), México, 1972; B Myerhoff, *The sacred journey of huichol Indians*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1974; J Negrín, *The Huichol Creation of the World. Yarn Tablas by José Benítez Sánchez and Tutukila Carrillo*, E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, 1975; J Negrín, *El arte contemporáneo de los wixaritari*, Universidad de Guadalajara, INAH, Guadalajara, 1977; P Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture*, Chandler and Sharp, San Francisco, 1976; P Furst, 'The Life and Death of the Crazy Kiéri: Natural and Cultural History of a Huichol Myth', *Journal of Latin American Lore* vol. 15, no 2, 1989, pp. 155-177; P Furst, 'Myth as History, History as Myth: A New Look at some Old Problems in Huichol Origins', En: Stacy B. Schaefer & Peter T. Furst (eds), *People of the Peyote: Huichol Indian History, Religion, and Survival*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1996, pp. 26-60; P Furst, *Visions of a Huichol Shaman*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2003; S Leal Carretero, *Xurawe o la ruta de los muertos. Mito huichol en tres actos*, Universidad de Guadalajara,

Una buena parte de la literatura antropológica, histórica o etnográfica sobre este pueblo se ha relacionado con un análisis profundo de su cosmovisión, mitología y con sus prácticas mágicas y médicas. Una parte menor de los trabajos pero que han tenido un impacto significativo sobre la orientación de investigaciones posteriores sobre este pueblo, tiene que ver con sus conocimientos herbolarios, específicamente en cuanto a las nociones y uso de plantas psicoactivas. Un trabajo específico sobre la cultura *Wixárika* en relación al agua fue desarrollado por Johannes Neurath y Ricardo Pacheco como parte de un proyecto mayor auspiciado por UNESCO. Ese trabajo intenta abonar reflexiones sobre las relaciones de la mitología, la naturaleza y el territorio, en el ámbito de esta cultura.

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Guadalajara, 1992; F Benítez, *Los indios de México: los wixaritari*, Tomo II, Ediciones Era, México, 1994; J Neurath, 'El don de ver: el proceso de iniciación y sus implicaciones para la cosmovisión huichola', *Desacatos* vol 5, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Mexico, 2000, pp. 57-77; J Neurath, 'Venus y el sol en la religión de coras, wixaritari y mexicanos: consideraciones sobre la posibilidad de establecer comparaciones con las antiguas concepciones mesoamericanas', *Anales de Antropología*, no 36, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, UNAM, México, 2002, pp. 155-177; J Neurath, 'Alteridad constituyente y relaciones de tránsito en el ritual huichol: iniciación, anti-iniciación y alianza', *Cuiculco*, vol 15, no 42, ENAH, México, enero-abril, 2008, pp. 29-44; S Villaseñor Bayardo, A Lara Zaragoza & M Aceves Pulido, 2006. 'Kierixiet+, the Drunkenness of the Divine: a Culturebound Syndrome'. *Investigación en salud*, vol. VIII, no 1, CUCS-U de G, Guadalajara, Abril 2006, pp. 16-22; F Guízar Vázquez, 'Parentesco y relaciones de género en una localidad wixarika (huichol) del sur de Durango'. *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, vol 2, no 2. Antropólogos Iberoamericanos en Red, Madrid, Mayo-Agosto 2007, pp. 192-227; J Chamorro, *La cultura expresiva Huichol, reflexiones y abstracciones del mundo indígena del norte de Jalisco*, Universidad de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, 2007; C Hammerschlag, 'The Huichol Offering: A Shamanic Healing Journey'. *Journal of Religion and Health*, no 48, 2009, pp. 246-258; entre otros. El autor ha publicado en esta revista en el volumen 3 y 4 de 2012, un trabajo sobre el imaginario territorial *Wixárika*, asociado a prácticas mágicas de esta nación.

## Territorio y algunos elementos de la historia Wixárika

De acuerdo con Neurath y Pacheco<sup>4</sup>, hasta ahora no existen fuentes arqueológicas confiables como para saber el tiempo de ocupación de los territorios en los que actualmente vive el pueblo *Wixárika*. Señalan que las primeras menciones de esta nación se pueden encontrar en fuentes coloniales que se remontan al siglo XVI, no obstante que de acuerdo con Hammerschlag<sup>5</sup>, a través del análisis de cenizas de los lugares sagrados realizados mediante pruebas de carbono radioactivo, se puede saber que los centros ceremoniales han sido ocupados por un período de al menos 15000 años. Los *wixaritari* como grupo étnico podrían estar emparentados cercanamente con *coras*, *tepehuanos* y mexicanos, compartiendo además de la región geográfica de la Sierra Madre Occidental/Noroeste de México (región que incluye además a Arizona), costumbres, elementos de cosmovisión y mitología. No resulta muy claro si los *wixaritari* pertenezcan a Mesoamérica o a Aridoamérica (región cultural que la tradición antropológica estadounidense denomina el “*Greater Southwest*”).

La compleja cosmovisión y mitología *Wixárika* puede ligarse a las grandes culturas de Mesoamérica como los Mayas: *Tumurawi* o *Watakamé*, por ejemplo, que en la mitología *Wixárika* representa al sembrador divino, al primer hombre que emerge de la inundación primordial para poblar la tierra y al que *Tatei Niwetsika* le entrega el maíz sagrado para que lo siembre; puede relacionarse con la saga de los gemelos *Hunapuh* y *Xbalanque* de los relatos sagrados de los mayas. En la zaga puede compararse a *Xmucané* con *Watakame* o *Tumurawi* en su afán por sostener mediante prácticas mágicas específicas, reveladas tanto por la madre del maíz *Tatei Niwetsika*, como por la abuela madre de la madre tierra, *Tukutsi Nakawé*, a la

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<sup>4</sup> J Neurath & R Pacheco, *Atlas de culturas del agua en América Latina y el Caribe pueblos indígenas de México y agua: wixaritari (huichol)*, INAH, UNESCO, México, S/F

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

planta de maíz<sup>6</sup>. En otras leyendas, como la de la creación de las cosas por el desmembramiento ritual de *Tukutsi Nakawé*, pueden encontrarse paralelismos con el mítico surgimiento de la tierra que protagonizaron dos de los hijos de *Ométeotl*: *Tezcatlipoca* y *Quetzalcóatl*, entre los mexicas, que a través de dividir en dos al monstruo marino primordial y su desmembramiento pudieron crear todas las cosas de la tierra<sup>7</sup>. Así como en representaciones de los escribanos mesoamericanos: en el códice Vaticano A, conocido como Códice Ríos, por ejemplo, se ve claramente cómo de los órganos de un cuerpo surgen todas las cosas hacia todas las direcciones: “cada parte del cuerpo humano estaba relacionada con los días del calendario, y además éstas estaban asociadas con ciertos elementos de la naturaleza (fauna y flora) y del cosmos”<sup>8</sup>, de forma parecida a la manera en que en la tradición *Wixárika* se presenta el sacrificio de *Nakawé*, que se presentará más adelante.

Pero, por otra parte, su cosmovisión y costumbres rituales (entre las que se incluye la herbolaria) podrían relacionárseles con las altas culturas de ciertos grupos cuyos territorios ahora estarían comprendidos en el suroeste de los Estados Unidos, como los Navajos, Pueblo, Anasasi o Hopi. La costumbre *Navajo* de asociar el poste central de la vivienda ritual (*Hogan*) a un *axis mundi* que uniría al inframundo con los mundos superiores<sup>9</sup>, responde aproximadamente a la costumbre *Wixárika* de los dos postes que flanquean el recinto del fuego sagrado *Tatewari* en el *tukipa* o *callihuey*. Y que igualmente podrían señalar la construcción de un

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<sup>6</sup> Neurath, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> D Heyden, ‘Tezcatlipoca en el mundo náhuatl’, *Estudios de cultura náhuatl* no 19, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989 pp. 83-93.

<sup>8</sup> M Jaén & S Murillo, ‘Las enfermedades en la cosmovisión prehispánica’, *Estudios de antropología biológica*, vol 12, no 2, 2005, p. 878.

<sup>9</sup> A Rapoport, ‘El pueblo y el Hogan: comparación intercultural de dos respuestas a un rededor’. En: Oliver, Paul, *Cobijo y Sociedad*, Blume, Madrid, 1978, pp.74 a 87.

*axis mundi* por el que el *maarakame* “desplaza” su conciencia en su trabajo con los ancestros. En este mismo sentido y a través de estos elementos, las prácticas del *maarakame* pueden equipararse con las del chamán de las tribus siberianas<sup>10</sup>, lo que ya señalaría en una dirección interesante sobre el origen de este pueblo y las filiaciones de su sistema mítico.

## Los ciclos míticos y el agua entre los wixaritari

La mayor parte de la literatura sobre mitología *Wixárika* considera que esta puede ser dividida en tres grandes ciclos, cada uno de los cuales agrupan zagas centradas en eventos, enseñanzas específicas, personajes o lugares. El primer ciclo mítico trata acerca de la creación de *Tayau*, sobre la cacería del venado y sobre el sacrificio sagrado de *Kauyumari* para darnos el *híkuri* (*Lophophora Williamsii*) en *Wirikuta*; en este ciclo toda la creación emerge del mar poniente en *Haramara* (océano pacífico) y se dirige al oriente en *Wirikuta* (en el desierto de San Luis Potosí, cerca de Real de Catorce) para presenciar el nacimiento del sol. El segundo tiene su origen en la Isla de los Alacranes, en la laguna de Chapala. Este ciclo da comienzo con el gran diluvio anunciado por *Tukutsi Nakawé*, para dar paso a la creación del maíz y al origen de los *wixaritari*, a través del matrimonio sagrado del sobreviviente y sembrador divino *Watakame* o *Tumurawi* con una perrita negra que se transformó en la primera mujer y madre de los *wixaritari*. El tercer ciclo mítico se relaciona con Cristo y las deidades cristianas (la Virgen Madre y Santo Domingo *Apaxuki*, principalmente), sobre el dinero y los diversos elementos de las costumbres de influencia *teiwari*.

Las zagas o series míticas que comprenden estos ciclos no necesariamente concluyen cuando éste ha cambiado. En ocasiones

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<sup>10</sup> N Stepánova, *La invocadora de los dioses*, Grijalbo Mondadori, México, 2001.

pueden ser mayores que los ciclos, penetrando hasta la historia actual y ofreciendo explicaciones incluso para esta, tal es el caso de la extensa zaga de *Tukutsi Nakawé*, que cruza por entre los ciclos y se actualiza constantemente. Por tratarse de un pueblo con una grafía diferente a la que acostumbramos a entender como tal los occidentales<sup>11</sup>, los relatos tradicionales se transmiten a través de la interpretación del *maarakame* o de las revelaciones a los peregrinos, en forma de relatos orales o cifrados en forma gráfica en una serie de elementos de la cultura expresiva visual. Los relatos y visiones son dados a los *wixaritari* en ocasiones a través del ensueño, con lo que la variación de los relatos es algo que suele confundir a quien espera una historia lineal, cifrada, objetiva y estable; cuando lo que se encuentra en muchas ocasiones es una mitología que se adapta, que es un territorio vivo en el que el *maarakame* penetra constantemente para “negociar” con los ancestros<sup>12</sup>.

Si dispusiéramos a la mitología *Wixárika* como una historia lineal (lo cual es sólo una simplificación para los lectores occidentales no acostumbrados a una lectura matricial de múltiples entradas) podemos interpretar al primer ciclo mítico como el de la creación, que va de un caos indiferenciado y acuático al surgimiento del sol y la claridad (por el sacrificio de *Kauyumari*) que es dado a la humanidad a través del *hikuri* en el peregrinaje a *Wirikuta*. El primer ciclo puede abstraerse como un impulso “lineal” que va del poniente, que encaja en concepciones de lo acuático, indiferenciado,

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<sup>11</sup> El papel del *Nierikate* es interesante como instrumento de registro y cifrado simbólico del conocimiento mágico- mítico entre los *wixaritari*. Para una comprensión de su forma y función puede referirse al trabajo clásico de Lumholtz (*op. cit.*), o los contemporáneos de Negrín (*op. cit.*) o Chamorro (*op. cit.*), así como a la revisión que hizo Montaña (C Montaña, El huichol José Benítez exporta mensajes de los dioses. *Contenido*. Diciembre 2001, pp. 84- 88.) del insigne pintor *Wixárika* de *Nierika*.

