

## THE WESTERN "*PHURBU*"

By François Pannier

Using the term *phurbu* to describe certain ritual objects used outside the Himalayan context is certainly provocative.

However, having worked in the field of Himalayan shamanism for many years, and having written a number of texts on the subject, we have sometimes found ourselves confronted by Western objects or statues that display certain arresting elements that have given us cause to reflect on the question of whether or not it might be appropriate to do so.

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These objects, the subject of this article, are difficult to date, were produced over a relatively extended period of time, and underwent evolutionary processes in connection with religious contexts, as Christianity gradually integrated what were initially pagan elements.

As Celtic and Gallic civilizations intentionally ignored written language, we were obliged to rely on later texts, among them those of Julius Caesar.

Generally second hand accounts, these texts are often far from convincing and refer to gods like Jupiter and Mercury while completely ignoring both maleficent and beneficent local divinities. One must recognize that the Gallic pantheon is particularly dense. Indian lineages seem clear and simple by comparison. As a result of this fact, Julius Caesar, who undoubtedly did not make any attempt to go too deeply into the subject, was content with just creating a resume that that was intelligible to the Romans.

Illustration:

Detail of the Arco I menhir statue

Riva, Trentino, Italy

3rd millennium

Using the term *phurbu* thus allows us to define and set apart the objects used within a ritual framework, and to distinguish them from the objects defined by words like dagger, knife or sword, which tend to refer to utilitarian objects of daily life.

The rituals in which they were used, in which druids played a central role, would have displayed multiple influences, undoubtedly at least partly those of shamans.

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## ***The Valley of Marvels***

A very interesting book by Roland Dufrenne<sup>1</sup> decrypts the designs engraved on the rocks of the Mount Bègo region through the lens of Indo-European mythology. This ensemble constitutes one of the most important manifestations of alpine rock art, the other being at Valcamonica in Italy. These engravings were created between the Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze age, which is to say between 3300 and 1800BC.

Albeit by way of different reasoning, we sometimes arrived at conclusions identical to those reached by Roland Dufrenne. That, for instance, was the case for the rapprochement he makes between engraved daggers and the *sphya* and *phurbu* on page 127, and in our Toit du Monde newsletter number 22.<sup>2</sup>

The dagger design is one of many one notes. Plates 20<sup>3</sup> and 21<sup>4</sup> show a large number of these objects, sometimes accompanied by their "baldrics", to use the term the author prefers, although "sheaths" seems more appropriate to me. These drawings were obtained either in the Valley of Marvels or at Italian Chalcolithic sites. The nature of the weapons depicted, excluding the spears and swords, allow the author to date these engravings to between 2400 and 1700BC, the period during which the site became ritualized.

The novelty of these weapons is associated with the discoveries of metallurgy and the magic that resulted from it. From its beginnings, the foundry was associated with fire and was a magical place that was observed in different forms, and especially in connection with Vulcan. Weapons served not only utilitarian, military or practical purposes, but played a role as ritual, apotropaic, or symbolic instruments. This is apparent in a certain number of engraved designs which it seems logical to associate with shamanic rituals.

These are of course simple suppositions made as a result of noting similarities with rituals described elsewhere, but the configuration of these designs does exclude the possibility that they might be insignificant. The local context forbids us to believe that they could have had anything but a magical function.

This is the case for the engraving **(1)** in which a person with sexual characteristics is seen brandishing a dagger in the course of a ritual. In a depiction of combat the dagger would not be represented vertically.

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<sup>1</sup> La vallée des merveilles et les mythologies indo-européennes - Essai d'interprétation des gravures rupestres de la région du mont Bègo - Studi Camuni - Volume XVII - 1997 - Editions du Centre - C.H.A.A.M.

<sup>2</sup> Toit du Monde Newsletter #22, September 2017; *Notes complémentaires sur le phurbu et ses origines (Additional Notes on the Phurbu and Its Origins)* by François Pannier.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, page 122.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, page 128.

The "sorcerer" in the Valley of Marvels (2) also can only be viewed as performing a ritual. Is he doing so in a shamanic context? Everything points to the idea that that is the case.

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Another engraving could also be interpreted as having a shamanic basis.

