

THE RITES OF THE EARTH

The earth in its double function as abode of the deceased and giver of life has a strong symbolic connotation which is expressed in the rites devised by man in the course of time



THE EARTH AS MEDIATOR

THE EARTH PUTS THE WORLD OF THE LIVING IN CONTACT WITH THE WORLD OF OUR FOREBEARS AND THE DIVINITIES



KYENGE KIKOKO, Cécile's father, and tribal chief of Kyenge village, explains that among his people communication through the earth takes place at the **HOUSE OF THE ANCESTORS** where each forebear is represented by a termite's nest, the symbol of an unbroken relationship between "below" and "above".

In the Ghanaian rite which **Thomas** spoke about the prayer addressed to the supreme god, other divinities, deceased kings and forebears reaches the earth in the form of a liquid poured by the officiating priest at the feet of the King.

KWAW PENTSIR and **FUSSEIN IBRAHIM**
King and spokesman of Gomoa Simbrofo village



"In Colombia when we prepare **CHICHA**, a drink obtained from fermented maize, the first drop is poured onto the earth so that it can be conveyed to those no longer with us. According to myth," **Irma** says, "an Indian who was resting in the waters of Lake Guatavita to avoid the contempt shown her by her chief for not drinking the broth made with the testicles of her lover, comes out of the water, takes a sip of **CHICHA** and is turned into a snake. This legend lives on in my region when, in the month of October, the Chicha festival begins, a festival of perseverance, life and happiness."



CONTAINER FOR CHICHA. Peru, necropolis at Ancon (XIV century). Chicha is widespread throughout the Andes. During the pre-Colombian Age it was a common practice to place pots full of Chicha in the tomb next to the body of the deceased person.

MOTHER EARTH

EVER SINCE MAN FIRST PERCEIVED THE VALUE OF THE EARTH AS PRODUCER OF FRUITS, HE HAS IDENTIFIED THE CONCEPT OF FERTILITY WITH THE FEMALE FIGURE, MORE OR LESS IDEALIZED

THE SAVIGNANO VENUS sums up the female role as life giver and source of fertility. The marked accentuation of the buttocks, breasts and abdomen are an explicit reference to woman's childbearing function, crucial to ensuring future descendents in a period when man's presence on the earth was still precarious and mortality high.

THE SAVIGNANO VENUS
Upper Paleolithic
(between 28 and 24 thousand years ago)

THE GODDESS TELLUS in her role as **EARTH MOTHER** was probably the chief fertility goddess. A Vth century A.D. mosaic, discovered behind the apse of the Church of Santa Maria delle Assi in Corso Canalgrande, Modena, depicts the goddess holding a cornucopia full of pomegranates, the symbol of abundance.



DISTAFF and SPINDLE
Modena area
(first half of 20th century)

In traditional agrarian society the painstaking work of spinning with a distaff was considered an ideal way of cultivating the qualities required of a woman. The distaff accompanied the bride on her wedding day, when she travelled by cart to the house of the groom; it was the symbol *par excellence* of femininity and family virtue. The spindle, on the other hand, was considered a masculine element in folklore and fable and involved the risk of getting pricked, metaphorically associated with the perils of fleshly union.

Germain: "In the Congo the **BIRTH** of a **DAUGHTER** is greeted as a positive sign and guarantee of the future."

Iryna: "In the Ukraine, the earth is compared to a **MOTHER WHO FEEDS HER CHILDREN**. Man, who was the head of the family, had the task of ploughing the land and sowing the grain. The woman, considered the head of the house, took care of the harvest."

NORA: "**PACHAMAMA** is a divinity venerated by the indigenous peoples of the Andes, from Peru to Argentina and Chile. Literally her name derives from the words in the Aymara and Quechua tongue: mama = madre and pacha = Lady of the World. Incan mythology has it that Pachamama is one of the fertility goddesses who preside over sowing and harvest and causes earthquakes. During festivals, holes are dug in the ground to receive offerings of chicha, food and candles."



RITUALS IN HONOUR OF PACHAMAMA



PROPITIATION AND WARDING OFF DANGER

Halyna tells us that in the Ukraine, and throughout Eastern Europe, eggs are a symbol of fertility, and she remembers the custom of rolling eggs over a freshly sown field so as to protect the crop from the rigours of winter. The tradition of decorated eggs (**PYSANKA**), pagan in origin, was assimilated by the Christian religion, giving us Easter eggs. The decorations are drawn on the shell with a nib dipped in melted beeswax. Once the wax has hardened the eggs are immersed in the desired colour. The wax is then removed by melting it off with a candle flame.