<sup>12</sup> A Narváez, ‘El ensueño como elemento para la comprensión del imaginario territorial wixárika’. *Chronica Mundi, terra e identitá in Messico*, vol 3-4, no I/II, 2012, pp. 196-209.



femenino, creativo, inferior (altura), sexual, oscuro, salado, relacionado con el *kieri*<sup>13</sup>; al oriente, que es seco, luminoso, de la visión, diferenciado, masculino, de abstinencia sexual, magro, superior (altura) y relacionado con el *hikuri*. Hasta aquí, este ciclo se asemeja en muchos de sus elementos con las mitologías sobre el origen del mundo y la disipación de la oscuridad, la niebla o el caos

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<sup>13</sup> En una parte de la literatura especializada actual, al *kieri* se le identifica con la *Datura Stramonium*, también conocida en Norteamérica como *Jimsonweed*, no obstante que existe una importante controversia alrededor de esta identificación. Furst y Myerhoff (*op. cit.*) señalan que su impresión (incipiente) es que el *kieri* era la *Datura Innoxia* (conocida también como toloache). Señalan que en trabajos de Robert M. Zingg, se identifica a la planta como *Datura Meteloides*, siendo renombrada como *Inoxia*. Yasumoto (M Yasumoto, 'The Psychotropic Kieri in Huichol Culture', en: Stacy B. Schaefer & Peter T. Furst (eds), *People of the Peyote: Huichol Indian History, Religion, and Survival*, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1996, pp. 235-263.) Señala que la que los *wixaritari* identifican como el *kieri* real es más bien la *Solandra* (identificada como *S. brevicalyx Standl*, u otras variedades: *S. guttata*, *S. guerrerensis* o *S. maxima*), que tiene un arreglo de alcaloides cuyo consumo puede causar daños psicológicos permanentes y en ocasiones de sobredosis la muerte. Esta planta era bien conocida por los aztecas que le llamaban *tecomaxochitl*. Yasumoto afirma que los *wixaritari* consideran que el *kieri* puede ser también la *Brugmansia*, cuyo uso como alucinógeno ha sido reportado entre los Jíbaros de Ecuador, lo que nos puede dar una idea de las filiaciones culturales entre los *wixaritari*. De mi diario de campo recojo la siguiente información sobre el *kieri* transmitida por el *maarakame* Don Jesús, el 25 de enero de 2013: "Mira, el palo loco crece en donde hay viento, porque es de viento y ayuda a lo que es el viento, ayuda... por ejemplo, si tú te quieres dedicar a la política y quieres dar un discurso, hace que el aire no se te acabe y que tus palabras lleguen a los oídos de la gente, que los ganchen tus palabras y que te sigan... porque es de viento de lo que son las palabras" le dije que tenía dudas sobre cómo se preparaba para su consumo, si era la flor o la raíz, que había opiniones contradictorias al respecto. Me dijo que ni una ni otra, que lo que se hacía era consumir del palo (quizás de ahí el mote "palo loco") una resina que estaba bajo la corteza, entonces me explicó que era delicado el consumo porque era fuerte, que la planta si no se sabía tomar era a veces venenosa. Entonces me dijo que lo que él ha visto es que se toma un palito de la planta, se le quita con cuidado la corteza y luego, mientras está fresca se pasa un

original desarrolladas por numerosos pueblos aborígenes de Norteamérica<sup>14</sup>.

En esta primera serie mítica el agua es el origen de los ancestros. Se considera que el origen de los primeros eventos cosmológicos está ligado a la costa del pacífico frente a lo que actualmente es la costa nayarita. Es en el mar de esta región que cuida *Tatei Haramara* (Nuestra Madre el Mar), que se encuentra toda la fertilidad de la tierra, pero es una fertilidad salvaje a la que se asocian serpientes marinas monstruosas. El lugar en el que los *wixaritari* depositan hoy sus ofrendas es una roca blanca que emerge frente a la costa de San Blas (*Waxiewe*). Las Jícaras dedicadas a esta deidad contienen rezos para propiciar la fertilidad y abundancia en las cosechas<sup>15</sup>. Esta roca se asocia al segundo ciclo mítico como el origen de la tierra seca, en el primer ciclo se trata del primer objeto sólido que surgió del autosacrificio de *Tatei Haramara* que se arroja constantemente hacia la roca creándose a sí misma y recreándose en el rocío y la lluvia que propicia su arrojado sobre *Waxiewe*. A este ligar suele tratarse como donde vivían los *Hewixi*, que son tratados como gigantes primordiales en la literatura especializada, pero que son interpretados por el *maarakame* Don Jesús como “antiguos”, o como “hachas de piedra”, lo que puede remitir a personas de otra raza más antigua que los *wixaritari* o como una especie humana primordial; otras concepciones se refieren a esta antigua raza como los habitantes de *Kam+kita*, “el lugar de la gente lobo”, refiriéndose probablemente a los acompañantes nagual de los *maarakate*, como habitantes del inframundo, que es el lugar de los

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*híkuri* sobre la superficie pelada en cinco ocasiones, tratando de recoger la resina, entonces se consume el *híkuri*. Hasta esta fecha, no he podido identificar botánicamente al *kieri*, pero esta nota puede señalar lo equivocados que estarían hasta la fecha los especialistas citados.

<sup>14</sup> A Narváez, *Crónicas de los viajeros de la ciudad*, Idearium, Argentina, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> O Kindl, ‘La jícara y la flecha en el ritual. Análisis iconográfico del dualismo sexual y cosmológico’, *Antropología. Boletín Oficial del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, num 64, 2001, pp.1-20.

espíritus al que recurre el *maarakame* cuando es auxiliado por los antepasados.

Las historias sobre el origen suponen que todos los ancestros surgieron del seno de *Tatei Haramara* hacia la tierra firme, para iniciar un peregrinaje en la búsqueda del sol. En la concepción *Wixárika* del mundo que se deriva de esta y otras historias, el mar poniente, el oscuro origen de toda la fertilidad, el inframundo; se conecta con el mar del oriente (el Golfo de México) en forma subterránea; de hecho, en su concepción se trata del mismo mar primordial. La tierra, así sería como una isla que flota sobre un sustrato acuático. Así concebido el mundo, es viable la consideración de un inframundo oscuro y acuático, previo; sobre el que yacería una tierra seca, actual, de la luz y de la reproducción a través del trabajo.

El inframundo es el lugar oscuro de los muertos y el origen de todo lo que puede vivir en el mundo. Ello no habrá que entenderlo bajo la óptica tenebrosa occidental que quizás ha tenido su origen en el *Hades* de los griegos o en el Infierno cristiano; sino como un lugar que orgánicamente se relaciona con el mundo de lo vivo- actual. Los lugares intermedios entre el mar y la tierra seca –las costas, las marismas- serían para los *wixaritari* los lugares de morada de los muertos que en vida llevaron una vida licenciosa y que ahora existen en un continuo mitote. En ocasiones estos *wixaritari* muertos suelen asociarse a los mosquitos que se alimentan de sangre, sobre todo en los manglares costeros.

Si el origen de toda la fertilidad se encuentra en el agua salada que es la superficie primordial del mundo, para que la tierra seca pudiera contener la vida hubo de ser necesario el sacrificio de los antepasados que dieron sus venas para que se hicieran las venas de *Tatei Yurianaka*, de la madre tierra, a través de las que el agua circula desde las fuentes y manantiales de las montañas de nuevo hacia la costa y de *Haramara* hacia las altas serranías en forma de

lluvia. En la concepción *Wixárika* del mundo, que se deriva de los conocimientos revelados por el primer ciclo mítico, el agua es una y toda tiene su origen en el poniente, el inframundo fértil, morada de los muertos y de los ancestros primordiales. En este sentido, el agua es la manera en que *Tatei Haramara* se materializa, adquiriendo un cuerpo para que nosotros podamos tomar contacto con ella, en un sacrificio que transmite su vida para que a su vez nosotros tengamos vida.

Ya en el primer ciclo mítico se anuncia el surgimiento de una dualidad fundamental. La de lo acuático indiferenciado y lo seco diferenciado, que correspondería al eje poniente- oriente de la peregrinación primordial que culmina en el cerro del amanecer, *Paritek+a* en *Wirikuta*. De esta manera se empieza a interpretar la dualidad inframundo- mundo superior a través del agua y de su ausencia. Para el *maarakame*, esta división es fundamental, pues la búsqueda de visión que es uno de sus objetivos en su viaje de iniciación a *Wirikuta*, tiene que ver con un periodo de abstinencia de todo aquello que tenga que ver con lo marino- inferior- femenino- ensueño (aún y que el *maarakame* sea una mujer): el baño, el sexo, la sal, que son las interpretadas como propiedades de lo anterior al *híkuri*<sup>16</sup>. Otra interpretación del viaje a *Wirikuta* tiene que ver con el recuerdo del viaje primordial. Parte de los ancestros

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<sup>16</sup> Existe una diferenciación semejante en herbolaria que tiene que ver con este ciclo mítico y con un segmento de la zaga de *Tukutsi Nakawé* que forma parte de este ciclo. Antes del sacrificio de *Kauyumari* a través del cual se nos daría el *híkuri*, existía el *kieri* que era usada para obtener visión. Era tal su poder embriagador y alucinógeno, que era usado para hacer magia perjudicial que pudiera hacer que el hechicero pudiera capturar el *kupuri* (fuerza vital) de una persona para hacerle daño o matarla (Hammerschlag, *op. cit.*). Ahora en el territorio *Wixárika* sigue siendo usada esta planta, asociándosele a prácticas parcialmente desconocidas de manejo de ciertas energías por algunos hechiceros. Su asociación con el aspecto más destructivo de *Nakawé* (en su aspecto iguana o lagarto o agua de tormenta destructiva), no deja de ser interesante cuando se le ve en la polaridad de la luz de *Tayau* en la tierra seca que es representada por el *híkuri*.

quedaron rezagados, lo que los hizo constituirse en otros grupos, que se asimilan como las naciones vecinas o con rasgos del paisaje; mientras que los que sí llegaron a *Paritek+a* se convirtieron en los iluminados ancestros que ahora guían a los *wixaritari* y los sostienen. Algunos de estos ancestros, en un acto de auto-sacrificio se convertirían en elementos y animales para darse a los hombres y garantizar su subsistencia. Hubo algunos que se hicieron fuentes de agua dulce. De lo que se desprende que los animales, los rasgos del paisaje, el agua, entre otras cosas, son considerados por los *wixaritari* como personas, aún y que tengan una apariencia diferente, como personificaciones de los ancestros que en su sacrificio sostienen la vida de los hombres.

De manera que en la diferenciación de lo seco a lo húmedo se encontraría un elemento para indicar cómo se actualiza el primer ciclo mítico. Aunque esta división es instrumental, pertenece a la propiciación de la visión, y contribuye a anunciar una diferenciación en el territorio (lo superior y lo inferior) que constituye a la primera concepción del mundo<sup>17</sup>.

Asimismo, en este ciclo mítico de los orígenes, el agua juega un papel de oscuridad, mientras que lo seco estaría relacionado con la luz del día<sup>18</sup>. Esta oposición es la que se tiende entre *t'kari* (la

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<sup>17</sup> Es en el mar, en *Haramaratsie* que se origina todo, inclusive el alimento sagrado. Se concibe a *Tamatsi Kaenyumari* –el venado sagrado– como el origen de las jícaras (*xukuri*) que surgieron de sus excrementos, mismos que darían origen a *Tatei Niwetsika* (la madre del maíz) a la calabaza y al frijol. Ulteriormente y como ya ha sido señalado, del sacrificio ritual de *Kaenyumari* surgiría el *hikuri*. Hoy, los recolectores de *hikuri*, (*hikuritamete*) denominan a los pequeños brotes de cinco gajos “patas de venado” y atribuyen una energía poderosa y benéfica a estas jóvenes plantas de peyote.

<sup>18</sup> “Las jícaras con pintura ‘sangre’ son para las deidades celestes y el fuego, las ‘oscuras’ para las diferentes diosas madres (las *Tateiteime*), para *Takutsi Nakawe* y el dios del viento (*Tamatsi ‘Eaka Teiwari*). Ambas clases de jícaras sirven como recipientes para ofrecer la sangre de los animales sacrificados a las deidades” (Kindl, *op. cit.* pp. 12-13).

oscuridad) y *tukari* (el medio día). *T'kari* estaría asociado a lo húmedo, lo monstruoso, a la enfermedad, a lo *teiwari*, por lo tanto a todo lo que es exterior al territorio *Wixárika*, lo que ya implica el considerar a través de estas series míticas que el territorio en sí se concibe como un recinto encerrado, protegido, cálido y seco (la vida que nos da el padre *Tayau*) que se opone a la exterioridad representada por las madres primordiales formadoras y ciegas de la oscuridad marina que, según se desprende de los relatos del segundo ciclo mítico, son fuerzas amenazantes y dadoras de vida (al mismo tiempo) que establecen una relación dinámica con el mundo *Wixárika* que es el dominio del padre *Tayau* (lo superior celeste), y por extensión de *Tatewari*, la hoguera sagrada (el esposo sagrado de *Nakawé* en su aspecto positivo de abuela devota y que es lo ígneo que puede remitir a la domesticación del fuego primordial e incontrolado *Na'r'* esposo del aspecto destructivo de *Nakawé*).

Estas fuerzas opuestas han de poner en riesgo constante la estabilidad del mundo seco en la forma de la inminente inundación, de la lluvia destructiva del ciclón, de las olas que pueden devorar al mundo. La oposición fundamental encarnada por estas fuerzas podría ser una cubierta de la oposición de lo crudo y lo cocido en la construcción de una cultura agrícola y sedentaria de base patriarcal que se impondría sobre una cultura matriarcal de cazadores y recolectores. Una nota en apoyo de esta especulación la podemos encontrar en la zaga de *Tukutsi Nakawé*, en la que queda claro que fue la primera chamana cantadora que fue desmembrada por sus topiles cuando se negó a cantar y exigía cada vez más *tejuino* y *kieri*. Tras el asesinato y desmembramiento de *Nakawé*, los topiles nunca pudieron hallar el corazón en el cuerpo. Tiempo después se darían cuenta los chamanes que el corazón de *Nakawé* vivía en los nudos de un junco que crece en los arroyos de las cañadas y con el que ahora se fabrican bastones mágicos que protegen al *maarakame* asociándolos a *muwierite* adornados con plumas de águila marina (*Wierika*) que junto con el viento es uno de los emisarios de

*Nakawé*<sup>19</sup>. Es posible asociar a través de estos elementos simbólicos a *Nakawé* con lo húmedo y oculto, como la fuerza que habita en las cañadas con los abundantes frutos, con los mosquitos y la enfermedad, en lo inhabitable, es decir, fuera de los límites de lo que es *Wixárika*.

