

Review

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by CARL HENTZE

Review by: Carl Schuster

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BOOK REVIEWS

CARL HENTZE: *Objets rituels, croyances et dieux de la Chine antique et de l'Amérique*. Antwerp, Éditions "De Sikkel", Rue Kruishof, 223, 1936. 119 pp., with 230 figures in black and white, and 12 colotype plates.

The present volume continues the line of research begun in the author's *Mythes et Symboles lunaires* (Antwerp, 1932). On the principle that symbolic and religious representation in art is tantamount to the written expression of language, he sets about finding certain complexes of ideas which are represented in similar artistic forms in different cultures, notably in the cultures of Eastern Asia and of pre-Columbian America. The author quotes Laufer's remark: "If numerous tales and myths have found their way from Asia to America over the northern and southern routes, we may expect similar transmissions of other culture traits, such as notions of astronomy, especially the zodiac, calendrical and astronomical systems, technical methods and art motives. These investigations are still in the beginning." A number of able scholars have contributed to the elucidation of this important problem, each in his specialty and in his way. Hentze takes for his field the investigation of mythological symbolism in the Far East and in the New World.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each of which is devoted to a motive or group of motives with more or less clearly suggested mythological contents, first in ancient China or in Siberia, and then in pre-Columbian America. Examples are the motive of an animal holding a human figure between its paws, the double serpent as an expression of dualism, the single-footed monster *k'uei*, the peculiar mushroom-shaped horn which adorns the *k'uei* and the *t'ao t'ieh* masks on ancient Chinese bronzes, the motive of a bird with a human face on its breast, an animal mask surmounted with antlers and provided with an elephant's trunk which occurs on certain ancient Chinese bronzes, the god with long locks and widespread legs, demons of light and darkness, of fertility and increase, etc.

Hentze undoubtedly deserves credit for the keen observation and insight which have enabled him to pick out and give definition to certain motive-types in ancient Chinese art. An example of this useful work appears in chapter IV, "Le masque à trompe et le masque de cervidé", where he shows that certain animal masks on Chou bronzes represent, with a high degree of probability, the Siberian reindeer. These masks are often associated or combined on the bronzes with another mask, which ap-

pears at first sight to be that of an elephant. However the "tusks" of these elephants are generally rudimentary or entirely lacking, and the heads are instead surmounted by a pair of large recurving horns. Hentze observes that these horns resemble nothing so much as the tusks of the extinct Siberian mammoth, and explains their presence on top of the "elephant" heads by the Siberian legend that the mammoth (which the Siberian tribes used to find exposed in the earth by the landslips which accompany the springtime thaws) was a subterranean creature who burrowed his way by means of a pair of monster horns which he carried on the top of his head (but which are in reality the animal's tusks). This legendary conception of the mammoth as a creature with immense recurving horns on its head would have been transmitted to the Chinese by their Tungus neighbors, together with the motive of the Siberian reindeer, with which the Tungus were familiar in real life. The elephant's trunk which is attached, quite inorganically, to masks betraying the features of the reindeer, is probably borrowed from the Indian elephant as a contribution to the composite image of a purely mythical beast made up from bits of exotic fauna — a procedure familiar in China as well as in other parts of the world. Thus the association of the reindeer mask with that of a trunkless horned elephant on Chou bronzes would be accounted for as the representation of a beast envisaged by contemporary Chinese mythology. The argument is extremely ingenious and fairly convincing.

The latter part of the chapter is devoted to a consideration of American parallels. Hentze thinks that the much discussed Central American representations of masks with trunk-like probosces are probably a reflection of a reminiscence of the ancient Siberian legend of the mammoth as a subterranean animal, which was carried over to the New World by early migrating races. Whether Hentze's explanation will ultimately prove to be right or not, the arguments by which he seeks to support it are not very convincing. He finds that the New World representations agree in the minutest significant detail with the representations on ancient Chinese bronzes, due to a fundamental identity of symbolism underlying the two traditions. A number of iconographical details are found to be common to the American motives and the Chinese ones (see the enumeration on p. 84, elaborated in tabular form on p. 90), but these resemblances are, for the most part, in what I believe must be regarded as not very essential features of the American representations, so that the analogies do not carry much conviction.