PYSANKA

Created by Halyna Hevko on the occasion of the exhibition. The drawings on the egg refer to the universe of symbols connected with the fertility of the fields.



Iryna: “In the Ukraine, tradition demanded that before starting to plough the land you were not supposed to give or lend anything to anyone. You had to begin before dawn, so as not to meet anybody. If you did meet somebody, you were not supposed to talk or even say hello, but only nod your head; that way you didn’t lose the happiness and blessing you needed to perform this work.”

“From the corn harvested, the first bundle was used to create a **DIDUKH** (literally the “spirit of the ancestors”), a symbol of family wellbeing and a way of wishing prosperity for the following year’s crop. The didukh is displayed in Ukrainian houses on Christmas Eve, which in the orthodox calendar falls on January 6.”



DIDUKH created by Roksolana Movchan on the occasion of the exhibition

“In Colombia,” says **Irma**, “all of the offerings made to the gods, such as flowers, fruit, grain, seeds, wine or milk, are placed in the ground while this prayer is said: ‘Lady of the moon, the impetuous seas and the green earth, Lord of the sun and the wild creatures, accept these offerings I place here in your honour, and give me wisdom to see your presence in nature.’ ”

On the day of Saint Stephen, in the countryside around Modena, there was a custom known as **CARGARIA ED SAN STEVEN**; plants were symbolically beaten with the branches of fruit-bearing trees. This custom, which stems from ancient propitiation rites intended to drive out evil spirits from the crop, was performed to the chanting of a dialect rhyme: *Càrga càrga stivanèin / càrga di pàm e di pumèin al grân in d'al granèr / el galèini in d'al pulèr* (Saint Steven was entreated to fill the trees with apples, the barns with grain and the chicken coop with hens).

Mona: “In Iran on 13th day of farvardin, the first month of the year, the New Year is welcomed with the **NOWROZ** festivities. Misfortune, which is associated with the number 13, is exorcised by the whole family leaving the house. Normally the parks are so full of people that you can't find a place that's free. All kinds of dishes are prepared: fruit and sweets, rice and main dishes called **koresh** (stews). All washed down with litres of tea. The **NOWROZ** celebrations conclude by throwing **sabzeh** (herb shoots) which are made to germinate to entreat good weather; young women knot them in the hope of finding a lasting love.



THE NOWROZ TABLES
Tables in houses are filled with seven different kinds of food whose Persian name begins with the letter “s”.



RUMANIAN PEASANTS WITH FERTILITY SYMBOLS



Anca: “In Rumania, during periods of drought, people go outdoors with icons taken from the monasteries; they kneel and read special prayers to entreat rain. Normally after two or three days it starts to rain.



ICONS DEPICTING SAINT TRIFON
Throughout the Balkans Saint Trifone is held in great esteem by country folk as protector of the harvest.

On the first of February, which marks the start of the cycle of life, we celebrate **SAINT TRIFON**. In popular folklore “Mad Trif”, as he is also known, is the patron saint of all the parasites that infest the fruit trees and vines. **Anca** tells us that on this day fires are lit at the edge of the vines and the earth is sprinkled with drops of wine offered to the saint while this prayers is said:

“Accursed be you vermin, caterpillars, beetles, locusts, mice, moles, fleas and flies of every kind, moths, ants, wasps and creeping things, and birds which fly and harm the crop, the vine, the trees and gardens...leave this place and go to places unexplored, where there is neither fruit nor water, as I have told you.”

CALOIAN'S FUNERAL



Anca: “Between the Spring and the Summer, in the more arid parts of Rumania, **CALOIAN**’s funeral is re-enacted to entreat the heavens for rain. Caloian is an effigy with male features, created and decorated with fresh flowers by the girls. Caloian is laid out on a small coffin made of tree bark and reeds, carried through the fields by groups of young men and finally buried or thrown into the river. Three days later, Caloian is disinterred and carried to the village, where the festivities begin.”



Idris: “During periods of **DROUGHT**, it is quite common in Moroccan villages for people to leave their houses, men and animals, to commence praying to make it rain. At times, people also change the way they dress as a means of changing the weather, or else they take flowers to the homes of newborn babies whose mothers stop feeding them so that their tears will attract God’s mercy.”