En el segundo ciclo mítico, el agua se revela como una dualidad que señala hacia dos direcciones: la vida y la muerte, mientras que en los relatos se revelan las otras direcciones del cosmos, completando al territorio como un ente total, que encierra y protege a los *wixaritari*. Es en el segundo ciclo, referente al gran diluvio universal, que *Watakamé*, el sembrador divino, se encuentra con *Tukutsi Nakawé*, que le revela que el mundo será destruido por una gran inundación, por una portentosa lluvia que borrarán de la faz de la tierra todo rastro de tierra seca. Pero *Nakawé* salva a *Watakamé* y a las semillas que harán brotar los frutos que le alimentarán. Es a partir del segundo ciclo mítico que el agua encuentra una diferenciación, donde las torrenciales lluvias provenientes del poniente se han de relacionar con lo destructivo y lo monstruoso, con una involución hacia la indiferenciación primordial y con la desaparición del mundo; de las aguas del oriente, que se relacionan con la fertilidad de la tierra y las cosechas abundantes.

A través del ciclo del diluvio los cuerpos de agua van a adquirir carácter de serpientes. El caso de *Tatei Haramara* es considerada como la mayor de las serpientes del agua, pero es *Tatei Kiewimuka* la que personifica a la lluvia torrencial del poniente, al ciclón, capaz de destruir las cosechas y asolar los poblados. Etimológicamente, el nombre de este ancestro se origina en *kieri*, de ahí su filiación con un poder destructivo, con el sol negro (nocturno) o con el planeta Venus. Otras serpientes son las propiciadoras de las buenas lluvias. Parte del objeto de la peregrinación ritual a Wirikuta tiene que ver con que se atraigan a las serpientes de las nubes orientales hacia la

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<sup>19</sup> Comunicación personal con el *maarakame* Don Jesús, junio de 2011.

sierra (*Nia'ariwame*). Esta costumbre quizás tenga su origen en la peregrinación primordial en la que los animales míticos transformados en orugas viajaron desde el mar hacia el desierto en su búsqueda del agua de lluvia y de la salida del sol. Ahora, los jicareros que peregrinan a *Wirikuta*, se asumen como las orugas primordiales en su viaje para atraer la lluvia<sup>20</sup>.

Don Jesús me ha informado que no se debe buscar a las serpientes de lluvia ni en las nubes en sí, ni en los remolinos resecos del desierto ni en el rayo; que se trata de seres que viajan en las tormentas y son de color negro u oscuro y con forma alargada (como si se tratara de serpientes reales) que sólo se ven como visiones que pasan fugaces y que se regocijan con el canto del *maarakame* soltando sus aguas.

Una de las prácticas del *maarakame Wixárika* es el atraer con sus cantos y sus sacrificios a la lluvia sobre los territorios que atraviesan por la seca, e inclusive trabajando en el ensueño. Para llevar a cabo estas operaciones, el chamán hace una ceremonia de velación en la que prepara las ofrendas que han de ser entregadas a *Tatei Yurianaka* y *Nakawé*, o al ancestro que se está solicitando

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<sup>20</sup> “Entre los *wixaritari*, la búsqueda de visiones realizada por los jicareros o iniciandos, durante la peregrinación del peyote al desierto oriental de *Wirikuta*, culmina con la llegada de la lluvia desde el desierto oriental a los centros ceremoniales *wixaritari*. Este acontecimiento se representa durante la fiesta *Hikuli Neixa*, ‘la danza del peyote’, celebrada a finales de la temporada de las secas. La lluvia aparece en forma de una gran serpiente de nubes (*haiku*), personificada por el grupo de los peregrinos de peyote en su conjunto. Los punteros de la danza (los *tekoamana*) portan trajes de plumas blancas y sostienen varas serpentinas de color azul” (Neurath, *op. cit.* pp. 158-159). Más adelante el mismo autor señala que “La importancia de la observación del bucle dibujado por Venus en sus trayectorias por el cielo puede relacionarse mejor con el ciclo de peregrinaciones que realizan los *wixaritari* durante la temporada de las secas a toda una serie de lugares lejanos. En el punto más lejano (*Wirikuta*) los peregrinos sueñan las serpientes de nubes (*haiku*). Al regresar, se transforman colectivamente en una representación de esta serpiente, que puede identificarse con Venus que regresa a la tierra” (ibid p. 169).



ayuda. Se canta a las ofrendas para solicitar la energía de los ancestros sobre ellas. El fuego *Tatewari* es un elemento importante en estas ceremonias de velación. En ocasiones se prepara a un animal para el sacrificio ritual, por lo que ha de cantársele y explicar a su espíritu que su sacrificio es necesario para que el pueblo tenga la bendición del agua. Estos cantos pueden extenderse por toda la noche. Por la mañana, el animal es sacrificado y su sangre es recogida para bendecir las ofrendas y servir de alimento a los antepasados. Los cantos pueden seguir durante el día del sacrificio. Sólo el *maarakame* sabe cuando la ceremonia ha terminado.

Esta práctica es apreciada por los *teiwari* como valiosa para alejar a la sequía. Se me ha informado que durante el gobierno de Alfonso Martínez en Nuevo León fueron convocados tres *maarakate wixaritari* para terminar con una sequía que asolaba al Estado y que amenazaba con hacer que se perdieran cosechas y ganado por la falta de agua. Los *maarakate* Don Eligio García de Santa Catarina, Don Vicente Montoya de *Tatei Kie* y Don Jesús de la Cruz de Nayarit, realizaron la ceremonia de velación y preparación de las ofrendas en un rancho en la colonia Tamaulipas entre Juárez y Guadalupe en las afueras de Monterrey; mientras que el canto y sacrificio del becerro lo realizaron en el cerro de la silla, donde se depositó la ofrenda. Los *maarakate* de *Tatei Kie* y de Nayarit se retiraron de la ceremonia a petición de Don Eligio García, quien terminó con los cantos. Los tres *maarakate* fueron llevados a sus lugares de origen en el avión del gobernador en señal de agradecimiento. Dos semanas después de que hubieran vuelto a su tierra los *maarakate*, llegaba a Monterrey y a la región uno de los huracanes más recordados de los últimos tiempos al que se bautizó como Gilberto.

Otras prácticas que se llevan a cabo para propiciar las lluvias tienen que ver con mover agua de los sitios sagrados para depositarla en el mar, con lo que se pretende poner en movimiento esas aguas que “querrán volver” a sus lugares de origen en la forma de lluvia. Estas

prácticas y las historias tejidas alrededor del agua, hablan ya de una concepción que va más allá de las consideraciones de mercado o de derecho elaboradas por nuestra cultura alrededor del líquido vital.

Es a partir del final del diluvio, que las tierras secas se separaron de los mares. La mitología *Wixárika* considera que es esa la época en que los ríos fueron formados, y donde quedaron dispuestos los cuerpos de agua y manantiales que ahora forman al paisaje. No debemos dejar de lado que a través del diluvio la tierra primordial fue removida para hacer surgir una nueva, una segunda creación que albergaría a los hombres actuales.

De acuerdo con la leyenda, al final del diluvio, *Hatuxame* (Río Chapalagana) salió de *Kutsaraupa*, en *Wirikuta*, brotó de *Tatei Matinieri*, yéndose primero por las venas ocultas de la tierra hasta salir en lo que hoy es Aguascalientes, de ahí que el nombre *Wixárika* para este río es *Tatei Hatuxame*, poniendo antes del nombre propio el apelativo de madre, como señalando que es origen de todas las aguas.

Como el agua del río *Hatuxame* es blanca, los *wixaritari* la consideran una muchacha joven. Tres ríos se disputaron su amor y corrieron, de acuerdo con la leyenda, tras de ella para juntarse en San Blas. Eran como gente víbora, pero de agua. El primero es el que baja de San Juan Capistrano. Se le conoce entre los *wixaritari* como *Haik+ Munieya* (Río Chimaltita), es una víbora que tiene la cabeza color rojo. Este se juntó en San Antonio de Padua con otro, el segundo muchacho, que bajaba de San Pedro *Xícoras*, *Haik+ Yuwi* (Río Jesús María) que pasa por *Huazamota*.

El tercer muchacho- víbora, *Kuyaurika* (Río San Pedro) salió muy cerca de Durango, y pasó muy próximo a *Hauxamabaka* (Cerro Gordo), la leyenda atribuye a ello su tamaño y por los arroyitos con los que se junta; pasó por San Pedro Ixcatán. Casi alcanza a la muchacha por donde está Santiago Ixcuintla, pero supo que ya le

habían ganado los ríos- hombres- víboras que venían de *Huazamota*. *Haik+ Munieya* y *Haik+ Yuwi* le ganaron a *Kuyaurika*. Esos dos hombres- víbora de agua se encontraron con *Hatuxame* en *Huaynamota*, en ese lugar se enredaron como las víboras cuando se aparean y rodaron hasta el mar, bajando a San Blas y confundiendo con las aguas de *Tatei Haramara*. Al ver esto *Kuyaurika* se enojó y llegó a Tuxpan, donde se detuvo a formar la laguna y los charcos, y ya no llegó al mar.

A *Hatuxame* le dicen los *wixaritari* “*Kuka Tuxame*” (Chaquira Blanca), a *Haik+ Munieya* se le dice “*Kuka Xureme*” (Chaquira Roja), a *Haik+ Yuwi* se le llama “*Kuka Yuawi*” (Chaquira Azul) y a *Kuyaurika*, el que no llegó con la muchacha, se le conoce como “*Kuka Yuwi*” (Chaquira Negra), recordando los colores de las cabezas de cada uno. Las jícaras para las ofrendas a estos ríos respetan como tradición estos colores, de tal modo que las ofrendas se identifiquen con los ríos para pedir su ayuda y protección.

Las fuentes que brotan de la tierra también tuvieron su origen cuando emergieron las tierras secas tras el diluvio; hay un arreglo geométrico preciso de los sitios sagrados que corresponde con una figura romboide que constituye una especie de glifo del cosmos entre los *wixaritari* y que representa fertilidad y protección. Hoy se reproduce este glifo con estambre de colores sobre una cruz de madera y se le conoce como *si'kuli* (Ojo de Dios). Este glifo fue revelado por *Nakawé* a *Watakamé* cuando la diosa hizo brotar al bosque que había talado el sembrador divino, a través de una operación mágica con su bastón<sup>21</sup>. Algunos de los extremos del territorio *Wixárika*, correspondientes a los cuatro vértices y al centro del romboide, están asociados a fuentes de agua que se consideran en sí santuarios por la presencia del líquido.

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<sup>21</sup> A Narváez, ‘El ensueño como elemento para la comprensión del imaginario territorial wixárika’. *Chronica Mundi, terra e identità in Messico*, vol 3-4, no I/II, 2012, pp. 196-209.

El corazón del territorio *Wixárika*, correspondiente a la localidad de Santa Catarina, *Tuapurie*, se considera el lugar en el que nació el fuego sagrado *Tatewari*, o que es su hogar. Se le conoce con el nombre de *Teakata* (el lugar donde está el horno). Se trata de una delgada plataforma sostenida en la roca, donde llegan los *wixaritari* para depositar sus ofrendas. Encima de ésta se pueden apreciar varios *xirikite* que forman un círculo. Los *wixaritari* consideran que, uno a uno, los adoratorios están dedicados a *Tatewari* (el fuego sagrado); a *Tayau* (el sol), a *Tatei 'Utianaka* (la madre de los peces) y a *Tukutsi Nakawé*, (la abuela de la tierra, relacionada con el agua y con el inframundo). Cerca de ese santuario, por el rumbo de *Wautia*, se halla *Ni'ariwameta*, la cueva de “la casa de la lluvia”, se trata de una “depresión en forma de cono [...] cubierta de piedras y [compuesta por] varias cuevas”<sup>22</sup>. En este lugar, según los mitos, el sol apareció por primera vez y durante la estación de lluvias se mete debajo de la tierra en una de las cuevas. De acuerdo con lo que me ha informado Don Jesús, este es uno de los sitios más poderosos que existen en la nación *Wixárika*, se trata de una fuente de agua sagrada a la que los *maarakate* acuden para ponerse en contacto con los antepasados y para curar. Los *wixaritari* consideran que al ser el corazón del mundo, este es el lugar en el que se resguarda la luz. Estos santuarios son visitados antes de la salida a *Wirikuta* por los peregrinos. El color que corresponde a estos santuarios es el blanco.

### **Conclusiones: un mundo de agua**

A través del segundo ciclo mítico *Wixárika* se hace visible una naturaleza que se multiplica. Los ancestros primordiales adquieren cuerpo en el paisaje, en los elementos de la naturaleza, en los alimentos, en las plantas sagradas, en el agua. La antropización del territorio implica no una traslación de la imagen del propio cuerpo a éste, como en el caso de otras culturas tradicionales, sino un

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<sup>22</sup> Leal Carretero, *op. cit.* p. 202.

comprender que los elementos en sí son personas animadas por la energía de los ancestros, que es la fuerza del gran espíritu invisible que lo inunda todo, que da vida al cosmos, haciéndolo un mundo total animado.

