

*Marie Delcourt*

THE LEGEND OF  
SARPEDON AND  
THE SAGA OF  
THE ARCHER

THE LYCIAN PRINCES

Bellerophon, the grandson of Sisypchos, the king of Corinth, was forced to leave his country for having accidentally killed his brother. He was received at Tiryns by Proitos, whose wife Anteia, or Stheneboia, had become enamored of him. Then, as Bellerophon spurned her, she took an aversion to him and accused him before Proitos. She was the daughter of Iobates, king of Lycia. Proitos committed the execution of vengeance to his father-in-law and sent Bellerophon to Iobates. Contrary to expectations, Bellerophon was victorious over the Chimaira, the Solymoi, and the Amazons and compelled the respect of Iobates: from him he received the hand of his daughter and half of his kingdom.

Bellerophon was the father of Isander, Hippolochos, and Laodameia. Hippolochos had a son, Glaukos; Laodameia had borne Sarpedon to Zeus. In the *Iliad* Sarpedon and Glaukos lead the Lycian contingent, the most solid support of the Trojan forces, the "bulwark of Iliion" (XVI, 541). Glaukos serves as second-in-command to his cousin, and only receives the title of commander of the Lycian warriors after the death of Sarpedon.

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The "god-like" Sarpedon stands by Hektor in the battle led by Diomedes (V-VI). Tlepolemos defies him, Tlepolemos who is the only son of Herakles who figures in the Trojan War, while Sarpedon is the only son of Zeus who does. He kills Tlepolemos after having been wounded in the left thigh by the ash spear of his adversary: Zeus has intervened to save his son. Hektor has Sarpedon set down at the foot of the magnificent oak of Zeus (V, 693).

To carry the attack to the walls of the Greeks (XII), Sarpedon joins Glaukos and Asteropaios, "the best after him," and accomplishes feats of valor which aid Hektor to breach the rampart. In the battle of Book XVI, he opposes Patroklos. Zeus knows that his son is condemned; he sheds for him alone the rain of blood which serves as a prelude to great massacres. Indeed, Sarpedon is then struck dead by Patroklos. He bequeaths his powers to Glaukos who has been wounded by Teukros. Apollo comforts Glaukos so that he can "fight for Sarpedon." Around his body the struggle begins over which Zeus spreads a "ghastly night." Nevertheless, the Greeks seize the corpse and strip it. Zeus preserves it from their ravages, however, washes it, anoints it with ambrosia, and hands it over to Hypnos and Thanatos that they may convey it to Lycia where his brothers and relatives will be able to bury it: a mere formula, since Sarpedon has no brothers, and only late legend attributes children to him.

Such is the account of the *Iliad*, where legendary elements are subordinated to a chivalrous epic. Zeus weeps a rain of blood (XVI, 459) which plays no role in the succession of events, any more than the one he pours out at the commencement of the mighty deeds of Agamemnon (XI, 53). Nor do the combatants seem to notice the darkness which falls upon the battle and the removal of the corpse. All this is a purely literary supernaturalism. On the other hand, two scholiasts have touched upon a curious feature of the legend, which merits being studied.

"How does it happen," asks Eustathius (p. 894, XII, 101), "that it is Sarpedon and not Glaukos who commands the Lycians? Glaukos is by descent from his father of a royal race of men; Sarpedon is only the son of Laodameia, the sister of Isander and Hippolochos, all three the children of Bellerophon. One explains the affair as the result of an honor done to Laodameia. Her brothers, in conflict on the matter of the kingship, each mistrust the other's ability to shoot an arrow through a ring (*δακτύλιος*) placed upon the breast of a child extended on its back. Their sister provides them with her own son for the feat."

The scholiast Townley upon the same passage, while also elliptical

and perhaps mutilated, allows us to complete in part the note of Eustathius:

Why does Sarpedon command and not Glaukos? Is it that the brothers, in conflict for the kingship, each mistrust the other's ability to shoot an arrow through a ring placed upon the breast of a child lying on its back, and that their sister provides them with her own son for the feat, while theirs are withheld by their wives? Or rather because the descendants of a sister, a woman of loose life, are not at all illegitimate, as would be the case if a wife were involved?<sup>1</sup>

Examined together these notes speak very obscurely, first of a trial, and then of a principle of matrilinear succession formulated, moreover, in terms of patriarchal right: the daughter transmits titles and goods to the son, whoever his father may be. Sarpedon is always described as the son of Zeus, without indication of his supposed father, which the ancient commentator explains by saying that his mother had wrongfully allowed herself to be seduced.

Bachofen has made use of this curious story in his chapter in *Mutterrecht* on the matriarchy in ancient Lycia. He adds to it the numerous witnesses who, from Herodotus to Nicholas of Damascus, affirm that the Lycians designate themselves through the name of the mother; that someone asked about his kindred locates himself in his mother's line of descent and enumerates her ancestresses; that in the case of an uneven marriage the children take the status of the mother; and that an inheritance is awarded to girls in preference to boys.<sup>2</sup> Bellerophon, he concludes, closes the matriarchal era by defeating the Amazons, who represent "the greatest debasement of feminine right" (*höchste Entartung des Weibesrechtes*). Laodameia is the last of the princesses destined to prevail over her brothers. Henceforth, the right of the father will take precedence over that of the mother.

