



WE HAVE TWO MEMORIES

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In the past, when ancient history was still being taught a little (in 6th grade, the part on great civilizations), our children learned of the worth of Egypt and Babylonia in the history of human adventure. Ancient Greece weighed heavily in these programs. The grand dame. We owe her a lot, not everything, but a lot. Little was known about Indian civilization. Their jumble of gods, it is true, would doubtless have panicked the schoolchildren: the teachers even more. Besides, with the two great ancestral lands alone, there was plenty to do, even before Sumer and the Epic of Gilgamesh were extolled. Above all, whether it is conscious or not matters little, this teaching around these various deities was accompanied by a questioning of the origin of civilizations: how they are born, how they die. With India, we must add: how they endure.

Having emerged and developed at the same time as the old ancestral lands of Mesopotamia and Egypt, this ancient civilization does not belong like them to a bygone past: the Indian adventure continues before our eyes. This durability, it owes to tradition. The literary texts on which all Indian conceptions are based were composed at a very ancient time, and transmitted orally for a surprisingly long period before being written. If alterations occurred, they manifested themselves very slowly; distorting an initial theme with flourishes, but retaining for millennia the trace of the initial theme. Buddhist texts also participate in this strange mania for an endlessly modulated motif, which explains a literature of overwhelming abundance, terribly repetitive and, let's face it, deadly boring.

Our civilizations marked by writing have forgotten that before writing, we spoke. Philosophers would say in their learned (or curious) language that there is ontological pre-decision of speech over writing. Whether at the level of the individual, or at the level of an emerging society, all civilization has first of all an oral language, which it can fix in writing (or choose not to), grammar and tutti quanti. The birth of writing, we know thanks to Jean Bottero, is trivial, for accounting purposes - we need to calculate, record stocks, write a contract; it's commercial recording. And then comes poetry, the ardent desire to constitute a romance of the people, the land, the kings. An ardent desire to last, therefore, to transmit. Because we have two memories, as the geneticist Pierre Grasset said. Culture must reprogram itself; hence the importance of this cultural memory, which increasingly depends on the written word.

But the written part of the transmission is analogously, as in the theater, the text. We transmit through practices, uses, doings, and know-how; and then also, in addition, through writing - which matters. Don't get me wrong. But it is not the main thing.

We had a great orientalist university tradition, and in particular an Indianist tradition, which brought India into our episteme (with a lot of myopias and a few mirages). We also have had an anthropological tradition of Africanists who made known the gesture of the Dogons of Mali and the techniques of orality, of this African palaver which we must be careful not to speak ill of: it is a dimension of the "phatic" language, as much as instrumental.

Why is it so difficult for us to admit that the Gospels could have been spoken and recited? How come it is so difficult for us to admit that the Gospels could have been composed perfectly in Aramaic by Aramaeans, even though they are said to be crude people, except John? Simple people do not speak the language of culture; they do not speak Greek or Latin. How is it that it is impossible for us to come back to the question of these gospels supposedly written in Greek, despite the work of Jean Carmignac, Claude Tresmontant, and more recently, those of Pierre Perrier, Joseph Alichoran and Jean-François Froger? The work of Pierre Perrier in particular has made it possible to unearth this tradition of orality which comes to us from early Christianity. This obviously calls into question some dogmas that come from centuries of Protestant exegesis, from that critical historicism which is nothing but an apostasy shrouded in academic scientificity.

Coming from a Jewish religion, born in an eastern land, where Aramaic had been spoken for centuries, and where Hebrew was undoubtedly still spoken, Christ did not incarnate as a kind of an uneducated Aramaic man, among Aramaeans even more uneducated than he, from whom he chose men precisely for their ignorance, the supposed guarantor of an equally supposed humility, as certain ignorant priests tell us on Sundays in their astonishing homilies.

The language is not there first of all because men want to talk to each other and sign marriage or sales contracts. The language is there because there is speech; that is to say, the ultimate human fact. Language is there for man to enter the world of meaning and knowledge, starting with the knowledge of his own nature.