A short chapter pregnant with interesting possibilities is the fifth, which takes up "le dieu au gros nez", "le dieu aux longs cheveux", and "le dieu aux longs cheveux et aux jambes écartées". Here in his figs. 166, 168-9, 172-9, 182-7 and 189 Hentze calls our attention to a motive in early Chinese art which is undoubtedly of paramount importance, that of a type of crouching figure (Hockergestalt). He resolves the grotesque design on a bronze halberd in Toronto, fig. 178, ingeniously into a group of three crouching figures, two seen in profile at the sides and one seen in front view in the center, with common legs connecting the three figures, and a human face marking the knee joint of each of the common legs. With a keen eye for resemblance of type Hentze equates this representation to similar composite figures on Chinese

neolithic and eneolithic pottery, and on the other hand to a similar crouching figure on the well-known Sumitomo bronze drum.

But after analysing and identifying the designs, the author proceeds at once to "interpret" them (p. 97f.). The central crouching figure on the Toronto halberd is pronounced a "Hochgottheit", numerary symbolism of a not very convincing order is read into various features of the design, while minor details of the composition are assigned a specific lunar symbolism, and the author attempts to find analogous symbolical features in other designs of the same general type. At the end of the chapter he throws in one American parallel — pottery design from the Amazon.

Now an acquaintance with the decorative art of Indonesia and Melanesia would provide a rich field for the comparative study of these crouching figures in early Chinese design. Actually many features of the early Chinese representations are explicable in terms of Oceanic motives, which are to be understood in the sense of survivals of early continental influences. Indeed the Oceanic parallels are often so close, and the light they shed on the early Chinese motives is so illuminating that one feels justified in regarding Hentze's preoccupation with the peripheral areas of the Pacific, to the exclusion of all that lies between, as unfortunate; and one cannot refrain from expressing the conviction that his inferences about the significance of motives are based too largely on speculation and not nearly enough on an extensive and objective study of relevant comparative material.

On numerous occasions throughout the book Hentze reiterates the principle on which his comparisons are made — namely that not single motives but groups of associated motives must be compared. The principle is undoubtedly an excellent one. But there is still latitude for a difference of opinion as to what constitutes a motive and what constitutes an association. I can best illustrate the point by reproducing here one of Hentze's own comparisons, his fig. 89b, a "detail of a Chinese ritual bronze of the Chou dynasty" and his fig. 90, "details of a Peruvian vase from Chicama: the jaguar god associated with moon and stars". To begin with, Hentze explains that the cap-like tops of the horns on the Chinese monster represent lunar crescents, that the zigzag lines a little lower down are equivalent to ancient forms of the Chinese character for water, *ch'uan*, and that the spirals at the base of the horns are like the ancient form of the Chinese character for lightning, *tien*. Thus the horns of the monster are, according to Hentze, pregnant with cosmic symbolism. Having established to his satisfaction the meaning of the Chinese design, he proceeds to the comparison:

"On the big ogre masks which we have analysed, fig. 89, we have discovered a head ornament consisting of a horn decorated with a double volute whose ends turn in opposite directions. This is exactly the same combination of signs and of forms



Fig. 89. Détails de deux bronzes rituels chinois d'époque Tchéou

which we find on a Peruvian vase from Chicama, fig. 90: both the head and the tail of the jaguar monster are ornamented by a double saw-toothed line and two volutes. Thus not only is the ornament the same, but it is likewise attached to the head of the jaguar, and the jaguar itself is placed in a lunar crescent. Thus we have, as on the horns of the t'ao t'ieh or of the k'uei, the double volute, the double zigzag line and the crescent. An assemblage of so many totally identical phenomena could not be attributed simply to the result of convergence. But there is something still better ...”

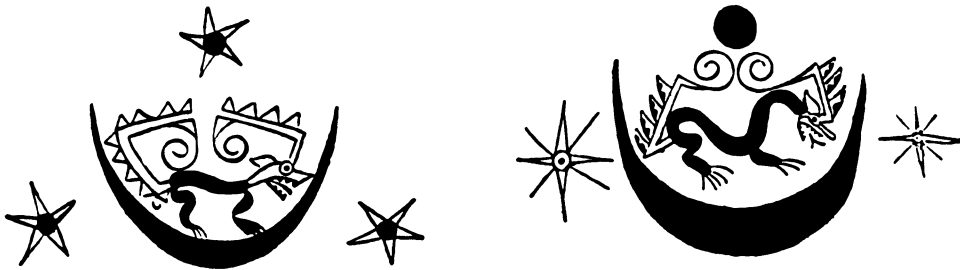


Fig. 90. Détails d'un vase péruvien de Chicama: le dieu Jaguar associé à la lune et aux étoiles