An object seen on its right side appears to be a shaman's drum (3). As they are very abstract, these designs could of course be interpreted in a number of ways. There are nonetheless enough elements that support the idea that a rapprochement can legitimately be made.

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Jean Clottes<sup>5</sup> illustrates an engraving from Skabberged near Tromsø in Sweden (4).

He notes in connection with it that drums are rarely seen in rock art.

In the engraving from the Valley of Marvels, a halberd is seen next to the design we interpret as the representation of a drum. This weapons is a cross between the dagger and the axe.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the Himalayan context, the dagger is one of the ritual objects used by the shamans of Tamang, and is called *phurbu*. The axe is associated with the lightning one observes on the central part of the Tamang shamanic *phurbu*, and that lightning is represented by the *vajra*, a design also seen on lamaic and Bön ritual objects.

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A figure in another engraving, also in the Valley of Marvels,<sup>7</sup> is called "The Chief of the Tribe" (5).

It has a sex, and is accompanied by two daggers and another object with a handle that is reminiscent of a drum. The difference in scale with the daggers is large, but nothing in this context respects rules of proportion.

The author believes that this scene could be the representation of a human sacrifice, with what he interprets as a dagger striking the person near his ear. This weapon is in any event very

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<sup>5</sup> Les chamanes de la préhistoire - transe et magie dans les grottes ornées (*The Shamans of Prehistory- Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves*) - Jean Clottes & David Lewis Williams - Seuil - 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Barfield, L.H., 1998, The Chalcolithic in Italy: Considerations of metal typology and cultural interaction, in Bagolini, B., Lo Schiavo, F. (Eds), *Metallurgy: Origins and Technology. The Copper Age in the Near east and Europe*, UISPP 1996, #13, Colloquium XIX, Ed. ABACO, Forli, page 71.

<sup>7</sup> Idem - plate 25, page 144.

different from those next to him, and that could lead one to suppose that it had another function.

We tend to believe that this is once again the depiction of a shaman. If that is correct, then the design must probably be interpreted as a divine message - as the word handed down from the great primordial shaman to his disciple in the form of a lightning bolt coming from the sky. We find ourselves once again confronted by the forces of the storm, lightning and thunder.

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We find a design (6) in the Valley of Marvels that does not relate to the connections this article makes with the *phurbu*, but which nonetheless relates to work we have done recently.<sup>8</sup>

In it we see a figure making a furrow with a chariot drawn by two oxen.

In this context, the furrow can only be understood to be the delimitation of a sacrificial area, and that brings to mind the birth of Sita, who was found in a furrow by her adoptive father Janatha, the king of Mithila, while he was performing this ritual (7).

It is of course also observed in connection with the creation of Rome.

### ***The Menhir-Statues***

A few menhir-statues were erected just prior to this period. They are believed to date to the third millennium BC.

Some of them, and among the most interesting ones, are at the Rodez Museum, but their dissemination was not limited to this area. There are others in Italy, Switzerland and on the Iberian Peninsula.

One of their characteristics is the presence of a dagger sculpted onto their chests approximately where the heart would be. We will see later on that this placement is very probably not without significance.

Marcel Otte<sup>9</sup> had noted:

"A symbol that alludes to a weapon is seen in complex combinations, and often associated with the illusion of a human body" (10).

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<sup>8</sup> Le Ramayana raconté par les masques Rajbanchi (*The Ramayana as Told by the Rajbanchi Masks*) - catalog for the 2017 exhibition at the Salle du Vieux Colombier, place Saint Sulpice, the Museo d'Arte Orientale of Venice, and the Bernard and Caroline de Watteville Foundation in Crans-Montana Switzerland.

<sup>9</sup> Sémantique et sémiotique des arts préhistoriques - Quaderni di semantica - 2015, pages 195-205.

The weapon itself is often only a symbol: found intact, it is adorned with decorations that distance it from its primary function, and it only incarnates a role. These "decorations" can themselves be parts of a complex symbolic game that involves a mixture of mythology and a variety of social values. The loss of its practical function becomes complete when a weapon is reduced to just an engraved sketch of itself, associated with that of a human silhouette. Its repetition ad infinitum reinforces its role, value and power because the allusion is 'gratuitous' and does not involve the production of real objects. The combined man-weapon signs thus form a homogeneous semiotic ensemble in which ideas fuse and are displayed in conspicuous locations like rocky summits or as monumental steles. The semiotic combination works in conjunction with the spatial dimension and imparts a monumental and spectacular feeling to it. Space, both in the atmosphere and underground, is part of the game established by the morphemes that result from these arrangements."