These conclusions are assuredly both too extensive and at the same time too elementary. But even if the vast constructions of Bachofen have proved themselves to be weak, one cannot too greatly admire his inspired divination in the matter of symbols. Beneath the incoherent redaction of Eustathius (he does not seem to have known the other scholiast), he has clearly distinguished, in the image of the ring pierced by the arrow, the equivalent of the *titulus femineus* which results in the selection of the boy Sarpedon and, in the anecdote, a figurative expression of "the fundamental idea of maternal right represented in

<sup>1</sup> ἢ ἐπεὶ ἀδελφῆς καὶ μοιχευομένης οὐ νοθεύεται τὸ γένος ἀλλὰ γυναικὸς;

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, I, 173; Nicholas of Damascus, Muller, F.H.G., V, 461, fr. 129 = Jacoby, F. gr. H. 103 K. Ernst Kernemann has gathered all the texts in *Die Stellung der Frau in der vorgriechischen Mittelmeerkultur*, Orient u. Antike 4 (Heidelberg, 1927).

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her bodily sexuality." He does not go further than this. He has not attempted to isolate the elements of the narrative. Satisfied with having recognized in the ring a symbol of the feminine essence to which Sarpedon owes his title, he has not wondered why Sarpedon receives a justification which at first sight seems extrinsic. "Der δακτύλιος, nicht der Pfeil entscheidet," he says.<sup>3</sup> But, even if it is the woman who transmits power, the man exercises it. Can one not find an explanation which gives full meaning to the arrow as well as to the ring?

GREAT DEEDS OF ARCHERS

How does Eustathius represent the scene that he describes? Sarpedon is lying on his back, like a woman in a bed. On his chest a ring stands upright which owes its equilibrium to the weight and support of its setting. If this is a genuine ring (and δακτύλιος has no other meaning<sup>4</sup>), the marksman would not be able to transfix it with his arrow. The arrow would not pass through, regardless of what the text may say (διατοξεύσαι), but would make the ring topple, thus placing the life of the child in danger.

An identical trial does not appear elsewhere. But there are trials which present analogous features.

One thinks immediately of the one which restores to Odysseus his double title of husband of Penelope and King of Ithaca. The account in the *Odyssey*, admirably composed, subjects two tests of similar meaning to a single end; and the juxtaposition alters the sense of the first, that of the strung bow, which in fact primarily concerns Telemachos. A son proves his legitimacy by showing himself capable of using the weapons of his father. Aegeus, leaving Aethra pregnant, placed his sword under a rock, asking her to send him their coming son when he would be able to lift up the rock and use the weapon (Plutarch, *Theseus*, 5-6). Among the Scythian triplets born from his union with the snake-woman, Heracles beforehand designates as king the one who will be able to draw his bow (Herodotus, IV, 8-10). On his fourth attempt, Telemachos would have succeeded in stringing the bow if Odysseus had not stopped him with a nod (XXI, 120). The trial of the son is turned aside: first, because the legitimacy of Telemachos has not been placed in doubt; second, because the father, and

<sup>3</sup> *Mutterrecht*, CLIII, p. 395 (1861 ed.): "Eine Erzählung die Eustath mitteilt gibt diesem Erbsystem einen symbolischen Ausdruck in welchem die Grundidee des Mutterrechtes in ihrer sinnlichen Geschlechtlichkeit zu erkennen ist." The book appeared when Freud was five years old; one may wonder if he ever read it.

<sup>4</sup> The sense is more restricted than that of the French *anneau*. They say *περιδέραιον*, *περιχέριον*, *περιβραχιόνιον*, *περισφύριον* to designate necklaces, bracelets, and ankle-belts.

the father alone, must emerge as the victor in the contest (a strict patriarchy forbids that there be more than one man at a time in a family); finally, the strung bow is a symbol of that virile power of which Odysseus must at this moment be the sole bearer.

Then Odysseus brings about a feat as impossible to imagine, as unrealizable, as that described by Eustathius. He shoots an arrow through the holes or the handles (*στειλαιαι*?) of twelve axes planted in a perfectly straight trench in such a way that a man seated on a stool is at the proper height to sight them. The arrow therefore must follow the axis of a long narrow cylinder. Whatever form and whatever position that one ascribes to the axes, the arrow would not be able to emerge from the other end.<sup>5</sup> The shot is purely metaphorical, without concrete reality.

The contest with the arrow has as its stake the hand of Penelope. It involves a sexual symbolism of which the Greeks were more or less consciously aware. This symbolism is brought out in the history of Sarpedon by the position of the boy lying on his back and by the use of the word *δακτύλιος*, which in medical vocabulary designates the *anus* (which is moreover nothing but the exact translation of it) and, by allusion, the *κρείς* in a passage of *Lysistrata* (416). The ambiguities of the *Proboulos* show that the Athenian listeners understood those that Rabelais placed in the ring of Hans Carvel. But the story of Sarpedon is the only one in which *sexual symbolism* and the theme of the *child in danger* appear together. One can trace the last of these in numerous legends.

Alkon, a companion of Herakles, one day sees his son Phaleros attacked by a serpent which surrounds him with its coils. Alkon was famous for the accuracy of his shooting. He had passed an arrow through the ring surmounting the helmet on the head of a soldier; he parted men's hair; his lance or his sword split blunted arrows. He killed the serpent without wounding the child, whom the Athenians later made the eponymous ancestor of Phaleron.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of the archer obliged to demonstrate his skill by risking the life of his son suddenly takes a new value in a series of legends which appear in the Germanic world beginning in the twelfth century. Nearly all are represented in the chronicles as events having happened some centuries ago. The first known version is perhaps that which figures in the tenth book of the *Historia Danica* of Saxo Grammaticus (died 1208). King Harald Blue-Tooth (died 987) knew that Toko, one

<sup>5</sup> A. D. Fraser, *Class. Weekly*, XXVI (1932), 25, speaks of all the interpretations which have been proposed.