From such comparisons I believe it is clear that Hentze is not looking for broad resemblances in artistic structure or conception, such as might conceivably have been transmitted from one continent to another, but for what we might call certain esoteric signs — the signs of a mythological ideology. These signs he seems to find associated in the same groups on both sides of the Pacific, suggesting a community of mythology — but these signs (or bits of motives, as they often appear to be) are generally so elementary in form and are combined or arranged in such different ways in the representations which he compares, often without appreciable emphasis on their symbolical character — indeed they are often introduced into the designs in what seems a purely incidental and decorative capacity — that the reader generally feels unable to follow him in his conclusions about the significance of their relationship to each other or to motives on the other side of the Pacific. This does not mean that the thesis of relationship between design-forms in Asia and America is in itself necessarily untenable, but simply that Hentze's choice of examples and his way of comparing them is open to misgiving.

The mythological values which Hentze assigns to the various motives are in themselves highly conjectural, so that his equations are built up on the basis of imponderable values; and an equation of imponderables is one to which, apparently, only Hentze is sure of the answer. Symbolical values in design are notoriously difficult to determine with any degree of objective certainty. To a large extent, probably, these values will always elude us. If there is any hope at all of getting at the meanings of such motives as those Hentze deals with, it lies in broadening and strengthening the basis of comparison. In the light of more extensive comparative material it is

possible that we may get an inkling of what lies behind some of the symbolical representations for which Hentze presents us with ready-made answers. On the whole, it would be better to place the primary emphasis on an objective study of the mere external forms of motives over a large area (by all means including pre-Columbian America): it will then be surprising to what a large extent we shall see emerging from these very data the indications of the underlying meaning at which Hentze is, after all, only guessing. Thus the interpretation of the motives, in so far as it is possible at all, would be a by-product of an investigation into their form and distribution. Only in this way, in my opinion, shall we ever arrive at anything approaching a scientifically valid interpretation of the kind of art-motives which we call "symbolical." More energy should be put into this comparative research, irrelevant as it may seem at first: its rewards will far surpass expectation. The value of Hentze's book lies more in its analyses of early Chinese design than in its symbolical interpretations and its comparisons across cultures.

Carl Schuster

FUNG YU-LAN: *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, The Period of the Philosophers. Translated by DERK BODDE. 455 pp. Peiping, Henri Vetch, 1937. Ch. \$ 18.00.

Nicht erst mit dem Einbruch des Skeptizismus in die chinesische Geisteswelt hat sich die Literatur der Dschouzeit, dieser Stolz und Kummer der chinesischen Geistesgeschichte, gefallen lassen müssen, kritisiert und zurechtgerückt zu werden. Kang Yu-we's Fanfare jedoch führte eine ganze Generation von Zweiflern heran, gegen dieses wohlgeschichtete Gebäude Sturm zu laufen. Es folgten Liang Ki-tschau, Tsui Schu, Hu Schi, Ma Sü-lun, Gu Gië-gang, Tsiën Mu und eine grosse Reihe anderer seinem Versuch, zunächst einmal ein Chaos herzustellen, aus dem dann eine neue Ordnung aufzubauen wäre¹. Um ein Beispiel zu geben von der Vielseitigkeit der Schlüsse, zu denen man auf diese Weise gelangt ist, sei erwähnt, dass einerseits das Kernstück der inneren Abteilung des Dschuangdsi, das Kapitel Tsi-wu-lun 齊物論, das mit dem Orgelspiel des Himmels beginnt und dem Schmetterlingstraum aufhört, Dschuangdsi abgesprochen und Schen Dau 慎到 zugesprochen wird², während andererseits das Kapitel

1) Neben dem sechsbändigen Monumentalwerk des Gu-sch'i-biën 古史辨 ist das handliche Bändchen von HUANG YÜN-ME 黃雲眉, *Gu-gin we-schu kau bu-dscheng* 古今僞書考補證, erschienen in der Serie: 金陵大學中國文化研究所叢刊 im 21. Jahr der Republik, als Zusammenfassung derartiger Arbeiten von erfreulicher Brauchbarkeit.

2) FU SSU-NIEN 傅斯年, *On the Authorship of Ts'i-wu-lun in Chuang-tzu* 誰是「齊物論」之作者 im *Academia Sinica, Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology*, VI, 4 S. 557 ff.