In the countryside around Modena, to ward off lightning strikes that might have burned down barns and stables, it was the custom to light small fires as the **STORM** approached. On the cart track, in the central strip between the two grooves left by the cartwheels, they used to place two olive branches in the form of the cross, a piece of log left over from Christmas and kept for its powers of protection, and a few sticks or dried grass. They would then light a fire next to which hearth tools – poker and tongs – were positioned in the form of the cross.



“KING OF THE YAM”
Ogbonna Okonkwo’s father was appointed King of the Yam 25 times

MACHETE
Tool for preparing the terrain for growing tubers, also used in ritual dances which accompany the “Yam festival”.



THE YAM FESTIVAL



In Nigeria the most important agricultural festival is dedicated to the **YAM**, a tuber that grows in wooded terrain rich in humus. The Yam is the staple food item in the Nigerian diet, and the festival offers the people an opportunity to give thanks to the earth goddess (Ala) for making this year’s harvest possible. Known as **IRI JI OḤURŪ** o **IWA-JI** among the Igbo of Nigeria, the festival features a libation with palm wine and an invocation to the spirits of the ancestors and local divinities, followed by dancing and acrobatics by groups of musicians and masks. The festival marks the moment when the new Yam crop is eaten for the first time. Traditionally, the senior member of the community or King (igwe) opens the procession and is the first to eat the new Yam. Today, even though it has undergone some changes due to Christian influences, this festival is celebrated throughout the world, and in Modena the Igbo community celebrates it every year. “The Yam festival”, explains Wilfred, “reminds us to cherish the precious gifts of nature, above all the fruits of the earth that have sustained human lives throughout history.”



THE EARTH CONSTRUCTS IDENTITY AND PROMOTES CREATIVITY

**“IN AFRICAN CULTURE
CLAY AND OTHER PRODUCTS
FROM THE EARTH ARE USED
TO TRACE SIGNS ON THE BODY
DENOTING AN INDIVIDUAL’S
PERSONAL OR SOCIAL IDENTITY
AND TO EXPRESS CREATIVITY
IN THE DÉCOR OF HOUSES”**
(Cécile, Congo)



Idris recalls that in Morocco tattoos are applied using **HENNA**, a plant that grows wild or is cultivated, and from whose leaves a reddish dye is extracted much appreciated by Berber women. Depending on what elements it is mixed with (lemon, cloves, orange blossom), a darker colour can be obtained. The designs, normally geometrical or floral, are considered an elegant decoration, above all on the back of the hand.



EDDAGNI ZINEB demonstrated the use of henna on the occasion of the exhibition



Cécile: “At the beginning of each Spring, the Congolese village of Lamba in Makwacha, at the frontier with Zambia, turns into an art gallery. It is the period of **KUSHIRIPA**, the art of repainting houses. This tradition is the

exclusive domain of women, who can now express themselves, unlike in the past, with a marked degree of creativity. The colours are extracted from natural substances: ochre for red, kaolin for white, coal for black and tapioca leaves for green.”



BRIGHTLY PAINTED HOUSES can be seen above all in Zimbabwe and Zambia. The houses painted by the Ndebele women are very famous.

THE EARTH PURIFIES AND HEALS

THE EARTH IS A FOUNT
OF NATURAL RESOURCES
THAT MAN HAS LEARNT TO
RECOGNISE AND USE
FROM ANCIENT TIMES

Cécile explains that in Africa expectant mothers buy large amounts of clay sold at the market in dried and smoked cubes. The desire for clay is ascribed partly to its ability to reduce stomach acid typical of pregnancy.

“In Ghana, those who have just left jail or have consorted with vagabonds and criminals, before entering the house, must purify themselves with the earth,” says **Thomas**.

Idris: “Before praying, a Muslim must practise ritual ablutions. If there is no water, they are done using earth, sand or stones.”



Spas, mud, caves, water, minerals are resources, rather “geo”-resources, connected to the deep dynamics of the earth. Next to the spas, Turkish baths, hammam, there are places that have maintained their original features, such as natural pools, wells, or geysers. The cosmetic and therapeutic properties of clay find many uses in treatments like mud-therapy and spa medicine.



THE MUD SPRINGS AT NIRANO
AND THE SALVAROLA SPA
near Sassuolo

At **Montegibbio** (near Sassuolo) the remains have recently been discovered of a Roman Age sanctuary, probably dedicated to **MINERVA**, the goddess connected with water, and its healing and redeeming properties.