<sup>6</sup> Val. Flaccus, I, 398; Apoll. of Rhodes, I, 97; Servius, *Ecl.* V, 2.

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of his archers, prided himself on shooting an apple off a tree at a hundred paces. The king required him to accomplish the feat with the apple being placed on the head of his son. Toko performed the task, but not without setting aside a second arrow with which he would have shot the king if he had been unfortunate enough to kill his own child. Odysseus also holds the arrows of his vengeance in reserve; but these have a significance considerably more grave when the archer has been obliged to endanger his own son. They also play a part in all the variants of the story. Toko then escapes from a storm by leaping from a boat onto a river bank. He leaves the service of the king in order to ally himself with his son Sveno, who—this detail at least is historical—revolted against Harald and killed him.

An analogous tale appears in the *Thidrekssaga* (ca. 1250). King Nidung imposes upon Egill, before granting him the liberation of his brother Volund, the same trial Harald required of Toko. In Norway, King Harald III, the Harsh, defeated with the bow by Heming, orders him to knock a hazelnut off the head of his brother. The hero is called Henneke Wulf in Holstein, William of Cloudesly in England, and Toell in Oesel Island in the Gulf of Riga. The *Iomvikings saga* sings of Palnatoki, a Danish archer of the end of the tenth century, who was exiled from his country after a trial and went to found Iomsburg in Pomerania. In a Finnish version it is the son who is obliged to place his father in danger.

The most ancient version, that of Saxo, already joins together the three themes destined to become famous in the legend of William Tell: the *great feat*, the *storm*, and the *leap*. As in the story of Alkon, the child is standing. The object aimed at is nearly always an apple. The author replaces it sometimes by a smaller object, in order to render the performance more astonishing. The victory of the archer consecrates the retaliation of a courageous man upon a tyrant who despises human dignity and feelings. This political aspect gave to the story the appearance of historical reality.

Tschudi (1505–72) in his *Schweizerchronik* has blended authentic fragments, popular traditions, and personal inventions. His biography of William Tell reconciles two traditions of rather different sort: on the one hand, a *Volkslied* of 1470, a *Volksspiel* of 1512, and the chronicle of Melchior Russ of Lucerne (1488), which presents Tell as the deliverer of the Swiss; on the other, a *Weisses Buch* of 1470 and the Lucerne chronicle of Petermann Etterlin (1507) in which it is Stauffacher who frees the cantons and federates them, while the good archer Tell plays only an episodic role. All the Swiss sources of Tschudi are thus older than the first edition of Saxo Grammaticus (1515).

Scarcely earlier than the Lucerne chronicles is the code of the inquisitors, the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*, edited at the request of Pope Innocent VIII by the Dominicans Institor and Sprenger (1484). Here one finds the story of the archer, but presented negatively. The authors devote a whole chapter (II, 16) to magic archers. They say that about 1420 a prince of the Rhine intrenched himself at Lendenbrunnen, from whence he terrorized the environs. He had in his service a prodigious archer named Puncker, who had obtained the aid of a demon by piercing the image of the Savior with three arrows. To requite him for having thus abjured the Trinity, the demon granted him upon every occasion three infallible arrows, the others depending solely upon his own ability. To test him, his master took hold of his son, placed a coin upon the beret of the child, and asked the father to hit the coin without touching the beret. Now (the text does not mention this) such silver coins bore a cross. The archer hesitated, fearing a trick of the devil that would ruin him (*ne per diabolum seduceretur in sui interitum*). Forced to shoot, he hit the mark, but like Toko and Tell, he saved the "arrow of vengeance."

Grimm briefly mentions the majority of these accounts and their partial correspondence with the story of Sarpedon, adding with his customary insight: "The myth as a whole reveals a deep and widely extensive rootage."<sup>7</sup> As related as its variants may appear, one must study separately the two meanings superimposed by the narrative of Eustathius.

1. *The nuptial ordeal*.—The feat of Odysseus restores to him his wife. It contains a symbolism so apparent that the poet did not attempt to reconcile it to physical verisimilitude. To be convinced of this, it suffices to compare his account with that of the chariot race in the *Electra* of Sophocles, where Orestes is supposed to have been killed: each detail in the drama can be stated precisely. Moreover, the bow plays a secondary role in the Trojan battles. It figures in the games in honor of Patroklos, but Teucer and Meriones alone excel at it. Dictys of Crete has them both vanquished by Odysseus, the trial of Ithaka having added a feature to the post-Homeric figure of the hero. The Greek athletic games in the historic era did not even include an archery contest.

The contest in the *Odyssey* has the semi-unreality of a fairy tale. It is pointless to go into its details, but it is necessary to interpret

<sup>7</sup>"Der ganze Mythos gibt eine tiefliegende, weitverbreitete Wurzel kund," *Deutsche Mythologie* (4th ed., 1875), I, 315. The *Motiv-Index* of Stith Thompson in the *Folklore Fellows Communications* unhappily does not allow the completion of Grimm's researches, because it records only tales as such, not historicized legends.

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them. Every Greek was aware of the sexual significance of a blow struck by a sword, by a spear, by an arrow. The images of the *furrow*, of the *plow*, and of the *fecundating wound* span the whole of the literature. The poets say that the arrow of Eros strikes the heart, that of a man as well as that of a woman; Euripides says that it springs from the eyes: but this is only a transposition into the realm of sentiment of what is first the very symbol of the creative act. The *Odyssey* allows this symbol to appear, but only within the halo of Odysseus' feat.