La estructura del mundo que se desprende del flujo constante del agua desde el inframundo en el mar del poniente, hasta el desierto en *Wirikuta*, en el Cerro del Amanecer, señala una organización centrada en el ciclo vida-muerte. El agua está presente así, como compañero, como hermano y como enemigo, siendo de esta manera una metáfora de la totalidad que anuncia el par poniente- oriente y la peregrinación ritual que busca constantemente el equilibrio del cosmos. Las mitologías en torno al agua y los antepasados recurren de esta forma a una reformulación constante, donde los orígenes remotos son actualizados en un aquí que sostiene la estabilidad precaria de la vida de los hombres. Para el *Wixárika*, y especialmente para el *maarakame*, el agua posee un espíritu con el que hay que conversar, al que hay que pedirle por sus favores, al que hay que ofrendar para que se presente y sostenga la vida.

Los elementos de la cultura material contribuyen a sostener estas concepciones sobre la naturaleza y forma del cosmos. La casa de las deidades, el *tuki* o *callihuey*, se organiza en torno a la fogata sagrada, *Tatewari*. Este se localiza hacia el centro del *tuki* en un rellano sobre el nivel del piso del templo. Al fuego se le alimenta por el tiempo que duren las celebraciones igual que se alimentara una persona más de la comunidad. A un lado del lugar de *Tatewari* se localiza un altar a *Nakawé*, normalmente, este altar tiene un objeto votivo que recuerda a la abuela, y se halla por debajo del nivel del suelo del templo. En el caso del *Tukipa* de *Tatei Kie*, se trata de un pequeño altar, casi imperceptible y bajo el nivel del suelo del recinto, que tiene la figura de una anciana frente a un brasero circular de tres patas. Este pequeño gesto expresivo encierra una gran parte de la concepción *Wixárika* del cosmos, ya que en los niveles de los diferentes rellanos del templo, se expresa la forma y

los atributos del universo, que va de un inframundo acuático (la asociación con *Nakawé*) al mundo de los hombres actuales, al mundo superior de *Tatewari*, el calor que conforta, que congrega; al corazón y lugar de la luz.

Junto con las historias, estos otros elementos expresivos colaboran para que se refuerce la forma atribuida al mundo por las leyendas. Vale plantear como hipótesis que el elemento acuático, junto con todas sus resonancias simbólicas y los antepasados que se le asocian, es una parte fundante de la visión de cosmos que se desarrolla desde la creación caótica y oscura del mundo, hasta el ascenso del disco solar, y que es en el segundo ciclo mítico, el del inicio de una organización ritual más elaborada, cuando se introduce la geometría romboide como la que explica a la totalidad del cosmos. Pero, el ciclo del agua, el que resuena como el más importante de todos los ciclos, el de la lluvia fértil- lluvia destructiva, de lo mojado primordial e inferior a lo seco superior y que culmina en la búsqueda de la claridad, en su forma se remite a la organización original del cosmos planteada a través de las zagas que componen al primer ciclo mítico, que es más simple, que es lineal y remite a una oposición fundamental de lo inferior y lo superior. De ahí que la pareja *Haramara- Wirikuta*, y el acto ritual de peregrinar, sea el más poderoso elemento para comprender la dinámica mítica del agua entre los *wixaritari*, y que se completa en el segundo ciclo mítico a través de la señal mágica de *Nakawé*, que rompe la linealidad del mundo complejizándolo a través de la forma cerrada del *si'kuli*.

## **Biografía**

**Adolfo Narváez Tijerina** es Doctor en Arquitectura en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, es Investigador de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León desde 1989, ha sido además profesor visitante de numerosas universidades en México, América Latina y Europa, realizando estancias de investigación en la Universidad de Guadalajara en México y en la Universidad de Mendoza en Argentina. Fundador del Doctorado en Filosofía con orientaciones en Arquitectura y Asuntos Urbanos de la UANL, fundador en 1996 del Instituto de Investigaciones de Arquitectura y en el 2003 del Cuerpo Académico Estudios Sobre Diseño. Ha sido distinguido por ANUIES en 1999 por el Mejor Ensayo Sobre Temas de Educación Superior y en 1998 y el 2001 ganó el Premio de Investigación UANL en Ciencias Sociales y en Humanidades. Fue reconocido por su trayectoria artística por el Consejo Cultural Mundial con sede en Estocolmo, Suecia, en el año 2007. Es miembro del Sistema Nacional de Investigadores desde 1996, actualmente nivel III, miembro regular de la Academia Mexicana de Ciencias y miembro de número de la Academia Nacional de Arquitectura desde 1997. Actualmente trabaja en investigaciones sobre imaginarios sociales aplicados a los estudios sobre lugares habitados; se destacan entre sus libros en esta línea los siguientes: *Crónicas de los viajeros de la Ciudad* (2000), *Ciudades Difíciles* (2006), *La Morfogénesis de la Ciudad* (2010), *Ciudades Inimaginables* (2012), *La Construcción Imaginaria de la Ciudad* (2013) y *Lo Imaginario y sus Morfógenos* (en prensa).

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# When a tree becomes art. Alberto Carneiro and the international artistic context around 1968.\*

Vanessa Badagliacca

**Abstract:** “We won’t affirm that a tree is an artwork. We will just affirm that we can take it and transform it in an artwork.” This way Alberto Carneiro (Coronado, 1937) wrote in his *Notes towards a Manifesto of Ecological Art* (1968-1972). In the domain of studying the notion of sculpture in the 1960s with an increasing and progressive insertion of natural elements (animals, vegetables and minerals) into art, the aim of this research is to focus on the presence of the tree as an artwork. Symbol of life, in its widest meaning—according to the Catalan poet and art critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1981)—“the tree represents the life of the cosmos, its density, growth, proliferation, generation and regeneration.” At this stage, the aesthetic project of the Portuguese artist Alberto Carneiro, adopting a tree in its organic materiality as an artistic practice, reveals his

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environmental and social concern that interested an intense international debate between artists operating in Western countries between the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies of the twentieth century. The aim of this paper is to present Alberto Carneiro's artistic research not just as "a Portuguese case", but rather as a protagonist of his time, as well as others with different backgrounds.

## Introduction

*Uma floresta para os teus Sonhos* ("A Forest for your Dreams," 1970), a work by Alberto Carneiro (Coronado, 1934), features tree trunks in their nude materiality. The trees present, as nothing more than themselves, and this piece is the point of departure for this research.<sup>1</sup> My aim is to explore the artistic context of the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, a time during which Carneiro's sculpture moves from abstract representation, to presentation of the tree in its material and metaphorical components. Nonetheless, "We won't affirm that a tree is an artwork. We will just affirm that we can take it and transform it into an artwork. Ecological art: a tree in a jungle of concrete." – Alberto Carneiro wrote in his *Notes towards a Manifesto of Ecological Art*, composed between December 1968 and February 1972.

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<sup>1</sup> This piece belongs to the collection of the Centre of Modern Art (CAM), and is exhibited periodically in this space, for example on the occasion of *50 Anos de Arte Portuguesa* ("50 Years of Portuguese Art"). On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Gulbenkian Foundation (founded in 1957), the exhibition, curated by Raquel Henriques da Silva, Ana Felipe Candeias and Ana Ruivo at *CAM Centro de Arte Moderna* directed by Jorge Molder at the time, was intended not only as a show of Portuguese art in the last fifty years, but also as an evaluation of the important cultural role of this institution inside and outside Portugal. In fact, since its beginnings it was the only institution providing grants to artists to study and work abroad.

With the term “ecological,” as underlined by Santiago Olmo, Carneiro was trying “to determine how, from his point of view, art [could] provide solutions to the scission between man and nature, a scission produced by the chaos of urban and cultural factors as well as by an idea of progress and modernity based on the industrial development that stigmatizes rural culture, regarding it to be outdated.”<sup>2</sup> Or alternatively, “ecological,” as Isabel Carlos alerts us, stands not as a discourse about or acknowledgement of living beings or the physical and biological environment they live in, nor as a kind of Earth art, or a even the limited Portuguese translation of “Land Art.” It is “an art that is a communion, an integration of the land as something sensorial and foundational to humanity.”<sup>3</sup>

During that period, some instances of ecologic art, with a similar connotation, were recorded in Italy. Here only a few examples will be presented by Germano Olivotto (1935-1974), Luca Maria Patella (1938) and the artist most similar to Carneiro, Giuseppe Penone (1947),<sup>4</sup> with the purpose of, through the materiality of the tree, creating a dialogue between these artists.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> S. Olmo, “Alberto Carneiro: Nature as Experience”, in *Alberto Carneiro*, Xunta de Galicia, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2001, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> I. Carlos, *Alberto Carneiro. A Escultura é um pensamento*, Lisboa, Editorial Caminho, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> For the three Italian artists’ insertion in the realm of ecologic art around the end of the 1960’ see also Lea Vergine, *L’arte in Trincea. Lessico delle tendenze artistiche 1960-1990*, Milano, Skira 1999 (1996), p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> For this extent, Catarina Rosendo’s observations concerning Carneiro’s first solo exhibition in Spain 1999 will be considered as a reference. That year, in fact, marked an increasing interest in Alberto Carneiro by Spanish critics, especially Javier Maderuelo and Santiago Olmo, whose contributions were significant in the development and analysis of the artist’s work in an international artistic context. Cf. C. Rosendo, *Alberto Carneiro: os Primeiros Anos (1963-1975)*, Colibri, Lisboa, 2007, pp. 17-18

## Notes on Alberto Carneiro

“One of the milestones years in contemporary history was 1968,” wrote the Spanish art historian Javier Maderuelo, referring to Alberto Carneiro work.<sup>6</sup> In that year, Carneiro was in London for a postgraduate course at the Saint Martin School of Art, after having completed the Sculpture course at the Porto School of Fine Arts. His first experience with the materiality he would work along his artistic production started at the age of ten. In fact, to quote Santiago Olmo, “he was employed in a workshop devoted to the making of religious images, where he would remain until the age of twenty-one (between 1947 and 1958)”.<sup>7</sup> This experience, as Alberto Carneiro himself has referenced several times, was remarkable to know intimately the material he was working with, in order to, afterwards, get to a demystification of the message he would communicate.<sup>8</sup>

The sculptures *Fusão de Troncos* (1963-1965) and *Tese* (1966-1967) – according to Isabel Carlos – reveal how Carneiro is moving towards a personal research internal to the act of sculpting, where “the tree rises already as metaphor of nature, matter and sculpted object”.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, from 1965 he started reading the French

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<sup>6</sup> J. Maderuelo, “Sobre la naturaleza y el agua”, in *Alberto Carneiro. Sobre los árboles y el agua*, Huesca. Arte y Naturaleza, exhibition catalogue, Sep-Oct 1999, p. 5. All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>7</sup> S. Olmo, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Alberto Carneiro’s declaration in Manuel Antonio de Pina “Onze anos a fazer santos sem nunca chegar à cabeça” (“Eleven years doing saints with never reaching to the head”), *Jornal de Notícias*, Porto, 2 Mar.1971, 8. At this extent, C. Rosendo remarks how Carneiro’s affirmation echoes his reading of the essay by Marshall McLuhan, a reference in those years in art internationally, pointing the attention on practical and social consequences, in our culture, of any medium – that is of any extension of ourselves. “The medium is the message”, *Understanding Media*, (1964), London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 7-9.

<sup>9</sup> “As esculturas *Fusão de troncos* (1963-1965) e *Tese* (1966-1967), denotam quanto se encontra já afastado da prática de santeiro, que abandona em 1958, e de como procura uma linha de investigação própria: a árvore surge já como metáfora

philosopher Gaston Bachelard's essays that the same artist in many occasions mentioned has a pillar of his reflections on art, its matter and its relationship with the ordinary and sensorial aspects of daily life.<sup>10</sup>

His studies in Portugal culminated with exhibition in 1967 at *ESBAP (Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto)*, known as an investigation of sculpture connected with the current of Minimalism and characterized by abstract forms in the materials of wood, while he was also exploring the materiality of metal, as shown by the sculptures exhibited at that period at the "Cooperativa Árvore," in Porto too. It coincided with the coming out of a crisis started long before that faced him with the necessity of passing to a new estate of relationship with the world through his work, as he wrote in his diary the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 1967. He continued saying: "I am closer to the origin but still not sufficiently free from my precedents. [...] I need to find the tree of mature fruits at whose shadow I played".<sup>11</sup>

The metaphorical image of the search for that tree and the necessity of distancing himself from the environment surrounding him determined his choice to go abroad and therefore his residence in London for two years, facilitated by a scholarship awarded by the Gulbenkian Foundation. He was a student at Saint Martin's School, where Barry Flanagan, Gilbert and George, Richard Long and

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da natureza, matéria e objeto do acto escultórico, mas também entidade portadora de um significado e de uma imagética própria e inerente a ela própria", I. Carlos, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. All translations from Portuguese are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. C. Rosendo, *op. cit.* p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> "O momento de crise é já longo. A necessidade de passar a um novo estágio de relações com o mundo através do meu trabalho torna-se imperioso. Estou mais perto da origem mas ainda não suficientemente liberto dos meus mortos. [...] Tenho que encontrar a árvore dos frutos sazonados à sombra da qual brinquei.", "Das notas para um diário. (18 Setembro 1967)", *Alberto Carneiro, exposição antológica*, Lisboa, Porto, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Fundação de Serralves, 1991, 41, quotation by C. Rosendo, *op. cit.*, p. 50.