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In the postface to *Statues-menhirs*<sup>10</sup> André d'Anna asks the question: *Menhir-Statues: Gods or Men?*

We had long believed that these daggers represent ritual objects rather than weapons (8, 9).

The Arco I menhir-statue (Riva, Italy) (11, 12) gives us an obvious demonstration of this. If the dagger were a weapon, it would be rendered alone on the sculpture.

On this menhir-statue, there are in fact seven daggers converging with their points directed at the center of the sculpture - what would be its heart.

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In *Le Coeur et la Caverne (The Heart and the Cave)*, René Guenon<sup>11</sup> writes:

"The close relationship between the symbolisms of the cave and the heart that we have already alluded to explains the function of the cave from the initiatic point of view as representing a spiritual center. The heart is in fact essentially a symbol of the center, whether it be the center of a being or, analogously, the center of a world, that is, whether the point of view be microcosmic or macrocosmic; the same significance thus naturally comes to be attached to the cave also, in virtue of its relationship with the heart; but this symbolic connection calls for a fuller explanation, and that is, precisely, the subject of this article.

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<sup>10</sup> *Statues-menhirs - des énigmes de pierre venues du fond des âges - œuvre collective - Editions du Rouergue - 2002.*

<sup>11</sup> René Guenon et *Symboles de la Science Sacrée - NRF Gallimard - 1962 - page 196.*

The 'cave of the heart' is a well known traditional expression: the word *guhā*, in Sanskrit, generally denotes a cave, but it is also applied to the inward cavity of the heart, and thence to the heart itself; this 'cave of the heart' is the vital center in which resides not only *jīvātmā*, but also unconditioned *Atmā* which is in reality identical with *Brahma* itself, as we have shown elsewhere. This word *guhā* comes from the root *guh*, which means 'covering' or 'hiding', as does also another similar root, *gup*, whence *gupta*, which is applied to everything secret, to everything that is not outwardly manifested: it is the equivalent of the Greek *Kruptos*, whence the word 'crypt' which is a synonym of 'cave'."

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In another article, René Guenon<sup>12</sup> writes:

"We believe that the heart is the seat and preserver of cosmic life. Religions knew that when they made the Heart a sacred symbol. So did the builders of cathedrals who erected the most sacred location at the heart of their temples, as did those who, in much older traditions and in very secret rites, abstracted discursive intelligence and imposed silence on their brains to enter into the Sanctuary to transcend themselves and accede to a higher state of being."

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The recurring relationship of the cave also takes us back to Jean Clottes' work:

"For Paleolithic peoples to have gone regularly into caves which they did not inhabit for over 20000 years in order to produce drawings on the rocks in them, these places must necessarily have had extraordinary importance for them."

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"In light of the facts presented up to here, it is legitimate to advance the hypothesis, more plausible than any other, that when they did this, people were conscious of the fact that they were deliberately entering another world - that of natural forces. That subterranean expedition was thus the equivalent of a shamanic voyage, that of a vision experienced in a trance."

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To return to the menhir-statue of Arco, one observes two groups of two halberds arranged laterally along the daggers, and an object which appears to be an axe among them.

All of these symbols are associated with lightning, thunder, storms, rain, the bull, and thus with fertility.

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<sup>12</sup> Idem - in Symbolisme du cœur - page 397.

The manner in which the axe is hafted could lead one to believe that it was double-bladed, and that in turn suggests the symbolism of Indra's *vajra*, the central part of the Tamang shaman's *phurbu*, seen on lamaic and Bön *phurbu* (12).

According to the explanation in the *Statues-Menhirs* book, the lower part of the menhir<sup>13</sup> represents an undulating scalloped belt.

Given the austerity of the sculpture, any kind of sophisticated ornament like that appears highly incongruous to us. Instead, we see the undulating lines as aquatic or cosmic waves, with a connection to the group of daggers above them (11b).