It crops up also in the *swayamvara* of the Draupadi of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>9</sup> King Drupada has a very stout bow made, impossible to bend, and sets a mark upon a target suspended in the air. If the arrow traverses the hole, the target falls to the ground. Arjuna is successful after some episodes curiously like those of the *Odyssey*. The act of stringing the bow bears explicit witness to the muscular power of the hero, and more indirectly, to his dynamic virility. It is the same in the scene of the *Rāmāyana* where Rama conquers Sitā by bending the gigantic bow of Shiva, which eight hundred men bring forth on a wagon. In the *Lalita Vistara*, the fabulous biography of the Buddha composed by his followers in the North, when Gopā is engaged in competition, the Bodhisattva likewise happens to stretch a bow that no one had ever been able to lift, that of his grandfather Sinhahanu. By so doing, he proves both that he is worthy of his ancestors and that he is deserving of the contested fiancée. As in the *Rāmāyana*, the interest is shifted from the arrow to the bow itself.

The legends perforce assign a secondary meaning to an act which, taken in itself, symbolizes sexual possession. In practice, they employ the symbols as material data. The bow and spear are seen as symbolic only through analysis; in the story, they are weapons of war and nothing more. Their latent value appears only in the associations in which the unconscious of the narrator and of his public betrays itself. They appear thus in the rites where the javelin figures as the auxiliary of the male act, acting favorably upon it through simple imitative magic.

During the course of the ceremonies of the royal marriage in India, the husband shoots an arrow toward each of the cardinal points, then one toward the zenith: Arjuna has five arrows in his quiver, of which only one passes through the target. The hair of a Roman bride was cut with the bent end of a spear which was called the *caelibaris hasta*. Now the spear of the lightly armed Roman soldier was a weapon to

<sup>9</sup> J. Przyluski (*Journal Asiatique*, CCV [1924], 101) shows clearly that the name is improper; the *swayamvara* is the choice of a husband by the girl herself. Here, as in the *Odyssey*, she is assigned to the victor in a tournament; though, again as in the *Odyssey*, she confers here hereditary goods.



be thrown quite as an arrow. In the eighty-seventh *Roman Question* Plutarch proposes several edifying justifications of this custom. Does it signify that the first wives were conquered? Or that a married woman must renounce frivolous adornments? Or that the marriage will only be broken by death? Festus (62, 16) adds that the spear must have been drawn from the body of a gladiator beaten and killed: that means that the woman will be bound to her husband as the spearhead had been to the body of the gladiator; or else that she seeks the patronage of Juno of the Spear; or finally, that she wishes to bear a brave son. Festus, like Plutarch, seems deliberately to avert the most simple explanation: to realize that the cropping of hair by the curved head of a spear—itsself perhaps bloodstained—prefigures defloration and, consequently, prepares for and eases it. Modern students (even Frazer in his commentary on the *Fasti* of Ovid, II, 560) see in the rite a precaution against demons. Bachofen was far more perspicacious. How can one be mistaken on the meaning of the *caelibaris hasta* when one remembers that, on the eve of their wedding, young Roman maidens sat upon a simulacrum of the phallus, piously kept in their bed chamber? And that Pliny writes (XXVIII, 34):

They guarantee that, in a difficult labor, delivery may be brought about immediately if over the roof which shelters the mother one throws a stone or projectile selected among those which have killed three times and always on the first shot, specifically, a human being, next a wild boar, then a she-bear. The result is better still with a javelin (*hasta velitaris*) drawn from the body of a man, provided that it hasn't touched the earth. If one carries it into the house, it will have the same effect. Similarly, according to Orpheus and Archelaus, if one slips into a bed some arrows extracted from a body, provided that they haven't touched the earth, they are an amatory charm (*amatorium*) for those who lie there.

I have gathered elsewhere some examples of censured legends.<sup>9</sup> On the same basis, one could speak of touched-up interpretations, those which declined to lead to the level of consciousness the latent content of a rite, as obvious as this content may appear to us, in order to find in it a historical or a moral signification, instead of a sexual value. The *Greek and Roman Questions* of Plutarch are full of substitutions of this kind.

Like Draupadi, like Penelope, Iole—the daughter of Eurytos, the king of Œchalia—is the stake of a tournament. In it the bow of Herakles is victorious, but Eurytos denies his daughter to the hero, who declares war upon him, kills his son Iphitos and makes Iole his captive

<sup>9</sup> Those which concern matricide: Marie Delcourt, *Oreste et Alcmon* (1959), p. 55.

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(Apollodorus, *Bibl.* II, 6, 1). It is perhaps the only case, together with the episode in the *Odyssey*, where the wedding contest in Greece includes the shooting of the bow. The fiancée is generally won by a race on foot or by chariot (Danaids, Hippodameia), trials which are part of the sports competitions in the historical epoch. On the other hand, arrows appear in the legendary setting of many illustrious marriages. The poets have reduced them to being the accessories of a battle. How many marriages are celebrated among bloody brawls!

At the wedding feast of Theseus and Phaedra, the Amazon Antiope, bow in hand, attacks the guests; she is killed by Herakles (Plutarch, *Theseus*, 28). At the marriage festivities of Pirithoos, the Centaurs led by Eurytion threaten the fiancée and are repulsed by the Lapiths with a rain of arrows. The same Eurytion seizes Dexamenos' daughter Deianeira, who was plighted to Herakles; the latter kills him as he killed Nessos, who menaced the other Deianeira, daughter of Oineus (Hyginus, *Fabula*, 30). In all these cases the struggle results from amorous rivalry. Antiope claims Theseus, who was her lover. The arrow, a symbol of virility, is hers by virtue of the reversal of roles which characterizes amazonism.