Hamish Fulton had recently finished their education. In the meantime, as Maderuelo observed, a new generation of artists started presenting their works in galleries and festivals around 1968, turning the current tendency by “opposing nature irregularities to minimalist geometry and dematerialized conceptual propositions to pop art objects”.<sup>12</sup>

From that period onward, Alberto Carneiro’s work can be considered as, in the words of Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, a “walk in the balance of a way going in the direction of an almost dematerialization, even if matters are foreseen and the own sculptor’s role is made explicit in his works.”<sup>13</sup> His recent memory contributes to describe his experience in London:

At the time I did not know the work of any of them. It was after the exhibition ‘When Attitudes Become Form’, organized by Harald Szeemann in Bern, and shown in London in September 1969 at the ICA, that I came into contact with land art, conceptual art and arte povera. I

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<sup>12</sup> Quoting the entire paragraph: “Una nueva generación de artistas que empieza a presentar su obra en galerías y festivales hacia 1968 va a dar la vuelta a estos presupuestos oponiendo la irregularidad de la naturaleza a la geometría minimalista y las desmaterializadas proposiciones conceptuales a los objetos del pop art. También en ese mes de mayo 1968 surge en Coventry la revista *Art and Language*, en cuyo primer número, cuyo subtítulo reza: *Journal of Conceptual Art*, se postula por una interpretación del arte como lenguaje, despreciando la materialidad de la pintura y los objetos.”, J. Maderuelo, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

In visual art, as for Europe and United States, the research in the realm of minimalism and pop art had arrived to an end. Lucy Lippard, in article written with John Chandler in 1967 “On Dematerialization of Art”, published in the February 1968 in *Art International*, traced the concept of dematerialization not as a movement, but as an enlarged phenomena whose focus was increasingly leaving pure forms and rich materials, with an interest to the work of art as process. It was lately republished in a collection of writings: Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley /Los Angeles / London, University of California Press, 1997 (1973).

<sup>13</sup> B. Pinto de Almeida, *As Imagens e as coisas*, Porto: Campo das letras, 2002, p. 197.

realized then that I myself shared similar concerns and sought different things and means of expression for my art.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, Maderuelo informs us that even if we can place Carneiro's work at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies in the same category as Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, David Nash, Andy Goldsworthy, Roger Ackling, Chris Drury or Raymond Moore, there are some personal, emotional and spiritual circumstances which clearly differentiate Alberto Carneiro's work from his British peers, despite their similarities in the use of media.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, our purpose of establishing a relationship between Alberto Carneiro and some examples of artists from Italy, as previously said, is not for mere comparison. It has already been recognized that, distancing himself from Land Art, Carneiro's work presents similarities with the work of Penone,<sup>16</sup> the most well-known of the three Italian names discussed here, for having been part of the group Arte Povera (the most internationally famous Italian artistic manifestation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after Futurism), whose first exhibition was organized by Germano Celant at La Bertesca Gallery in Genoa, in 1967.

The idea of proposing here the relationship between Carneiro and these Italian artists comes from the reading of a recent text (from 2013) written by Alberto Carneiro, when at a certain point says:

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<sup>14</sup> Alberto Carneiro, "Autobiographical anthology: Answers to question that I have been frequently asked about my work", *Arte Vida /Vida Arte – Art Life / Life Art. Alberto Carneiro*, Exhibition Concept: João Fernandes; Curator and production coordinator: Isabel Sousa Braga, Porto, Museu Serralves, 19 Apr - 24 Jun 2013, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Maderuelo, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Olmo, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

My identifications with matter are the discovery of my body as nature and art. I have been saying for a long time that ‘the artificial is the natural of man, his true nature’. Therefore what I seek is the recreation of the first tree in the consubstantiation of the abstract art, i.e., the identification of that which in me is the most primordial as experience, idea and art”.<sup>17</sup>

This foundational statement that Alberto Carneiro formulates, reveals a direct proximity to what was considered as essential of the human being in relation to other organic forms, such as plants and animals, and in relation to nature and culture, according to philosophical anthropological thought of Helmuth Plessner. The German philosopher of nature, in fact, in his essay titled *Die stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (unpublished in English: “The Levels of the Organic and Man. Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology”), first published in 1928, affirmed that “for the human being, having an existential neediness, divided, naked, artificiality is the expression that essentially corresponds to his nature. [...] Artificiality in acting, in thinking and in dreaming is the interior medium through which man, as natural living being, is in harmony with himself.”<sup>18</sup> Some pages later Plessner added: “Creative motion is an expressive

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<sup>17</sup> A. Carneiro, “Autobiographical anthology: Answers to question that I have been frequently asked about my work”, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> “Esistenzialmente bisognoso, diviso, nudo, per l’uomo è l’artificialità l’espressione che essenzialmente corrisponde alla sua natura. [...] L’artificialità nell’agire, nel pensare e nel sognare è il mezzo interiore con cui l’uomo, in quanto essere vivente naturale, è in accordo con se stesso.” This is my personal translation from the reference I consulted, the Italian translation from the original German book, ed. by Vallori Rasini, H. Plessner, *I gradi dell’ organico e l’uomo. Introduzione all’antropologia filosofica*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2006, p. 339. Original Title: *Die stufen des Organischen und der Mensch. Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie*, 1975 (3rd edition) Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin-New York. All translations from Italian are mine unless otherwise noted.

feature. Therefore, the act achieved, which is sustained on the materials offered by nature, obtains the character of artificiality”.<sup>19</sup>

### **Around 1968. A critical digression**

We may find similarities between Plessner’s theories on a continuous dialogue between the natural and the artificial as being intrinsic to human nature at the end of the twenties and a particular kind of artistic production at the end of the sixties in Europe, whose natural spaces determined different approaches to open space than United States Land Art. This consideration finds probably its most elucidate explanation in some verses Giuseppe Penone wrote in 1977. The activity of writing, as well as for Alberto Carneiro occupy a significant importance in complementing his work with sculpture and in enriching our comprehension of it.

La naturaleza, el paisaje que nos rodea es artificio

Está hecho por el hombre, es un paisaje cultural.

La acción del hombre ha modificado la naturaleza

Preexistente creando una nueva, producto de su acción, de su arte.

El valor cultural más inmediato de una obra humana

A menudo está en su ser reconocible.

Se tiende a separar la acción del hombre de la naturaleza

Como si el hombre no formara parte de ella.

He querido fosilizar uno de los gestos que la cultura ha producido.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “La mossa creativa è una prestazione espressiva. Con ciò l’atto che realizza, che si deve appoggiare ai materiali offerti dalla natura, ottiene il carattere dell’artificialità.” H. Plessner, *op. cit.*, p. 345.

Hence the main characteristic of Conceptual Art in Europe has been expressed “through the transformation of the installation into a type of ‘poor theatre’<sup>21</sup> where nature and culture coincide,” as described by Christov-Bakargiev in her study published at the end of the nineties on *Arte Povera*.<sup>22</sup>

The question of “The Poverty of Art” was the centre of a critical-philosophical debate at the *De Foscherari* gallery in Bologna in 1968, and included the participation of Italian artists, art critics and art historians. Their interventions were published in the first number of the notebooks series *Quaderni de Foscherari Bologna*, curated by Pietro Bonfiglioli, which introduced the debate as a result of a recognition of two main problems in the contemporary artistic production: the art-life relationship on one side and the search for the primal on the other, both coinciding with – according to Bonfiglioli – a substantial distrust towards the traditional connotations of totality and self-sufficiency of the artistic doing: a distrust that recognizes the real theoretical framework to which bourgeois art is condemned and its functionality to the system of work division are condemned, from the other side leave subsistence to the ideological hypothesis of a non functional and non

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<sup>20</sup> Original text in Italian: “La natura, il paesaggio europeo che ci circonda è artificio, / è fatto dall’uomo, è un paesaggio culturale. / L’azione dell’uomo ha modificato la natura / preesistente creandone una nuova prodotto della sua azione, della sua arte. / Il valore culturale più immediato di un’opera umana / sta spesso nella sua riconoscibilità. / Si tende a separare l’azione dell’uomo dalla natura / come se l’uomo non ne facesse parte. / Ho voluto fossilizzare uno dei gesti che ha prodotto la cultura”, Giuseppe Penone, *Respirar la sombra/Respirare l’ombra*, Xunta de Galicia, CGAC, 1999, pp. 132-133.

<sup>21</sup> Definition derived from an experimental theatre the polish director Jerzy Grotowsky was practising and theorized in his text *Towards a poor Theatre*, known in Italy as *Alla ricerca del teatro perduto*, Padua, Marsilio Editori, 1965.

<sup>22</sup> C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, London, Phaidon, 1999, p. 74.

marketable residual; of an original or primary place, almost of a natural estate, to which art could retreat to recognize its totality.<sup>23</sup>

Although the debate took place at the *De Foscherari* gallery, which hosted the exhibition *Arte Povera* curated by Germano Celant, these ideas had spread throughout the artistic community in Italy, involving the artistic practice of other artists, even those who were not included in the group. In this sense, we consider what Renato Barilli argued in his essay on contemporary art when affirming, “it wouldn’t be correct to concentrate the entire participation to the climate of Anti-form, attitude, conceptual to only official members of Arte Povera.”<sup>24</sup> The necessity of reiterating this concept surfaced recently as a reaction to the celebration of Arte Povera between 2011 and 2012 in some of the most important Italian museums – Triennale in Milan; MAMbo in Bologna; GNAM and Maxxi in Rome; MADRE in Naples – on the occasion of the 150 birthday of the Italian Union. Barilli defined as “excessive” a celebration that could probably have been justified in 2008 as commemoration of the ‘68 climate. The latter interested not only the privileged eleven artists included under a “brand” without specific features but rather

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. “Il rapporto arte-vita e la ricerca del primario coincidono in una sostanziale sfiducia che da un lato riconosce di fatto la separatezza teorica a cui è condannata l’arte borghese e la sua funzionalità al sistema della divisione del lavoro, dall’altro lato lascia sussistere l’ipotesi ideologica di un residuo non funzionale e non mercificabile, di un luogo originario o primario, quasi di uno stato naturale, a cui l’arte possa regredire per riconoscere la propria totalità”, P. Bonfiglioli, “Presentazione di un dibattito”, in *La Povertà dell’Arte*, Interventi di Apollonio, Arcangeli, Barilli, Boarini, Bonfiglioli, Bonito Oliva, Calvesi, Celant, Del Guercio, De Marchis, Fagiolo, Guttuso, Pignotti, Quaderni de Foscherari N°1, ed. by Pietro Bonfiglioli, anastatic copy realised in occasion of “Arte Povera 1968” at MAMbo Modern Art Museum of Bologna (september/dicember 2011), Bologna, De Foscherari, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> “Non sarebbe però corretto accentrare l’intera partecipazione italiana al clima dell’Anti-form, del comportamento, del concettuale nei soli membri ufficiali dell’Arte Povera.”, R. Barilli, *L’arte contemporanea. Da Cézanne alle ultime tendenze*, Feltrinelli: Milano, 2005 (1984), p. 326.

sharing aspects that were average of a more extended national landscape. In its criticism, Barilli described the qualities of each artist of the group and highlighted others not included as well.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, in Portugal, the exhibition *CIRCA 1968* - which inaugurated the Serralves Foundation's contemporary art museum (*Museu Serralves*) - was conceived to commemorate the 1968 climate with the aim of opening up to national borders and counting on international participation. It was the intention of the curators of the exhibition, Vicente Todolí and João Fernandes, that the museum, in fact, would have provided "a response to many of the lacunae inevitably arising from the isolation of the Portuguese artistic context from the rest of international art."<sup>26</sup> An approach on the period around ('circa') 1968, not as followers of the political and social movements of that time, but rather with the intent "to detect parallel processes that were convergent or divergent with these, within the spirit of the paradigm shift that these events proclaimed"<sup>27</sup>.

Leafing through the catalogue, after the curators' text follows Miguel Wandshneider's essay on "The slow and difficult affirmation of the vanguard in a changing context" which elucidates the Portuguese artistic context in the social and political transitional phase under the dictatorships of Salazar and Marcelo Caetano. He also argues – understandably – that 1968 was not a significant year for art in Portugal and that it was not until Ernesto de Sousa's

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<sup>25</sup> Mario Merz, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Gilberto Zorio, Alighiero Boetti, Jannis Kounellis, Pino Pascali, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Emilio Prini, Giulio Paolini. He didn't mention Giovanni Anselmo and then stressed other names as Gino De Dominicis, Vettor Pisani, Franco Vaccari, Claudio Parmiggiani, Luca Patella and also didn't mention Germano Olivotto, although having written in different occasions about him. R. Barilli, "Arte Povera Oltre I Magnifici Undici. Da Merz a Pistoletto", *L'Unità*, 16-11-2011, pp. 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> V. Todolí, J. Fernandes, "Circa 1968: around an idea of a museum and a collection", in *CIRCA 1968*, Porto, Fundação Serralves, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> V. Todolí, J. Fernandes, op. Cit., p.18.