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The megalithic alignment at Do-ring is located about thirty miles south of the Pagong great salt lake in Western Tibet. We have been obsessed with this alignment for a long time! Since very little study has been done on it, it remains very difficult to date. Anne Chayet<sup>14</sup> dates it to the "Early Metal Age", which is to say to about the 6th century of the second millennium BC. There is a stone structure at one extremity of it that appears to be a *phurbu*. The ensemble of stones was undoubtedly intended to capture cosmic energies that would have been channeled by this *phurbu* (13).

We have the feeling when we observe this group of daggers above the wave designs that we are witnessing a configuration of the same nature.

The number 7 has a powerful magical connotation. That has been extensively discussed by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant<sup>15</sup>, and it can be found in the symbolism of nearly all cultures and religions.

We will limit ourselves to the mention of two examples which concern the areas we have been working on.

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With reference to shamanism, we find the following statement, quoted by Jean-Paul Roux<sup>16</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> Idem - page 156.

<sup>14</sup> Art et Archéologie du Tibet - Picard - 1994 - page 56.

<sup>15</sup> Dictionnaire des Symboles - Bouquins - Robert Laffont/ Jupiter 192 - pages 860 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Paul Roux - Faune et flore sacrée dans les sociétés altaïques - Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient - Adrien Maisonneuve - 1966 - 1998.

"The Berge inscription essentially says: "I killed seven wolves; I did not kill the panther or the kökmäk."

The number 7, which is sacred among the Turco-Mongols, and the presence of the wolf, also a "sacred" animal, appear to suggest that this was a particularly significant hunt - perhaps a ritual hunt, or a first hunt?"

And referring to the Tatars of the Altai, Uno Harva<sup>17</sup> writes: "My land with Seven Doors and my waters".

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A radiating heart, surrounded by planets and zodiac signs, is seen on a black marble bas-relief from the Carthusian monastery at Saint-Denis d'Orques and dates approximately to the 16th century **(14)**.

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In his *Hymn to the Sun*,<sup>18</sup> Proclus, addressing the sun, says:

"Thou reignest from the throne, high above the ether, and with the countenance of the dazzling orb that is the Heart of the World, all things are by thy power filled with mind-exciting, providential care."

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In his *Song of Scipio*, Macrobe writes:

"The name of Intelligence of the World which we give the Sun answers to that of the Heart of the Sky; source of the ethereal light, the Sun is for that fluid what the heart is for the living being."

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The group of daggers around the heart must have had a very powerful both magical and symbolic connotation for the Catholic church to have made use of it in the representation of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows **(15, 16, 17)**.

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<sup>17</sup> Les représentations religieuses des peuples altaïques - Payot 1959.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by René Guenon - page 390.

The long tasks of neutralizing the ancient religious symbols indeed began very early with a process of denigration. The bear for example<sup>19</sup> was gradually transformed from a mythical and royal animal into a country fair buffoon.

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### ***Knife with a Handle in the Shape of a Female Figure***

With this photograph<sup>20</sup> (18), we find the following explanatory note, which we consider unsatisfactory:

*Knife with a handle in the shape of a female figure*  
*Schleswig-Holstein*  
*Late Bronze Age, Period V*  
*9th - 8th century BC*

Not only does the figure atop the object greatly impair the object's functionality, but we find it very reminiscent of the *phurbu*, the dagger which the Himalayan shamans of the Tamang ethnic group currently use (18b).

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So it is a knife or a *phurbu*? The question is of course impossible to answer definitively but it deserves to be asked. In our opinion, this is in any event much more likely to be a ritual object than a utilitarian one.

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### ***The Broc Plaque***

A terra cotta plaque called the Broc plaque was displayed at the Musée de Cluny's *Les temps mérovingiens (Merovingian Times)* exhibition in October 2016, and was illustration number 100 in the accompanying catalog (19).

The description of the Broc plaque was prepared by Ms. Inès Villela-Petit, and read as follows:

*Plaque from Broc - Auvergne, 5th -6th century*  
*Molded terra cotta - Height: 42 cm, width: 27.5 cm; depth: 3.5 cm*

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<sup>19</sup> L'ours - Histoire d'un roi déchu, par Michel Pastoureau - La librairie du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle - Seuil - 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Reproduced as #7 on page 58 in L'Europe au temps d'Ulysse - Dieux et démons de l'Âge de bronze - catalog for the 1999 exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris.