In some rather elaborate narratives, where analysis alone can decipher the latent content, romantic interest makes us neglect the symbolic value of arrows. This appears, however, in an allusive fashion, at the beginning and end of the trial of Odysseus. The bow of the hero comes from Iphitos: the name alone recalls to the listeners the most dramatic of all nuptial contests. And, at the moment of the blow, the pretender Antinoos recalls very confusedly the death of Eurytion. There are some infinitely revealing associations here, in which philologists rarely hesitate to see interpolations.

2. *The wager of the archer.*—There is missing in the nuptial trials a characteristic episode of the legend of Sarpedon, that of the endangered child. It figures, on the other hand, in that of Alkon and in the medieval variants which culminate in the tale of William Tell.

The stories of the archer center around a wager so dangerous that it is connected with the ordeal. In the ordeal, the fate of a human being depends upon the intervention of the gods; in the feat of the archer, it depends upon a purely human ability, but one which owes its success to supernatural aid. In the success of Puncker, the *Mallet of the Sorcerers* sees the work of the devil, just as the ancient would have seen it in the work of a god: the Christian transposition simply underlines the miraculous element in the result.

The one who emerges victorious in the ordeal is assured of good fortune. In the wager of the archer, the choice affects the father and the

son at the same time, who are but one and the same person in fact, criminally self-opposed by the inhuman act of a tyrant. Alkon was more famous than his son Phaleros; but it is the latter who figures among the Argonauts, bearing engraved upon his shield the feat of his father (Val. Flaccus, *Argonautica*, I, 398); and Manilius in his *Astronomica* (V, 305) marks precisely the meaning of the feat by saying that Phaleros came from out of it as from a second birth. And Saxo praises the heroism of the son of Toko, who during the course of the trial never ceased to encourage his father.

All of these values of the ordeal appear sharply and emphatically in the *William Tell* of Schiller. Rosselmann, the priest, says after the blow: "*The archer has aimed well. But woe unto the one who required him to tempt God!*" (III, 3). And Stauffacher says to Gessler, as the latter orders the arrest of Tell: "*My Lord, you would dare treat thus a man that the hand of God has just preserved before everyone's eyes?*" The child Walter plays a more important role in the play than in the sources. He inadvertently provokes Gessler by boasting to him of the ability of his father. During the trial, he conducts himself like the son of Toko, refuses to have his eyes bound and defies the tyrant, certain that his father will aim well: he represents the unconscious courage of Tell. It is he that is blessed by the dying old Baron of Attinghausen, the personification of the Swiss aristocracy, on his death bed. The explicit psychology of Schiller is naïve and simplistic, but the outcroppings of the unconscious are in his works extremely rich. In this drama he shows a judgment of God which extends to a whole country, beginning from a simple and pacific man, involved despite himself in a revolt to which he remained at first an outsider. A fisherman, indignant upon hearing that the Chosen One of God is at the mercy of the tyrant, cries that at present a new deluge has but to submerge the homes of men, evoking thus the Great Ordeal at the very moment when Tell escapes for the third time, and by his victorious leap gives birth to the new Switzerland (IV, 1). Bounding from the boat unto the cliff, he first kisses the earth, like Odysseus landing in Phaeacia.<sup>10</sup> These effective convergences have given to a simple story the power of a myth. Around 1860, J. E. Kopp was burned in effigy on the mount Rütli for having shown the legendary character of William Tell

#### THE PROMOTION OF SARPEDON

This lengthy excursus has been necessary to fill a lacuna in the note of Eustathius. It said that he will be king who will have passed an

<sup>10</sup> F. Lot, *Baiser la terre* (Annales de l'Institut de phil. et d'hist. orientales et slaves [Brussels, 1949]), IX, 435, shows that the ancient rite was authentically conserved into the Middle Ages.

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arrow through a ring balanced upon the breast of a child, and that neither of the two brothers wished to sacrifice his own son. In general, one understands that each of them claims the son of the other as the victim. But the scholiast of the *Iliad* indicates that each of them must jeopardize the life of his own child. Isander and Hippolochos clash with their wives; the father is quite willing to place his son in danger if it will gain him the crown; the mother refuses. The sister then offers her son.

In a matrilinear regime, the woman is not dependent upon her husband but upon her brothers. The wives of Isander and Hippolochos have neither the duty nor the right to sacrifice the children whose guardians are the maternal uncles. On the other hand, Laodameia is responsible only to herself and to her brothers for her child. On the same basis, Antigone renounces her marriage with Haemon to bury Polyneikes; Eriphyle sacrifices her husband Amphiaraios to the interests of her brother Adrastos; Althaea causes the destruction of Meleager because he has killed her brothers; Alkmene marries Amphitryon upon the condition that he avenge her brothers, and this although he has murdered her father, Elektryon. These are the traces of an ancient law. Another vestige is that Sarpedon is the son of Zeus, that is, the bearer of a royalty that he acquires from no known father; this the scholiast on the *Iliad* naïvely translates by saying that Laodameia was only a "girl of loose life," a *μοιχευομένη*.

But in this legend, of which there remains so little, the choice of Sarpedon is resolved twice: a first time by maternal right, which Bachofen has too quickly judged sufficient; a second time by a trial in which the *titulus femineus* appears only as a symbol, and which has certainly, independently of it, an autonomous value. This value is difficult to define, because the feat itself seems nowhere to have an exact equivalent.