“Alternativa Zero” in 1977 that the development of a Portuguese artistic movement truly began. He argues that the only critic in Portugal at that time, who reviewed the exhibition “When Attitudes Become Form,” curated by Harald Szeemann, was Jose-Augusto França, founder of “the only art magazine published during these years in Portugal (*Colóquio*)” in 1959, after divided into *Colóquio Artes* and *Colóquio Letras*. “He was the most influential Portuguese art critic of the time who, despite being relatively well-informed owing to his having lived in Paris for some years, was far from being an enthusiast concerning the new trends of the vanguard through reasons of background and taste”.<sup>28</sup>

He continues, explaining that “[i]n 1967, in a round table in which various critics debated the national artistic situation and namely, the possibilities and the limits of critical intervention, José-Augusto França could still lament the lack of material conditions which were faced by returning artists who had been sent abroad with grants awarded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.”<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, Wandshneider remarks how “[i]n Portuguese art, during the period in question, we can discover various significant cases both of artists who incorporated, in an original way, the forms of artistic production characteristic of the dominant paradigm (two obvious examples are Alberto Carneiro and Helena Almeida), as well as artists who have developed original styles alternative to this paradigm (for example, Joaquim Rodrigo and Álvaro Lapa)”.<sup>30</sup>

An essay by Eduardo Prado Coelho about the cultural climate of the country at that period follows Wandshneider’s piece, describing the cultural environment even though a situation of limited circulation

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<sup>28</sup> M. Wandshneider, “The slow and difficult affirmation of the vanguard in a changing context”, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> “A situação da arte em Portugal (Mesa redonda com José-Augusto França, Ernesto de Sousa, Rui Mario Gonçalves e Fernando Pernes) in *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias*, n.º 276, May 1970, Quoted by M. Wandshneider, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> M. Wandshneider, *op. cit.*, p. 30.



of art and literature publications crossing the national frontiers from abroad. These two essays about Portugal are followed by images of Portuguese artists' pieces, and next come other essays – inter alia, one from Germano Celant describing the international artistic context of the period<sup>31</sup> – and finally a group of illustrations by international artists. Reading the catalogue, without having seen the exhibition, Portuguese art does not appear to be follower, since it appears right at the beginning of the catalogue, which in practice doesn't seem to create such a difference, but indicates a separation. The attempt of inserting the Portuguese contribution to the artistic international debate to detect parallel processes, as intended by the curators, seems to end in a reiteration of a series of “Portuguese cases” in art history about something happening out there, out of frontiers. Consolidating a paradigm that this occasion had the potential to dismount, *CIRCA 1968*, being internationally a remarkable exhibition and reference, could be a significant turn point for problematizing and thinking again on the practices of art history, art critic and curating in their complementarity.

### **The tree in an artwork – the artwork in a tree**

In 1968 Alberto Carneiro was in London, a different environment than he was used to, and also far from the rural place where he had grown up. There he experienced what he later defined as *anamnesis* (from the Greek, composed by *ana*: again and *mnesis*: memory), a

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<sup>31</sup> “What matters is no longer the medium, but the subjectivity; techniques and materials thus present themselves in a state of equivalence. The outlet is a linguistic “disorder” in which the maximum *argumentative* efficacy is what counts. [...] The art born in 1968 is decidedly unclassifiable because it moves in direct connection with the present. It breaks the circle of the pre-existing system and opens itself up to a multiplicity of interventions and theories, actions and materials, presenting itself as a procedure without limits and without norms.” G. Celant, “1968: towards a global diversity”, *Circa 1968*, op. cit., p. 184.

remembrance.<sup>32</sup> It determined a process of reformulation and a new approach to sculpture, abandoning representation in favour of presentation and transposition of natural elements. This shift was manifested in the project *Canavial-memória-metamorfose de um corpo ausente*. Conceived in 1968, it was presented at “Galeria Quadrante” in Lisbon in 1973 and chosen as the image cover for the Portuguese Journal of Art’s *Colóquio/Artes* for the first volume of 1974.<sup>33</sup> The piece was made of bamboo, signposted with coloured strips tied with raffia strings. Through its apparently arbitrary order, Carneiro aims to interrogate and recreate the sensation of a body lying down in a cane plantation.<sup>34</sup> It was an “involvement,” the term that the artist prefers over “installation,” occupying the whole space, accessible to the spectator.<sup>35</sup>

*O Laranjal – natureza envolvente* (1969) presents an orange tree standing on a mound of earth, its shadow drawn on a vertical raw cloth and its shape cut on a metallic sheet behind the drawing. From above a feminine voice, intermittently spaced between silences and the sounds of bird, recites four texts, one for each season encountered by the environment represented.<sup>36</sup> Experiencing this

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<sup>32</sup> The notion of anamneses in Alberto Carneiro, the analysis of his artistic production between 1963-1975, in relation with the artist Black Notebook (*O caderno preto*) and the relation with his readings of Gaston Bachelard make Catarina Rosendo’s theses a reference for the study on this topic. See. C. Rosendo, *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. M. Brito Alves, *A Revista Colóquio Artes*, Lisboa: Colibri, 2007, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. I. Carlos, *op. cit.* p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> “[...] ‘involment’, a term used by the artist to single out moments in which sculptural objectuality is redefined by a different relationship between the action and the body, the coordinates of space and time as transformed by those actions and the conditions for sensorial perceptions offered to the viewer, in a semantic expansion that animates the concept of ‘installation’ or ‘ambient’, a more literal translation of environment, which Alla Kaprow postulated as new possibilities for artistic expression and manifestation.” João Fernandes, *Arte Vida / Vida Arte – Art Life / Life Art. Alberto Carneiro*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. C. Rosendo, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

piece, our perception of the orange grove is enriched by evocative senses encountered through sight, smell and sound.



*Alberto Carneiro (1937)*

*“O canavial: memória metamorfose de um corpo ausente”, 1968*

*Bamboo, colored strips, tracing letter and rafia*

*Variable dimensions*

*Courtesy of Caixa Geral de Depósitos Collection*

*Photograph: DMF, 2010*

*Os quatro elementos* (1969-1970) is a space delimited by metallic beams in a cubic shape, a kind of model synthesis, abstract and concrete at the same time, where the four elements are presented by

the materiality of earth, water, coal and a tree, and also photos and plastic.



*Alberto Carneiro*

*“O Laranjal. Natureza Envolvente”, 1969*

*Installation. Earth, soil, orange tree, metal, ray of light and audio*

*Variable dimensions*

*Courtesy of CGAC – Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea Collection*

*Photograph: Mark Ritchie (Ourense)*

The presentation and transposition of natural elements in the exhibition space culminates in *Uma floresta para os teus sonhos* (1970): two hundred tree trunks of different heights arranged to recreate a visual and tactile impression of a forest. Seemingly disordered, the trunks obey to a detailed project that describes the piece. Thanks to it, it was possible to do again the piece, with trees from the same place and of the same size, uprooted rather than cut,

as Carneiro explains<sup>37</sup> – after their destruction in a fire during their exhibition at the “Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna” in Lisbon in 1981, where the piece had already been shown in 1977 on the occasion of the group exhibit “Alternativa Zero.”

In Alberto Carneiro’s work, the tree presents itself as tree, i.e. raw, and at the same time condensing the most totalizing and generical idea of landscape, also reflecting the subject relating to it. In this self-sufficient and tautological formula of remembrance of the tree through the tree is enclosed the game of repetition and variation, assigning new meanings to the presented forms, renewed, in the “screen inside the [real]space.”<sup>38</sup>

The use of trees in Alberto Carneiro’s work – as described by Catarina Rosendo – makes tangible the direct and intimate relationship between body and nature that permeates the artist’s research, referencing works by some Italian artists from the same period. The purpose is neither a comparison, nor an attempt to assimilate one into the other, but rather a “here and now,” where different personalities and practices come together.

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<sup>37</sup> A. Carneiro at the round table with R. Henriques da Silva, J. Pais de Brito, J.F. Chougnat, P. Cabrita Reis and J. C. Alvarez at the symposium *Ephemeral art and Conservation*, Lisbon: Instituto de História da Arte, 2010, pp. 158-160.

<sup>38</sup> “(...) na obra de Alberto Carneiro, a árvore se apresenta como árvore, ou seja, em bruto, ao mesmo tempo que condensa a ideia mais totalizante e geral de paisagem e reflecte também o sujeito que com ela se relaciona. Nesta fórmula auto-suficiente e tautológica de rememoração da árvore pela árvore encerra-se o jogo da repetição e da variação que atribui novos significados às formas apresentadas, que se representam, renovadas, no “ecrã dentro do espaço” real.”, C. Rosendo, *op. cit.*, p. 176.



*Alberto Carneiro*

*“Uma floresta para os teus sonhos”, 1970*

*Installation*

*Tree trunks of pinewood*

*210cm height; 36 m<sup>2</sup> diameter*

*Courtesy of CAM / Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*

*Photograph: Paulo Costa, 2008*

After a consideration of sculpture in the realm of minimalist exploration of pure forms, whether in the internal space of a gallery or in public space, in his “Structures” – *Strutture* – Germano Olivotto conducts an interrogation of man in his transition between natural and artificial by the use of neon lights; in his earlier works as an almost imperceptible hint of neon lights, later using this medium in “substitution” of a branch in the structure of a tree. These interventions begun in 1968 are called in fact *Sostituzioni* (substitutions). His process is apparently discrete and modest, intervening in the open space, in a tree surrounded by trees. In fact,

argues Pierre Restany describing Germano Olivotto's work at the end of the 1960s

Quel est le donné naturel susceptible d'offrir le conteste sériel le plus propice à cette opération de substitution? L'arbre, considéré en soi ou par rapport aux autres arbres: une branche parmi d'autres branches, un tronc dans une forêt de troncs.<sup>39</sup>

The same Olivotto, in an interview by Jole de Sanna in 1973, explained that "substitution" didn't mean for him the replacement of the natural by the artificial, but rather an investigation into the "attitude of a human being 'vis-à-vis' to nature." His work uses an artificial medium, the neon light, to deliver to the viewer a sense of participation, "an extremely active degree of conscience about nature and the implicit problem in the relationship man-nature."<sup>40</sup> He explained that neon, in its technological materiality, would be the best medium for signalling the intervention; the most adept to suggest the concern about the topic he was proposing in an almost didactic way.<sup>41</sup>

Luca Maria Patella, having studied structural chemistry in Uruguay, had a profound interest in psychology, and went back to Europe at the end of the sixties to dedicate himself completely to art. He is one of the major figures in visual poetry and a pioneer in the use of video from that period. The relation we propose here between the two artists is very transversal and is suggested by an installation Patella presented for the first time at the Walker Art Center of

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<sup>39</sup> Pierre Restany, "Les travaux et les jours de Germano Olivotto", *GERMANO OLIVOTTO: STRUTTURE E SOSTITUZIONI, 1967-1974*, Complesso degli Eremitani, Padova, 1989, p. 31. (First published in *Art International*, summer 1972).

<sup>40</sup> J. de Sanna, "Intervista a G.Olivotto", *op. cit.*, (First published in *OPUS International*, 1973).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem.*

Liverpool. There, after having presented the “Talking Walls” (*Muri Parlanti*), he proposed *Un Boschetto di Alberi Parlanti e Profumati e di Cespugli Musicali, sotto un cielo* (“A small Forest of Talking Trees and Musical Bushes Under a Sky,” 1970-71).<sup>42</sup> The latter was an environment of trees and the sound of birds under a sky of moving clouds creating a kind of interactive and sensorial environment, where the spectator, becoming participant, is invited to explore the space where, for example, by touching a bush one would hear a sound, or moving closer to a tree one would hear a voice whispering.<sup>43</sup> Here, as in Alberto Carneiro’s *O Laranjal*, the tree becomes the pillar from which is built a personal experience from sensorial perceptions.

Between 1968 and 1969, Giuseppe Penone started his study of sculpture in relation to nature. Like Carneiro, he grew up in a rural environmental, although, as Didier Semin explains, we shouldn’t consider him to be a bucolic poet.<sup>44</sup> *Alpi Marittime, Continuerà a crescere tranne in quel punto* marked the beginning of his use of a tree as an artistic experience. It appears as an investigation through the materiality of the tree that also interrogates time, by the imposition of human force on the tree surface to challenge the vital

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<sup>42</sup> *Un Boschetto di Alberi Parlanti e Profumati e di Cespugli Musicali, sotto un cielo*, after having been shown at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1971 and the Bienal de São Paulo in Brazil in 1975, has finally been recreated for the exhibition “Luca Maria Patella – Ambienti Proiettivi Animati, 1964-1984”, MACRO, Museum of Contemporary Art Rome, January 30-April 26, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> In a conversation with Luca Patella at phone on 17th April 2014 he adds that the voice talking, in ironic tones from the inside of the tree is a woodworm, possible to ear only getting closer the ear to the tree trunk.