*Provenance: Le Broc (Puy-de-Dôme), before 1830.*

*A tile from the cover of a tomb found at Grésin (Le Broc, near Issoire) showing a triumphant Christ with a monogrammatic cross on his forehead. Three small lion's snouts printed from a 3rd century Gallo-Roman matrix (reuse of a terra sigillata ceramic from the workshop at Guegnon (Saône et Loire) (see Notet, 2012), are present on the plane, and the figure is kicking away the asp as in Psalm 91:13 ("You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot"), or as in many hymns inspired by this passage: "The one and only God has crushed the hatred of the envious dragon and the cruel lion's face" (Sedulius, *A solis ortus cardine*, 5th century), the maleficent beasts having been reduced to two species through the exegesis (Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*). The chain that runs along both sides undoubtedly comes from the Ambrosian hymn *Aurora lucis rutilat*: "This so powerful king overcame the power of Death, cast away Hell with his feet, and frees the afflicted from their chains." These liturgical sources that guarantee the protection of a powerful God to the deceased reveal a cleverly conceived work beneath its "extremely popular" syncretism. While the subject is not foreign to the classical tradition (the mosaic of Christ the Warrior at the Archbishop's Chapel of Ravenna and the imperial Roman currency, see Demougeot, 1986), the Broc Christ, wearing a pelerine, boots and a belted tunic that allows his genitals to be seen, a sword hanging from his baldric, holding a sphere and a barbed spear, seen walking but with his face rendered frontally, sun-like and beardless, a chain as a necklace and a diadem in his hair, does in fact present all of the attributes of the Apollinian and psychopomp Gallic god Lug associated with chains, the serpent and the spear (Gricourt and Hollard, 1997). The accumulation of signs of divine power (numina) has an equivalent in the Weapons of Christ with the ithyphallic horse on the buckle plaque of Ladoix-Serrigny (Côte-d'Or; Gaillard de Semainville, 2003)."*

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This explanation given at the exhibition left us perplexed. Any explanation that involved the Apocalypse seemed to us to be inappropriate.

The snake is not being crushed, and the figure is not holding a sphere. If he were, he would have his hand open with his palm facing upwards and the sphere placed on it. Instead he has his fist closed with his fingers wrapped around something, which we interpret as a handle, and the volume of the object is reminiscent of a drum shell. This is exactly the posture of the Nepalese Tamang shamans holding their *dhyangro*, the drum that they use to connect with Mahadeo, the Great Primordial Shaman, when they enter into a trance (20).

When asked about this,<sup>21</sup> the author acknowledged that the "Lug-Christ" was indeed holding a handle.

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<sup>21</sup> Email of December 15th 2016.

She noted however that the drum is not an attribute of Lug and indicated she believed the object in question was a mirror, an attribute of the sun that would be more appropriate in connection with this god. While the drum is not associated with Lug in any of the texts that were consulted, neither is the mirror.

Moreover, mirrors of the period were bronze, and thus small, and the object Lug is seen holding here is relatively large. We are thus inclined to remain convinced of our opinion that it is indeed a drum.

When the Celtic god Lug returns to Tara, the royal residence, he is adorned with a royal diadem on his forehead to ensure he is recognized, like the figure on the plaque, and it lacks Christ's aureola.

When the gatekeepers question him about the arts he practices, Lug replies that among other things "I am a sorcerer", and then finally professes to have multiple talents, and to be a master of all of the arts.

One can thus assume that shamanism would be among his competencies. A sorcerer at the time was involved with everything that was supernatural, including relationships with the spirits, and the term shaman did not begin to be used until the 19th century.

It is consequently possible that he is using a drum even if the texts do not mention that.

Moreover, all of the other attributes that surround him, the sword, and the spear, could all have shamanic functions. We have seen earlier that the dagger can have the same symbolic meaning as the sword. When one looks at the photograph by the Tamang shaman Ram Bhahadur Jhankri, one notes that he wears a *phurbu* in his belt in the same place where Lug wears a sword.

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The only Christian element is the very discretely placed little Chi-Rho christogram on the coif **(22)**, which suggests that the artist or commissioner of this work wanted the ambiguity of illustrating a god from the ancient world with a symbol that would stave off any criticism from the Catholic clergy.