The bow-shooting figures among the ritual acts that the Hindu sovereign must execute.<sup>11</sup> In the legends, it appears linked with a nuptial trial. At the tournament for Draupadī, Arjuna carries five arrows: one traverses the target; the four others, of which there is no question, should probably be dispatched toward the four cardinal points, of which they symbolize the conquest. There is nothing similar in any Greek legend. On the other hand, more than one story relating to the Orient attests the royal value of the bow.

The bow is connected with a trial of legitimacy in the story of the Scythian children of Herakles (Herodotus, IV, 8-10), in which the victor becomes king, thanks less perhaps to the feat than to a particu-

<sup>11</sup> Masson-Oursel, *L'Inde antique et la civilisation indienne* (1933), p. 105.

lar fashion of holding and handling the weapon. The story of Cambyses, as Herodotus tells it (III, 21, 30, 35), has a clearer meaning. While in Egypt, Cambyses considers an expedition against the Ethiopians. He sends them, along with some presents, some men from Elephantine who speak their language. In the purest "good-barbarian style," the king of the Ethiopians ridicules the ambassadors with arguments of natural wisdom which would have enchanted Thomas More and Diderot. He sends back with them a very large and tough bow, advising Cambyses to renounce attacking the Ethiopians if he is not capable of stringing the bow. Now, of all the Persians in Egypt with Cambyses, only one is capable of bending the bow the breadth of two fingers: this is Smerdis, his younger brother. Cambyses, further disturbed by a dream, sees in this gesture a presage: Smerdis wishes to dethrone him. Immediately, he sends him back to Susa, where he has him murdered by the faithful Prexaspes, whom he favors among all his servants.

Hence the story takes a new beginning. The son of Prexaspes is the cup-bearer of the king. One day Prexaspes says to the king that the Persians reproach him in but one respect, that he is too fond of wine. Cambyses wagers that he will prove his self-possession by striking his small cup-bearer squarely in the heart with an arrow, which he does; and Prexaspes tells him that Apollo himself could not have shot straighter. There we have a sort of reversal of the story of Tell. It is the tyrant who proves his skill, not in sparing the child but, on the contrary, in an attack on its life. The father does not rebel, either then or afterward. The king concludes from his masterful stroke that he is qualified to remain king of the Persians.

The interpretation of a historicized tale is always difficult, because the narrator alters the elements that he no longer understands, both to render them credible and to subject them to what he knows concerning the result of the events. Herodotus does not help us to answer the question that must here be plainly put:

*Does the royal tittle result solely from the skill of the archer or rather does the sacrifice of the child have a positive value?*

In other words, in the legend of Tell as in that of Sarpedon, is the danger undergone by the child a simple narrative happening, what we should call a "suspense," to make the trial more interesting? Or does it represent the last stage of a more ancient story, in which a king immolates a child in order to appropriate its vital energies? Is it a romantic addition or rather the adulterated remainder from an archaic foundation? The second hypothesis is not at all improbable.

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F.-J. Dölger and Jean Hubaux<sup>12</sup> have assembled some curious documents concerning sacrificed children, killed to obtain signs of the future, and, more frequently, to act upon the future by preventing the cessation of a regime or a reign. These acts were connected with the emperors Didius Julianus, Heliogabalus, and Valerian, the officer of Valens; they extend from the end of the second to the end of the fourth century. Augustine (*City of God*, XVIII, 53–54) must exonerate Peter from having practiced this magical infanticide upon an infant of one year, in order to obtain for Christianity a Great Year of 365 years. The same Augustine (*De haeresi*, 26–28) accuses the Montanists of eating a Eucharistic bread made of flour and of the blood taken from a child. If the child dies, they consider him a martyr; if he survives the bloodletting, they make him a grand-priest. The sentiments which arise around the threatened child are included very nicely in this alternative.

It is always dangerous to compare religious facts separated by large stretches of space and time; and still more so when they are few in number. Ritual infanticide has left both few historical recollections and few traces in the myths, probably because it soon appeared revolting. The Scandinavians knew, however, the story of King Aunn of Uppsala, who sacrificed one after the other of his sons to Odin to prolong his own life. At the moment when he was going to immolate the last, the Swedes stopped him and he died. S. Eitrem has compared this tale (born in the very country where the Saga of the Archer has flourished in numerous variants) with the story of Kronos, who swallowed each of his children at their birth, until the time when he was forced to yield the kingship to the last.<sup>13</sup>

The Scandinavians have left to the act of King Aunn its purely magical character. This character never appears in the numerous Greek legends where a king kills his son or sons. The murder is imposed by a god, as in the story of Athamas, in which the eldest son of the family, in the epoch of Herodotus, was perhaps still immolated to Zeus Laphystios.<sup>14</sup> Or else the father acted in a fit of madness, like

<sup>12</sup> F.-J. Dölger, *Sacramentum infanticidii*, in *Antike und Christentum*, IV (1934), 188–228; Jean Hubaux, *Rome et Véies* (1958), p. 20. Add to the passages that they cite Lampride, *Heliogabale*, 8. Heliogabalus sacrifices noble and beautiful children, who still have their father and mother, those whom the cult has selected as celebrants, as well as those whose vital energy was the richest.

<sup>13</sup> J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (2d ed.; 1956–57), pp. 284, 290, 433, 559; S. Eitrem, *König Aunn in Upsala* (Festschrift H. Falk [Oslo, 1927]), pp. 245–61. The psychological components of the legend of Ugolino deserve being studied.

<sup>14</sup> Herod., VII, 197; cf. Apoll., *Bibl.*, I, 9, and the note of Frazer. The theme of infanticide has curiously proliferated in the legend of Athamas.