<sup>44</sup> “Penone è stato frequentemente, e a torto, considerato come una sorta di poeta bucolico. Non dobbiamo commettere quest’errore: il dialogo che l’artista instaura tra natura e cultura non è espressione di un’inclinazione, per così dire, agreste. La questione vitale per lui è innanzitutto quella della scultura. La scultura concepita come un modo di stare nel mondo, di provarne, ovvero sentire e mettere alla prova, lo spazio, la fluidità, la resistenza o la pesantezza.” Didier Semin, (ed. by Germano Celant) *Arte Povera 2011*, Milano, Electa, p. 484.



expansion of the plant.<sup>45</sup> Conceiving of the tree as a fluid matter, he inserted a bronze hand in the act of touching the surface of a young trunk tree, the physicality of the hand witnesses the lifetime of the plant that, as the title of his intervention says, “will continue to grow except in that point.” A way of conceiving the process of sculpture close to Alberto Carneiro’s methods, which is characterised, as he refers, by three phases: “prospection,” “nomination,” and “possession.”<sup>46</sup>

In his use of trees, as for example in *Albero di 12 Metri* (1970), Giuseppe Penone conceives of sculpture as a process that corresponds to the rewind function in video: through the patient process of peeling a beam following the rings of growth, his aim is to find in the dead piece of wood, once destined to be construction material, the life that was in it. This is why Penone describes his

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<sup>45</sup> This work by Penone has been accompanied by some verses he wrote between 1968 and 1969. “L’opera è proiettata nel futuro, è legata alla crescita dell’albero alla sua esistenza. / L’opera è in divenire; per possedere l’opera occorre vivere accanto all’albero che ne è attore. La mutazione, / il processo di crescita dell’albero è l’esperienza dell’opera d’arte. / L’albero, perso e consumato ogni significato emozionale, formale e culturale, / appare un elemento vitale in espansione, in proliferazione e accrescimento / continuo. Alla sua ‘forza’ ha aderito un’altra ‘forza’, la mia. / La sua reazione è il lavoro. / I suoi rami e il suo tronco si adattano agli anelli delle mani, delle braccia, / delle gambe, ma i suoi movimenti tendono a sgroppare nel vuoto / i pesi aggiunti alla sua struttura. / Ad aggravare il suo sforzo teso a non perdere l’equilibrio reso / Continuamente precario dall’azione demolitrice della forza di gravità / Si aggiunge la spinta del vento e la instabilità del terreno che, smontando, / rende i suoi movimenti simili a quelli del pattinatore.” [1969, 1968, 1968, 1968] G. Penone, *Respirar la sombra/Respirare l’ombra*, Xunta de Galicia, CGAC, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> “ ‘Prospection’ is the field work which allows us to find something, not a way, but matter that corresponds to feelings inside me and that gives dimension to the thing itself. ‘Nomination’ is the moment in which I assume the thing as a vehicle or a means through which I will fulfil my work, and ‘possession’ is the definition of that work as a consequence to the outside, this means as a way of showing it to the public – because in a sense and as we all know, a work does not exist if it doesn’t have an audience.” A. Carneiro in *Ephemeral art and Conservation*, op. cit., p. 157.

work as a kind of accelerated rewind, moving through the phenomenon of growth until the moment in which the man's hand interrupted it.<sup>47</sup>

“Man is not spectator nor actor, but simply nature,”<sup>48</sup> declares Penone in one of his verses, and Santiago Olmo says, “Carneiro neither marks nor establishes distances with regard to nature in his oeuvre...the artist process implies another interior process, a formative process through nature. The way in which the artist acts on nature to favour the creation of a fuller idea of man, at once a part of nature and in contrast to it, proves essential.”<sup>49</sup> The similarities between Alberto Carneiro and Giuseppe Penone are not temporal, or related to the specific context of 1968 that we explored here; they define the long trajectory of their work as two parallel paths, where it seems that each one contributes to a better proximity / comprehension of the artistic practice of the other.

### **Final consideration for further considerations**

In all these cases and especially in Alberto Carneiro's, we have seen how the tree, presented in its materiality rather than represented with other media, and ever only considered for its matter (*materia* in latin means “wood”), it is indissolubly matter (form) and also the significance it brings with it (content). In fact, in his text for the previously mentioned exhibition “Art Life” in Porto in 2013, we can read:

In effect, I always joke whenever I am told: *Is your work in wood?* And I reply: *No. I work with trees.* When I work the wood, I act on it to find the tree once more. What is important to me is the energy of matter. In fact,

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<sup>47</sup> Didier Semin, (ed. by Germano Celant) *Arte Povera 2011*, Milano, Electa, p. 479.

<sup>48</sup> Penone, *Respirar la sombra / Respirare l'ombra*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> S. Olmo, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

the energy of the wood is the energy of the tree that still is, and will always be, in it. Each tree has its growing time, a different reaction to the elements, etc. Its qualities are intrinsic to the corresponding species. Nevertheless, each tree is unique and aggregates in itself the whole nature.<sup>50</sup>

Whether in a forest or in a forest of concrete, whether the dichotomies between nature and culture have apparently been overcome, the artistic expressions outlined approximate the viewer to the tree itself and the tree as an artwork when recreated in itself as concept for a metaphorical meaning. The words of the Catalan poet and art critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1981) resound more profoundly: “symbol of life, in its widest meaning, the tree represents the life of the cosmos, its density, growth, proliferation, generation and regeneration.”<sup>51</sup>

## Biography

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<sup>50</sup> A. Carneiro, “Autobiographical anthology: Answers to questions that I have been frequently asked about my work”, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>51</sup> Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Diccionario de Símbolos*, Barcelona: Siruela, 2004 (1958).

and the possibility of renewing ourselves and our environment through not doing”, *Zeteo. The Journal of Interdisciplinary Writing*, Spring Issue 2014 (<http://zeteojournal.com/2014/05/21/doing-nothing-garden/>).

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## COMMENTS and DISCUSSIONS

### **The mountains and the sea: travel as discovery in the lives of Emil du Bois-Reymond and Ernst Haeckel**

**Gabriel Finkelstein**

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Félix du Bois-Reymond, Emil's father, originally came from Swiss canton of Neuchâtel. When the July Revolution broke out in 1830 he petitioned his superiors in the Prussian Foreign Office to report on any unrest in their French-speaking territory. His request was granted, and on 11 June 1830 he took his family on a sixteen-month sojourn to Villiers, the village where he grew up. Emil was then twelve, and his diary of his stay sounds a good deal like the narrative of the *Swiss Family Robinson*: picking berries in the woods, jumping around on boulders, trips to waterfalls and meadows, everything Rousseau and Pestalozzi had advised parents to let their children do. One summer evening toward the end of their stay Emil noted that his parents entertained a certain César-Henri Monvert, a man famed throughout the region for his erudition. During the course of the dinner Monvert, who had just been reading Leopold von Buch, explained the origin of the Jura range. It was at this point that Emil developed his life-long fascination for mountains.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information on du Bois-Reymond is drawn from G. Finkelstein, *Emil du Bois-Reymond: neuroscience, self, and society in nineteenth-century Germany*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013.

Evidence for his interest abounds. Du Bois-Reymond spent most of his second semester at university studying geology, ‘burying himself’, as he put it, in Karl Cäsar von Leonhard’s textbook and Alexander von Humboldt’s *Aspects of Nature*. In his spare time he went on geological outings, longing to attend the annual Congress of German Naturalists and Physicians in Freiburg, where an excursion to the hills had been planned for the geological section. And at one point he even considered transferring to the University of Neuchâtel to study Alpine geology, natural history, and palaeontology under Louis Agassiz.

All this changed when du Bois-Reymond met Johannes Müller at Berlin. The encounter convinced him to change his career to physiology, but still, he never lost his interest in Alpinism. In 1850 du Bois-Reymond invited the Bavarian mountaineers Hermann and Adolph Schlagintweit to present their research to the Berlin Physical Society. In 1852 he emulated Goethe’s ascent of Vesuvius with his friend Charles Martins.<sup>2</sup> Two years later he attempted the Dachstein in Austria, but bad weather blocked the summit, and he wrote to his wife that all he managed was to dislocate his pinkie and shred his ‘unmentionables’.<sup>3</sup> In 1858 he had better luck on the Monte Moro Pass between Zermatt and Macugnaga, and he continued to climb as he grew older, scrambling up chalk cliffs on the Isle of Wight with John Tyndall in 1866 when he was forty-eight and the Monte Rosa in 1868 when he was fifty.<sup>4</sup> Exercise

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<sup>2</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. Claude, Naples, 1 October 1852 (#20), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

<sup>3</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. du Bois-Reymond, Vienna, 29 September 1854 (#88), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

<sup>4</sup> J. Tyndall to E. du Bois-Reymond, 18 February 1870 (#2437), John Tyndall Papers, Archives of the Royal Institution of London; E. du Bois-Reymond to J. du Bois-Reymond, London, 24 April 1866 (#148), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5; E. Brücke to E. du Bois-



seemed to do him good: ‘Whoever saw Emil at his peak, when he returned home from hiking in the Swiss Alps, tanned from the air and sun, life in every movement, dark eyes flashing; whoever enjoyed the privilege of following the rich play of his mind, the exhilarating keenness of his speech, never forgot the impression, not their whole life long’.<sup>5</sup> (Certainly not his wife, who accepted his hand in marriage at the top of Loughrigg Fell.)

Du Bois-Reymond also enjoyed the sea. During his honeymoon he stayed at Folkestone, care of his English friend Henry Bence Jones, and later in life, when his hip and back began to hurt, he took his daughter on a trip to Scheweningen, a resort recommended by the Crown Prince and Princess of Prussia.<sup>6</sup> But du Bois-Reymond was more interested in swimming than he was in the *beau monde*, and he grumbled to his wife that the shallowness of the Dutch shore only allowed him to wade in the surf.<sup>7</sup> He was happier diving from the rocks at Genoa, and even more, rowing out from his summerhouse for swims in the Havel.<sup>8</sup> Du Bois-Reymond remained

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Reymond, 20 November 1868 (#155), E.W. von Brücke, *Briefe an Emil du Bois-Reymond*, H. Brücke, W. Hilger, W. Höflechner, and W. Swobada (eds.), 2 vols., Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 154-155.

<sup>5</sup> E. Rosenberger, *Felix du Bois-Reymond*, Meyer & Jessen, Berlin, 1912, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. du Bois-Reymond, Godesberg, 18 September [18]78 (#215), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

<sup>7</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. du Bois-Reymond, Scheweningen, Hotel d’Orange, 22 August 78 (#201), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

<sup>8</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to C. Ludwig, 28 September 1894, *Two great scientists of the nineteenth century: correspondence of Emil du Bois-Reymond and Carl Ludwig*, trans. S. Lichtner-Ayèd, ed. P. F. Cranefield, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982, pp. 119-120; E. du Bois-Reymond to J. Claude, Berlin, 9 July 1853 (#85), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

active all his life, hiking, riding, rowing, sailing, and skating when he had the chance. He even managed to soar in Dr Lilienthal's flying machine, *The New York Times* reported, with 'leaps of nearly 100 feet through the air'.<sup>9</sup> Not bad for a man of 76.

Compare du Bois-Reymond with another student of Müller's, the naturalist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel imitated Goethe and Humboldt with ascents of Vesuvius and Pico del Tiede, but his climbs come across more as tests of strength than as means of refreshment. Haeckel lost consciousness near the summit of Tenerife, blood streaming from his nose.<sup>10</sup> No flashing dark eyes here. He much preferred the ocean, taking trips to Helgoland, Naples and Messina, the other Canary Islands, and Ceylon at various stages in his life. He also paid more attention to his environment, portraying what he saw in his letters or his sketches or his scientific work.

These differences were conscious choices. Haeckel and du Bois-Reymond had both read the same stable of travel literature: Goethe, Humboldt, Darwin, and in du Bois-Reymond's case, Gerstaecker, Pöppig, Heine, and Moltke. Both men could also draw beautifully, du Bois-Reymond later admitting that his 'real wish' when he was young was to become an artist like his aunt Louise, his grandmother Suzette, and his great-grandfather Daniel Chodowiecki; indeed, something of his family's talent can be seen in his illustrations of his experimental apparatus.<sup>11</sup> Nor did du Bois-Reymond lack any sensitivity to literature. He discussed descriptions of nature in his

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<sup>9</sup> 'Lilienthal Soaring Machine', *New York Times*, 24 March 1894, p. 6; 'The Flying Machine', *Scientific American* 70, no. 13, 1894, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> R. J. Richards, *The tragic sense of life: Ernst Haeckel and the struggle of evolutionary thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2008, p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> C. Kiel to E. du Bois-Reymond, 13 February 1838, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, *Nachlaß* du Bois-Reymond, K. 1 M. 6 Bl. 112; E. du Bois-Reymond, Emil du Bois-Reymond, Response to Rudolf Virchow, 'Ansprache an Herrn Geh. Rath du Bois-Reymond bei der Feier seines 50jährigen Doctorjubiläums am 12. Februar 1893', *Berliner Klinische Wochenschrift* 30, no. 8, 20 February 1893, p. 199.

popular science courses, and he rightly credited Rousseau for the same.<sup>12</sup> When pressed, his own style could be as lyrical as anyone's. Here is a cameo of Pozzuoli from a trip he took in 1852:

The dark blue sea, the green-brown hills, the shining sky, the burning sun, the white houses with flat roofs and monstrous barren spaces inside, the streets narrow, dirty, filled with the noise of business, craft, trade, and family life. Everything takes place outside: naked children, pigs and chickens between barrels of the most amazing sea creatures, some of which I recognized from specimen jars in the anatomical museum and saw alive and wriggling for the first time; and then the splendid costumes, the shrill speech, the violent gestures, the occasional figure of loveliness, though not a single beautiful face: the whole muddle makes up such a strange world that one is inclined to consider whether one has remained the same oneself.<sup>13</sup>

If du Bois-Reymond didn't write narratives in the style of Humboldt and Darwin, it wasn't because he couldn't. His idea of science was entirely urban: a downtown laboratory run like a factory according to a strict division of labour.<sup>14</sup> The closest du Bois-Reymond came to the field was his aquarium (which had a habit of breaking), and which housed his electric fish (which had a habit of dying, or even worse, misbehaving when he was trying to show them off to Prince Albert). In the summer of 1858, after a few weeks of exasperation in his lab (if we can call two small rooms on the third floor of the university a lab), du Bois-Reymond wrote to his wife in

<sup>12</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond, Lecture 17, *Ergebnisse der neueren Naturforschungen*, 1864, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlaß Emil du Bois-Reymond, K. 12 M. 8 Nr. 11 Bl. 34<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. Claude, Naples, 29 September 1852 (#18), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

<sup>14</sup> S. Dierig, *Wissenschaft in der Maschinenstadt: Emil Du Bois-Reymond und seine Laboratorien in Berlin*, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2006.