This symbol is moreover seen on a coin representing Constantine with a Chi-Rho on his helmet, which dates to 315 and was minted at Ticinum (now Pavia) **(21)**.

The description also mentions the buckle plaque of Ladoix-Serrigny **(23)**.

This piece also leaves us perplexed. In an article published by Henri Gaillard de Sémainville<sup>22</sup> about this buckle plaque that was not unearthed in excavations, we are offered the following explanation:

"The clumsily executed decoration consists of an extraordinary threatening Christ figure on horseback, armed like a Frank chief with an angon and an axe, framed by a cross with a Chi-Rho on his right and a quadruped on his left. A Latin inscription provides valuable information, especially through its mention of the name of the object's creator, Landelinus, and a millennial reference it makes: "Whosoever possesses these things, may he live until the thousandth year of our Lord". And that leads us to the heart of the subject of the Apocalypse. The confrontation of the latter with the decoration on the Ladoix plaque has in fact made it possible to observe numerous significant details, and to establish that this had to do with the final triumph of Christ over the beast and the Last Judgment.

The very unusual nature of this subject and the way in which it is treated led to a search for similar examples, and for a way to situate it in the context of Paleo-Christian and Merovingian iconography, as well as in relation to the religious ideas of the time, in particular those concerning the Apocalypse and millennial theories. It is possible that Landelinus was man of the church with moral authority, at least in some places, or that he was of Germanic origin. An object of this kind sheds very precious light on the diversity of religious conceptions in the heart of Merovingian society."

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This decryption once again, and erroneously in our opinion, alludes to the Apocalypse. The author indeed mentions the clumsy execution of the design. We are far from the refinement of the beautiful interlacing patterns seen on Carolingian paintings.

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It is also far from Roman paintings, admittedly much later, that date to the 12th century, which represent an equestrian Christ, like the fresco at the Saint-Martin de Nohant-Vic church (Indre) or the crypt at the cathedral of Saint-Etienne d'Auxerre (Yonne).

One is indeed left with no option but to recognize that this is popular, provincial and unsophisticated work. It thus corresponds somewhat to the brutal mores of the time. We need only recall the ordeal inflicted on Queen Brunhilda by her relative Queen Fredegund to be convinced of that.

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<sup>22</sup> Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre - BUCEMA #12/ 2008 "A propos de plaques-Boucles mérovingiennes à motif chrétien".

But could one envisage, even in this context, that Christ would be represented as a hirsute caricature, with protruding ears riding a horse with oversized genitals? The general impression one gets is rather that this figure is in a state of trance.

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The text presents us with Christ triumphing over the beast. But the beast in question here does not appear to have been vanquished if one is to judge by its behavior, and moreover, as we have observed earlier, the arrow and the axe are symbols of ancient traditions that one finds in shamanism and are associated with lightning and thunder, and by extension with fertility.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (circa 500) wrote as follows about the angels: "The spears and axes express the faculty which they possess to discern opposites, and the wisdom, the liveliness and the power of that discernment." This text, which is almost contemporaneous with the plaque, could not have been known to the artist.

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Just as Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, intended to neutralize ancient and thus pagan traditions, this text appears to have been created with the same objective in mind.

One gets the impression that through the use of Christly symbols, the artist plays with ambiguities that have been discussed above, and has represented a divinity from an earlier cult. It was in fact a period during which all of the ancestral traditions were challenged and vilified by triumphing Christianity. Resistance was nonetheless manifest in certain details inserted within Catholic structures.

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In our preceding article on the mushroom masks of Nepal,<sup>23</sup> we mentioned the fresco of the temptation of Adam and Eve at the Chapelle de Plaincourant in Mérygnay (Indre), which depicts the serpent entwined around an *Amanita muscaria* mushroom instead of around a tree, and dates to the 12th century.

The *Amanita muscaria* is a hallucinogenic mushroom that is or was used by Siberian shamans among others. It must have been used over a very wide area and there are even traces of it in France.

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<sup>23</sup> Toit du Monde newsletter #25, March 2018, by François Pannier.

There are many examples of such "transgressions" and we have selected a few, ranging from "pagan" to erotic, that seemed most characteristic to us:

A series of column capitals adorn the summits of pillars in the Saint-Pierre de Nant church in the Causses region (24).

In the middle of these column capitals of very classic style, one represents the head of a bull. It is completely different in style from the others and is of much more archaic character (25).