The Apostles were undoubtedly imperfect men; and their first imperfection was that they did not always fully understand what Rabbi Yeshuah was explaining to them, which from time to time made him nervous or at least insistent: "Do you understand what I am telling you?" Apparently, they did not fully understand these stories of the temple being His body; at least not until the Helper in charge of the rest of the company arrived.

Vedic India has transmitted for millennia texts it held to be sacred, the Vedas. A caste of Brahmins (people specialized in the management of the sacred word), assumed or arrogated to themselves the charge of the transmission of this revealed knowledge, transmitted orally; then fixed in writing, in Sanskrit say the specialists. On this point, we can believe them.

Thus, oral transmission did constitute a sort of monopoly of Indian and African civilizations, while the Christianized European world became incapable for all eternity of any memorization of texts considered important, so important that we too have specialists who are in charge of this sacred deposit and whose transmission comes from the Apostles. Yes, we too have a certain sense of Transmission.

Eastern Christians have the gospel in their hearts, memorized from childhood, through supporting each other with tonic-postural techniques and gestures linked to the bi-lateralization of the human body. The whole Bible is actually written in an oral style, intended to support this effort at memorization, something modern translations fail to capture and even carefully redact. In his time, Marcel Jousse had the intuition of these memorial gestures and had attempted a new anthropology. If it didn't get the impact it deserved, it's not just because of an unnecessarily complex formulation of these brilliant hunches. This is because the Himalayas of prejudice against our sacred texts, the legacy of two centuries of largely Protestant historicist exegesis, has continued to wreak havoc.

Eastern Christians knew the Gospel by heart, rooted in their very corporeality, with the language associated with it, the tongue of Christ. The ferocious hatred which persists against this heroic people, the last vestige of the divine Presence incarnate, through the spoken language and the kept traditions, invites us to take seriously the question of the Prince of this world. And their heroism makes the poverty of our lived and internalized Christianity all the more pathetic.

Our Christian children – those few that actually still go to catechism – have catechism books which begin with the great cycle of evolution from the primate cousin to the modern man, with the different stages that show how he gradually came to stand straight. How we were able to print this lamentable diagram on the first page - that should leave us speechless. And furious.

The question of evolution is obviously an intriguing affair. And it is arguably one of the most formidable questions about the chasm between the text of Genesis and the scientific fiction which accounts for our supposed evolution. The respective cemeteries of the history of science and that of philosophy are full

of scientific fictions.

Children should be told that when faced with the question of the "historical" origin of man, we do not have and doubtless never will have a clear answer; and that it matters little to know that there is a very old skeleton that the stupid media hastens to proclaim "the first man." A day will come when an even older skeleton will be found that will be claimed to be the prototype of humanity.

The answer that Genesis gives are the principles of intelligibility of our human nature that does not depend on time, since it comes from a creator God. Or that doesn't just depend on the weather. Our horizon is not Covid 19, nor biological death that we wave before our eyes with great reinforcements of anxiety-provoking speeches. Our horizon is participation in Eternity – when history and creation will have entered into the fullness of what we call the "times." Then we will see history as it really is – not an endless march of empires, a frightening succession of wars, of kingships, of dynasties, of destruction, of competing economies, of stories of pandemics, of techniques, great men and forgotten peoples – but like the march of Love, silent and yet royal.

Thomas Aquinas said that time is coextensive with Eternity. That's a difficult concept. In the past, certain words, certain formulas were given to meditate in the night of intelligence – there, where a new light sparkles – that of the Helper who is waiting that we might enter it, during this dark night of our immortal soul – that we may hear and see what human language cannot teach us when it has become too poor or too arrogant. And that maybe which it wasn't meant to teach us.

We have two memories, the cultural memory and the memory of Eternity. The one, singled out in one or more languages, in a country or a region, in a genealogy. It is precious and it is fragile. The other, carried by the history of Israel, and extended by 2000 years of Christianity and ecclesial history, in a Revelation that it is up to Christians to transmit, by way of all their living flesh, in all the languages of the world, because He who is its object is the living Word, the source of all living words.

Marion Duvauchel is a historian of religions and holds a PhD in philosophy. She [has published widely](#), and has taught in various places, including France, Morocco, Qatar, and Cambodia.

The featured image shows, "Over Eternal Quiet," by Isaac Levitan, painted in 1894.