Switzerland, ‘I wish I were with you already. Nothing to do but eat and drink, sleep with you, swim, and climb about in the woods’.<sup>15</sup> He considered mountains a solace, a refuge from the trials of the city—a place of recovery and reinvigoration.

When du Bois-Reymond was hired as professor of physiology at Berlin in 1858 he was promised a new laboratory by the Prussian Minister of Education. Wars swallowed the funds: in 1859 there was a scare in Italy, in 1864 a war with Denmark, in 1866 a war with Austria, and in 1871 a war with France. Prussia received a huge indemnity of five billion francs in 1872 and still the government dragged its feet. Tired of delays in construction, du Bois-Reymond threatened to decamp for Switzerland. (The lab got built.) When I think about it, though, I don’t think du Bois-Reymond would have been very happy in Geneva. There were decent colleagues at the University, to be sure, but the one who sticks out is Henri-Frédéric Amiel, a professor of aesthetics best remembered for pouring his heart into his endless diary. Du Bois-Reymond once stayed at the beautiful *Hôtel des Bergues*. Everything after that would have been a let-down.

On the one hand, there are the mountains; on the other, there is the sea. On the one hand, there is nature set off from work; on the other, nature and work all of a piece. We could ask what accounts for these differences. It had little to do with technology. As Alain Corbin has argued, the seashore was invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; all railways did in the 19<sup>th</sup> was to popularize it among the middle class. This certainly holds for du Bois-Reymond and Haeckel. Du Bois-Reymond discovered mountains before railways existed, and the lure of the sea had attracted naturalists like Haeckel back in the days of Humboldt, Müller, and Darwin. Steam merely reinforced patterns of travel that had already been set.

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<sup>15</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond to J. du Bois-Reymond, 22 July 1858 (#110a), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Haus Potsdamer Straße, Handschriftenabteilung, Depositorium Runge-du Bois-Reymond, K. 11 Nr. 5.

I suppose the difference in choice comes down to a question of taste. Haeckel preferred the field. Du Bois-Reymond preferred the lab. Haeckel saw the seashore as a place of discovery, teeming with creatures waiting to be studied. (This included the locals, by the way, with their dark skin and scant clothing.) Du Bois-Reymond preferred to outsource his experimental material, whether to his colleague Anton Dohrn at his station in Naples, or to his student Carl Sachs on his trip to Venezuela, or to his assistants at what he called the 'Institute of Berlin Street Urchins', who supplied him with frogs so large that he had them shipped to the Royal Institution.

Du Bois-Reymond saw limits everywhere. There were limits to his discipline: 'Physiology is the only science which forces you to talk of things you know nothing about'.<sup>16</sup> There were limits to his equipment, which had to be tested and corrected and calibrated at great pains. There were limits to his laboratory, which consisted either of a room in his apartment, which only had two, or a room in the university, where his assistants messed up his apparatus, or a room in his institute, where he repeated experiments over and over till the end of his life. There were limits to the students he could teach or what he could teach them, as he discovered year after year at examinations. There were limits to power, as when Bismarck pressured the Ministry of Education to appoint his personal physician, Ernest Schweninger, chief of dermatology at the Charité hospital and associate professor at the University of Berlin. There were limits to his ambitions, as when the Academy of Sciences shot down his proposal to open sessions and his idea of an Academy of German met ridicule. There were limits to his money, which vanished in bad investments in Chile in 1878, forcing him to beg

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<sup>16</sup> E. du Bois-Reymond, 'Gedächtnisrede auf Johannes Müller. Gehalten in der Leibniz-Sitzung der Akademie der Wissenschaften am 8. July 1858', in *Reden von Emil du Bois-Reymond*, Estelle du Bois-Reymond (ed.), 2 vols., Verlag von Veit, Leipzig: 1912, vol. 1, p. 188.

the ministry for raises and go on lecture tours of the Rhineland. There were limits to his power as a father, when work kept him from his wife and children for days on end, and worst of all, when smallpox killed his infant daughter Alice. It is not at all surprising, then, that du Bois-Reymond's most famous lecture was 'On the Limits of Natural Knowledge', or that his lecture 'Darwin versus Galiani' offered an portrait of himself as Lucretian mountaineer: 'Free from vertigo at this height of Pyrrhonism, he disdains the void that yawns around him, filling his imagination with images, and gazes fearlessly into the pitiless whirl of a disenchanting nature'.<sup>17</sup>

And Haeckel? He recognized no limits, no 'World Riddles'. Everything for him was connected, like the ocean. Like Müller, he performed experiments, but his real strength lay in observation. There is no limit to what you can see at the shore.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Schwindelfrei auf dieser Höhe des Pyrrhonismus, verschmätzt er die Leere, die um ihn gähnt, mit Gebilden seiner Phantasie auszufüllen, und blickt furchtlos in das unbarmherzige Getriebe der entgötterten Natur'. E. du Bois-Reymond, 'Darwin versus Galiani. In der Leibniz-Sitzung der Akademie der Wissenschaften am 6. Juli 1876 gehaltene Rede', in *Reden von Emil du Bois-Reymond*, Estelle du Bois-Reymond (ed.), 2 vols., Verlag von Veit, Leipzig, 1912, vol. 1, pp. 562-563. 'Disenchanting nature' or 'exorcized nature' comes from Schiller, not Weber. Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book Second: 'It is sweet, when on the great sea the winds trouble its waters, to behold from land another's deep distress; not that it is a pleasure and delight that any should be afflicted, but because it is sweet to see from what evils you are yourself exempt. It is sweet also to look upon the mighty struggles of war arrayed along the plains without sharing yourself in the danger. But nothing is more welcome than to hold the lofty and serene positions well fortified by the learning of the wise, from which you may look down upon others and see them wandering all abroad and going astray in their search for the path of life, see the contest among them of intellect, the rivalry of birth, the striving night and day with surpassing effort to struggle up to the summit of power and be masters of the world'. *On the nature of things*, Book Second, trans. H. A. J. Munro, Deighton, Bell, Cambridge, U.K., 1866, p. 28.

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## TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

### **“NEQUE IMPETU HOSTIUM NEQUE MOTU TEMPESTATUM”. I PERICOLI DEL MARE NEL RACCONTO DI SAEWULFO, PELLEGRINO ANGLOSASSONE DEL XII SECOLO.**

**Francesca Tasca**

**Abstract:** The contribution aims to highlight the attitude and perception of the pilgrim in the face of many dangers faced during the sea voyage within the Relatio de situ Ierusalem - travel report of the Anglo-Saxon Saewulf drawn up between July 1102 and September 1103 in the Holy Land. The winding coastal route, followed both outward and return, indeed, presented to Saewulf different threats and looming risks: sea storms, shipwrecks, pirate and Saracens' attacks, strong headwinds. And in all these events Saewulf, with a deep religious approach, was able to reap the special and indisputable divine protection afforded to him.

### **THE DAWN OF ASTROPHYSICS IN MEXICO: MEXICAN/AMERICAN POLITICAL AFFAIRS DURING SECOND WORLD WAR**

**Jorge Bartolucci**

**Resumen:** Con la fundación del Observatorio Astrofísico de Tonantzintla en 1942 se sentaron las bases para el establecimiento de la astrofísica moderna en México. Su construcción fue posible gracias a la solidaridad del director del Observatorio de la Universidad de Harvard, Harlow Shapley, y al apoyo incondicional del gobierno de México a un grupo de jóvenes científicos

mexicanos encabezado por Luis Enrique Erro, funcionario público y astrónomo aficionado. ¿Qué sucedió esa vez que pudo concretarse el demorado objetivo de actualizar la astronomía mexicana? Las respuestas a esta pregunta remiten a un complejo proceso en el cual factores tales como la personalidad, la capacidad intelectual y la posición política de los protagonistas, tejieron una trama que conectó sus experiencias de vida con hechos de otra envergadura, como son la lucha política en México y las relaciones internacionales con los Estados Unidos. Dado que la historia tuvo lugar en el contexto de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la influencia de los asuntos geopolíticos adquieren un realce inusitado. Como estudio de caso contribuye a comprender el adelanto de la ciencia en los países en desarrollo y su integración a la comunidad internacional, a la vez que ofrece respuestas a la pregunta que más ha estimulado el debate entre sociólogos e historiadores de la ciencia: cómo y en qué medida la actividad científica se facilita o es inhibida por factores sociales e históricos?

## **“S’ODE ANCORA IL MARE”: LA SCULTURA MONUMENTALE DI ISPIRAZIONE MARINA IN EPOCA CONTEMPORANEA**

**Maria Beatrice Giorio**

**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyse how the sea has inspired the monumental sculpture, in particular that of the contemporary era. Through the study of different types of monuments dedicated to the sea, from those of traditional conception to the modern and innovative ones, I will reflect on the role of the protagonist/antagonist embodied by this natural element, focusing on how art is to throw a bridge between the human world and that of the abysses. By the interpretation of marine monumental sculpture as an “aesthetic reconciler”, this paper will present a more

recent kind of monumental, the submerged sculptural installation: through the immersion of the artwork in the depths of the abyss, the sea, replacing the sculptor, becomes the active element of artistic creation and creator of a unique aesthetic experience, destined to forever change the millennial bond between man and nature.

**“BO ME TRUO”: A FEMALE-CENTRED SUN FIRE NUDITY DANCE RITUAL OF FERTILITY OF THE SEHWI PEOPLE OF GHANA.**

**Awo Abena Amoa Sarpong**

**Henrietta Emma Sarpong**

**De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway**

**Sommario:** Questo articolo esamina Bo Me Truo, un rito la cui performance è un amalgama di danza, canto e recitazione e le donne del popolo Sehwi (Sefwi), una delle etnie Akan del Ghana, che lo eseguono sono nude. Che cosa spinge le Sehwi ad eseguire un simile rituale durante una celebrazione dedicata agli antenati defunti? Quali sono i significati profondi racchiusi nei suoi elementi coreografici e cromatici, e negli oggetti e ornamenti di scena? Questo saggio analizza il rito da una prospettiva storica, filosofico-coreografica e artistica, e, attraverso un'indagine della cosmovisione dei Sehwi, lo descrive come una forma di arte indigena. Trascendendo l'esteriorità della performance che ad un elemento culturale “estraneo” potrebbe risultare scioccante, l'articolo chiarisce come questo potente rito nudità femminile sia funzionale per scongiurare disastri di qualsiasi tipo e dare una carica spirituale che renda fertile il suolo e fecondo il popolo.

## AGUA E IMAGINARIOS TERRITORIALES *WIXÁRIKA*: REPRESENTACIONES DE LA NATURALEZA SAGRADA

**Adolfo Benito Narváez Tijerina**

**Abstract:** The work explores the conception of territory constructed by the *Wixárika* people (huichol) of west Mexico through their mythic conception developed concerning one fundamental natural element: the water. It will study the mythic components about the values associated with this element, to develop the hypothesis that through the mythic space the *Wixaritaris* developed their territorial conception, in which water is a fundamental element to delimitate and mark their territory. It is to present different associations of water with different elements of the *Wixarika's* mythic system, to initiate a structural comprehension of their imaginaries. It especially studies the mythic course before the rise of ancestors in *Haramara*, the pilgrimage to *Wirikuta*, the role of desert and lighting of *Kauyumary* and the epic of *Tukutsi Nakawé* as an explanation about symbolism of water between the *Wixarika* people.

## WHEN A TREE BECOMES ART. ALBERTO CARNEIRO AND THE INTERNATIONAL ARTISTIC CONTEXT AROUND 1968

**Vanessa Badagliacca**

**Resumen:** “Nosotros no afirmaremos que un árbol es una obra de arte. Apenas diremos que podremos tomarla y transformarla en obra de arte.” Así escribió Alberto Carneiro (Coronado, 1937) en sus *Notas para un Manifiesto de Arte Ecológico* (1968-1972). En el marco del estudio sobre la noción de escultura en los años sesenta del siglo XX, con una creciente y progresiva inserción de elementos naturales (animales, vegetales y minerales) en la práctica artística, el propósito de esta investigación es trazar la presencia del árbol como

obra. Símbolo de vida, en su más vasto sentido, “el árbol representa —según el poeta y crítico de arte catalán Juan Eduardo Cirlot (1981)—la vida de los cosmos, su densidad, crecimiento, proliferación, generación y regeneración.” En este punto, el proyecto estético del artista portugués Alberto Carneiro, apropiándose del árbol en su materialidad orgánica como practica artística, revela su preocupación ambiental y social que interesó un intenso debate internacional entre artistas activos en países occidentales entre finales de los años sesenta y comienzo de los años setenta del siglo XX. El propósito de este artículo es de presentar la búsqueda artística de Alberto Carneiro no apenas como “un caso portugués”, sino más bien como un protagonista de su tiempo al par de otros de proveniencias diferentes.

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