One gets the impression that the craftsman who sculpted it wanted to highlight a new religion by leaving a vestige of the old one. This does not appear to be a representation of the symbol of Saint Luke the Evangelist.

Many other examples can be cited in the region's churches, in which mermaids and centaurs are often seen depicted: at Sainte Foy de Conques (26), at the church in Saint-Pierre de Bessuéjols (27), and even as far away as Poitou at the Église de Tavant (28). One sees centaurs on the corbels in the apse at the Église de Perse in Espalion (29).

Such "un-Catholic" elements are present in great numbers on the column capitals of the Roman period.

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In the Saintonge region, a column capital that has been published<sup>24</sup> is a particularly interesting example, and so is the commentary that accompanies it:

*"At Colombiers, a curious scene unfolds amid interlacing vegetal elements, which reminds of ancient legends forgotten today: a man with a wooden leg is seen in several iterations in the churches of the area."*

The author of the text was manifestly unaware of what fellatio is, unlike the sculptor, who was undoubtedly not thinking about making reference to ancient legends here...

Although it is sometimes said that the purpose of using of some of these iconographic elements was to reveal the turpitudes of a past that the Christian faith would now replace, there is a certain lasciviousness about them that can hardly be viewed as "Catholic" under any circumstances (30)!

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<sup>24</sup> *Connaissance des Arts* - May 1976 - article by Pierre Kjellberg - *Verve Romane en Saintonge* - page 101.

The different elements that we have assembled here lead us to believe, as we have stated in our introduction, that all of the weapons from the Valley of Marvels, the menhir-statues and the plaques we have examined, are ritual objects for which the term *phurbu* may not be completely appropriate, but which nonetheless had very similar functions.

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Equating a living tradition like that of the Nepalese shamans with traditions of millennia gone by that can only be analyzed by comparison is obviously a delicate matter. There are however many intriguing elements that invite one to consider the question in spite of that fact. And in conclusion, I would like to say that I think the "sorcerer of the Valley of Marvels" was in fact a shaman rather than a sorcerer.

Captions for numbered illustrations:

**(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7)** have no captions.

**(8)** Menhir-statue from Durenque

**(9)** Menhir-statue from Lunigiana

**(10)** Symbolic weapons, either realized and decorated but not identifiable, or represented in dialogue with allusion to the human. (1) Bronze dagger blade (2) Rock engraving of a dagger associated with the anthropomorphic, Pena Tu, Cantabria (3) Oceanic club (4) Neolithic crozier, Portugal (5) Stele from Morbihan

**(11) (11b)** Menhir-statue from Arco I  
Trentino, Italy  
3rd millennium BC

**(12), (13)** have no captions.

**(14)** Bas-relief from the Carthusian monastery of Saint Denis d'Orques  
Circa 16th century

**(15)** Stained glass window of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows at Guayaquil (Ecuador)

**(16)** Our Lady of Seven Sorrows at the Pörtschach am Wörthersee church (Austria)

**(17)** Scapular

**(18)** Knife with a handle in the shape of a female figure

**(18b)** *Phurbu* of the Tamang ethnic group

**(19)** Broc plaque

Auvergne

5th - 6th century

Molded terra cotta

Height: 42 cm; width: 27.5 cm; depth: 3.5 cm

Provenance: Le Broc (Puy de Dôme)

Before 1830

**(20)** Ram Bhahadur Jhankri

Tamang shaman

**(21)** Coin with a depiction of Constantin with a Chi-Rho on his helmet, dated 315

**(22)** Chi-Rho

**(23)** Buckle plaque from Ladoix-Serrigny with a detail of the equestrian Christ

**(24)** Pillars at the Saint-Pierre de Nant church in the Causses region

**(25)** Detail, bull's head

**(26)** Double-tailed mermaid on a column capital at the abbatial church of Saint Foy de Conques (Aveyron)

**(27)** Mermaid on a pillar at the Église de Bessuéjols (Aveyron)

**(28)** Mermaid on a column capital at the Saint Nicolas de Tavant church (Poitou)

**(29)** Hunting centaur at the Église de Perse in Espalion (Aveyron)

**(30)** "Man with a wooden leg" at the Église de Colombiers in Saintonge (Charente Maritime)