“Our hypothesis,” explains Francesca Guandalini, who conducted the excavation, “is that there was an an oracle-based cult related to the miraculous apparition of water and mud.”



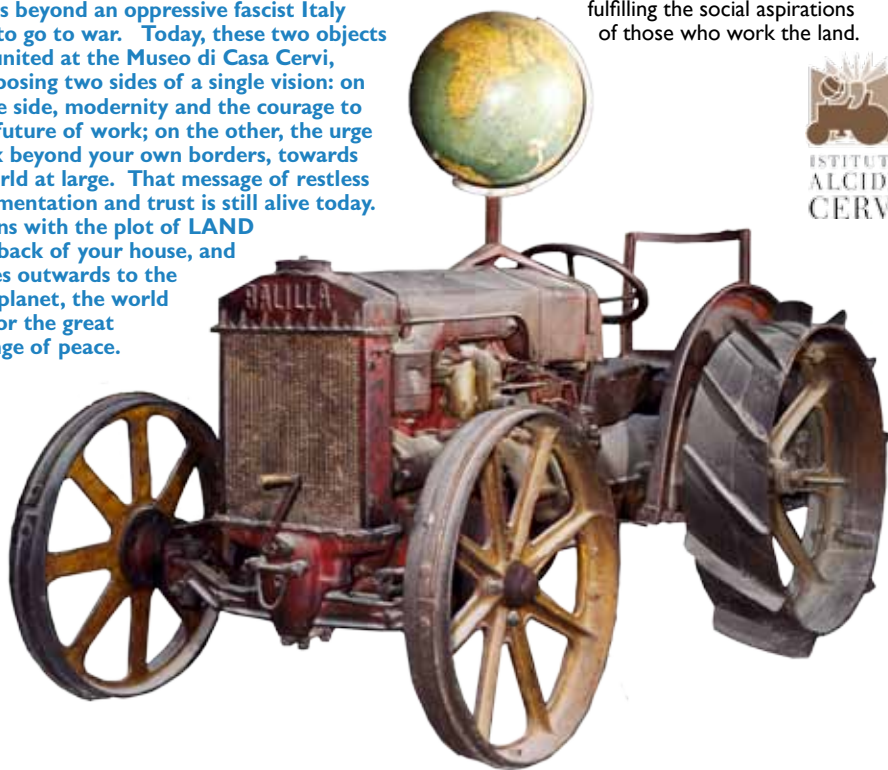
FRAGMENT OF A BOWL
with the inscription
MINER SUM
(I AM OF MINERVA)
from Montegibbio
(late first century B.C.)

FROM HOMELAND TO GLOBE...

THE TRACTOR AND THE GLOBE: TWO OBJECTS FROM THE CERVI HOUSE MUSEUM, APPARENTLY DIFFERENT BUT IN FACT CLOSELY CONNECTED, HAVE BEEN CHOSEN AS A SYMBOL TO END OUR JOURNEY, WHICH STARTED WITH THE RELATIONSHIP EACH OF US HAS WITH OUR HOMELAND AND TRADITIONS, AND ENDS WITH A VISION THAT EMBRACES THE ENTIRE PLANET

The **TRACTOR** and **GLOBE** came to the Cervi household together, only to be separated: the tractor chugged out to the fields to break up the earth as was never before possible, and the globe stayed in the house, where the family reunited to talk of politics, hope and borders beyond an oppressive fascist Italy about to go to war. Today, these two objects are reunited at the Museo di Casa Cervi, recomposing two sides of a single vision: on the one side, modernity and the courage to face a future of work; on the other, the urge to look beyond your own borders, towards the world at large. That message of restless experimentation and trust is still alive today. It begins with the plot of **LAND** at the back of your house, and radiates outwards to the entire planet, the world stage for the great challenge of peace.

The seven Cervi brothers, peasant farmers and anti-fascists, were shot dead by Black Shirts in Reggio Emilia on the 28th of December, 1943. The Cervi brothers were unlike other farmers, in love, as they were, with progress and knowledge, in which they perceived the key to fulfilling the social aspirations of those who work the land.



**WITH THIS MOVING STORY WE PASS ON THE BATON
TO THOSE WHO HAVE TURNED THE PAGES OF THIS DIARY
FOR THE STORY OF THE EARTH GOES ON FOREVER
AND SO...
ADD YOUR OWN!**