Herakles. Sometimes also the archaic justification appeared in a rationalized form: the father acquires a victory with the life of one of his children. In this case it is almost always a girl (the daughters of Erechtheus, of Leos, of Agamemnon): a concession to the ideas of a later epoch in which the king cannot renounce his son without renouncing in the same stroke the permanence of his kingdom (thus Creon, in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, refused to redeem Thebes at the price of Menoeceus), while daughters, whose life was without value, often served as a *Bauopfer* in real life. And, in many stories, the hero, like Petit Poucet, is saved because a girl is substituted for him. The substitution of the girl for the boy proves, moreover, that one was no longer conscious of the archaic meaning of the sacrifice, in which the father must absorb in himself the energies and duration of life of the most vigorous of his offspring. A sacrifice already agreed to by the father (Abraham, Athamas, Idomeneus, Agamemnon) is occasionally interrupted and the child saved at the last moment. We have there a further resemblance between the mitigated versions of ritual infanticide and the trial of the archer.

The trial is always ordered by a tyrant. The sacrifice is always a young boy: the being whose vigor an aging king would most keenly desire to obtain for himself. Cambyses himself kills the son of Prexaspes, a child for which he cares, since he made him his cup-bearer. Once the child is dead, Cambyses feels his kingship is strengthened, and Prexaspes bows before him. One is tempted to see here a debasement of an analogous theme in the story told around 1175 by the Persian poet Farid Uddin Attâr. He relates that a king placed an apple upon the head of his favorite slave and, with each shot, split the apple with his arrow; the boy became ill from fright.<sup>16</sup> The story is anterior to all the German variants of the Saga of the Archer, where the apple again figures; apples are a symbol of rejuvenation, of rebirth, in every mythology, but especially in that of the ancient Germans.

The king nourishes himself with the substance of a being who takes the place of a son and whom he destroys; such is the schema that we may assume from tales in which a double modification takes place: first, the despot interposes someone between his victim and himself; second, he allows the victim a chance for survival. It is futile to wonder how and why the archer father has come upon the scene. All we know

<sup>16</sup> Garcin de Tassy, *La Pensée phil. et rel. chez des Persans, d'après le Mantic Attâr* (1860), p. 37. Quite as the nuptial ordeal, this Persian tale involves a very clear sexual symbol which is lacking in the archer's wager: the slave is the king's minion.

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is that from that moment interest shifts onto him, and all the feelings that the judgment of God call into existence have crystallized around the feat. Moreover, these tales, born in the midst of paganism, are known to us through Christian versions, dating from an epoch in which the ethic of the free man was defined in the West. This is why the king is invariably deceived, condemned; the one who is promoted, together with his father, is the child saved by a miracle—the one whom the Montanists, according to Augustine, had made a grand-priest.

These comparisons do not enable us to reconstruct the pre-Homeric legend of Sarpedon, but this can be speculated:

Isander and Hippolochos, in order to reinforce their royal power, each prepare to risk the life of their own son: if the child dies, his energies will pass on to his father; if he survives, the royal prestige will be that much greater. Their wives prevent them from following through. Laodameia offers the son that she has borne to Zeus.<sup>16</sup> The trial takes place. Sarpedon is saved and destined for a high fame; he will eclipse his cousins. Of these, we know only the son of Hippolochos, the charming Glaukos.

The ancients would therefore have justified the royalty of Sarpedon by two different methods. The trial of the bow, which moreover has as its center a maternal image, was perhaps added when the right of inheritance on the mother's side ceased to be admitted. Many legendary acts have thus two or three determining factors; when one inspects them closely, one sees that the surplus arises because one of the motives was no longer understood. This in no way signifies that the superadded motive belongs to a less archaic legendary stratum, but one must admit that it had retained more power of suasion.

#### SARPEDON THE HERO

The dead Sarpedon is carried away by Hypnos and Thanatos, who take the body to Lycia in order that those near to him may accord him the burial and the honors which revert to the dead. The same privilege falls to Memnon, the son of Aurora, returned from the aid of Troy with the Ethiopian contingent. This is why Polygnotus has represented them together in the porch of the Cnidians at Delphi, where he painted the heroes in the outer tomb. Sarpedon hides his face in his hands; Memnon places his arm on the shoulder of his friend. We know the work of Polygnotus only through the description of Pausanias (X, 31, 5). But we have some admirable vases on which one

<sup>16</sup> Another Laodameia, the nurse of Orestes, sacrifices her son to save the young prince. The account is probably found in Stesichore (Pherecydes, *F. gr. H.*, 3, 134).



sees Hypnos and Thanatos transporting the inert body of the young hero. The funerary deities are winged and, what is strange, armed and helmeted. This remains unexplained.

If the *Ethiops* were not lost, we would better understand why the ancients have paired Memnon and Sarpedon.<sup>17</sup> Both are great because of their mothers; both were thought to survive in the earth, Memnon in the form of a black stone (Philostratus, *Imagines*, 1, 7), Sarpedon as an oracular god who responds to his consultants by sending them dreams. It is nowhere said that Sarpedon disappeared into the earth like Amphiaraios. Homer, on the contrary, speaks of his funeral. But the presence of Hypnos beside Thanatos is perhaps a vestige of a different legend. It is necessary to recall that although William Tell died at Schächenbach, this does not prevent him from sleeping in a cavern of the lake of the Four Cantons, from which he will one day rise again, like Wieland, the Volund of the *Thidrekssaga*, saved by his brother Egill, the good archer?

The cult reveals in Sarpedon a chthonian god. Several places in Thrace and Asia Minor bear his name. Tertullian reported an oracular cult of his in the Troad (*De Anima*, 46). Strabo mentions (XIV, 19) a sanctuary and an oracle of Artemis Sarpedonia in Cilicia, where inspired prophets practiced divination. One can see neither what connection there may be between Artemis and Sarpedon, nor, furthermore, why the goddess, in the *Iliad* (VI, 205), is angry with Laodameia and kills her. Near Seleucia in Cilicia was located an oracle of Apollo Sarpedonios: we may be sure that Apollo is superimposed there, as he has been elsewhere, upon a local, more ancient hero, who divulged his counsels through *incubatio*, by way of dreams. The name of Apollo seems to have disappeared rather soon. The sanctuary bore only the name of Sarpedon (or Sarpedonius, the adjective having been taken for a substantive) when St. Thecla sought refuge there. She silenced the oracle and healed the sick. This is at least the story told in *De Vita et miraculis divae Theclae libri II* by a certain Basilius, who describes himself as the Bishop Basil of Seleucia and must have been a priest of the fifth century. Thus one sees in succession on the same spot first a chthonian cult, then an Olympian cult which does not succeed in eliminating the first, lastly a Christian cult.<sup>18</sup>

This *Vita* describes also how Sarpedon came to be established on the cape which bears his name. This account, based upon local tradi-

<sup>17</sup> Memnon appears also to match Achilles rather closely: both are helped by their mothers, their human fathers counting for less than their divine mothers.

<sup>18</sup> Texts *apud* Reinhold Köhler, *Rhein. Mus.*, XIV (1859), 471-75; see also Lud. Deubner, *De Incubatione* (1900), p. 100, and Ernst Lucius, *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkults in der Christlichen Kirche* (1904), p. 212.

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tions, makes of Sarpedon the son of Zeus and Europa, a variant already attested in the Hesiodic poems. Sarpedon in this case is the brother of Minos and of Rhadamanthys; he leaves Crete and comes to Asia Minor where he forms an alliance with his uncle Cilix, the eponym of Cilicia, and becomes king of the country (Apollodorus, *Bibl.*, III, 1, 1). Zeus then grants him the privilege of living three generations. This last detail is an expedient of mythographers in order to assemble in a single biography episodes which are contemporaneous, some from Cadmus, the others from the Trojan War. Thus Herodotus makes of Sarpedon the son of Europa, and of Lycia a Cretan colony, adding (I, 173) that Lycia is governed by laws related to both those of Crete and those of Caria, countries equally rich in survivals from a matrilinear regime. Let us remark that, in the Cretan version as in the Homeric, Sarpedon is a *parthenios*, bereft of paternal ancestry. Dictys of Crete is ashamed for him and assigns him a phantom Xanthos for a father: a general must be of good family. The Cretan version places Sarpedon in the service of Cilix. The latter's father is Agenor, who parts with his sons in sending them in search of their sister Europa, as if this daughter were worth more to him than his masculine descendants. In the *Vita* appears, in a confused and altered form, a new detail: Cilix kills his nephew, whom he has not recognized. It is curious that these artificial inventions, designed to explain the names of places and to reconcile disparate details, have rediscovered an important element of matrilinear law, the dependence of the nephew with respect to the maternal uncle, a dependence which, in the Greek legends, often corresponds to a marked hostility.

Other survivals crop up in the legend of Bellerophon, the grandfather of Sarpedon; in their family tree, they alone bear names which are in no way explained by the Greek. Proitos, who thinks himself insulted by Bellerophon, does not exact his own revenge, but sends him to Iobates, as if the offended wife depended still upon her father rather than upon her husband. Iobates does not kill Bellerophon, but imposes upon him three trials, to which normally he must succumb: a recourse to the ordeal arises generally from a fear of shedding blood, which fear is foreign to the heroes of Homer. Iobates evidences toward him a great ingratitude. Bellerophon then invokes Poseidon, who inundates the plain of Xanthos. It is the women who avert a calamity. They employ the same means as Queen Mugain and her followers to disarm the raging Cuchulainn, who wishes to seize the fortress of Emain and kill everyone; as the Gallic women of Gergovia employ to make their assailants retreat (Caesar, *De Bello Gall.*, VII, 47): they perform the gesture of Baubo and reveal their nudity. The

*anasyrma* overcomes Bellerophon, who turns away and flees while the flood withdraws. Plutarch, after this version, supplies another, in which the sexual aspect is revealed only in a symbol: Bellerophon breaks a natural dam; the Lycians supplicate him in vain, but he yields to the prayers of the women (*De virtute Mulierum*, 9, p. 247 F). Finally he becomes king by marrying the daughter of Iobates. One should not assign an excessive importance to the trees which appear around him in the Homeric setting: the oak of Zeus which shelters the dead Sarpedon, first wounded by an ash spear, the admirable verse of Glaukos on the generations of plant life. But the tree—and the apple—are feminine symbols, as Bachofen had clearly seen.

We remember the interpretation of Bachofen. Bellerophon, he says, conquers in the person of the Amazons a "gynecocracy" in its aggressive form, immoderate and censured by nature, though he bows before the feminine furrow: the times are ripe for the accession of a patriarchal society based upon marriage. The legends conform poorly to such a systematic sociology. And if Bellerophon shrinks before the naked Lycian women, it is from terror rather than from respect. One must make these reservations, yet recognize that one never opens *Mutterrecht* without finding there enlightening observations. One would have quite astonished Bachofen by telling him that this work of a jurist-archeologist would be valued one day for its inspired psychological intuitions, and that he would be a precursor in a domain which to him was foreign. But when we examine close up one of the myths that he has deciphered, we discover there superimposed determinative factors, more numerous, more interfused than he could have imagined.