

European Religious Cultivation of the Soil

Nikola Patzel

16.1 Introduction

16.1.1 *'Enlightenment' of the Land Versus European Agrarian Culture*

One of the battle cries during the cultural change called European Enlightenment was: "Our foes are superstition and dullness, our heroes are enlightenment and reason." What happened in Europe, especially with its agrarian culture, during its biggest change, after the transition from the pre-Christian religious age towards Christianity?

With the development of modern chemistry, analytical and physiological experimentation with plants and soil samples began. Additionally economic analysis was made part of the management of some estates. Thus began the 'enlightenment' of the soil and agriculture. The rural-population enlightenment campaigners included liberal politicians, teachers, writers/journalists, estate owners, and priests. They spread their message by means of speeches, pamphlets, newspapers, and reformist farmer's almanacs. This activity began in the second half of the 18th century and intensified during the whole of the 19th century. The object of cautious undermining or ambivalent criticism, as well as of aggressive attack, by this movement for cultural change, was the agricultural tradition, in part or as a whole. It was considered to be full of false and misleading beliefs concerning soil and agricultural techniques, and was seen by many scientists and campaigners as a dull bar or a hideous opposition against the oncoming new time.

This text has been published in
Edward R. Landa and Christian Feller (eds.):
Soil and Culture
2010, part 4, p. 261-276

A copy is available at:
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/hv4801g4rr62k811>
DOI: 10.1007/978-90-481-2960-7_16

Nikola Frederik Patzel (M)
Seestraße 5, 88662 Überlingen, Germany
e-mail: nikola@patzel.info

16.1.2 *An Early 21st Century View of this Cultural Change in Europe*

Now we see that the European Enlightenment was a complex cultural struggle for hearts and minds. The visible drivers of change were new economic principles and trade relationships, new scientific discoveries and related technological inventions, and a whole process of social and political change. *Psychologically understood, it was a new consciousness of matter and a new consciousness of individuality, breaking its way to become the new mainstream in the course of about 150 years (1800-1950).* This mental framework proved to be decisive for the development of a new attitude towards soils and plants.

While the old cultural battles are not yet completely finished, new conflicts are now more prominent. In the current state of Western culture, the classical enlightenment, its emphasis on what is called 'rationality', and its protagonists are criticised or under attack in a different way, other than by the well-known conservative reaction. This has happened mainly out of the ecological movement, including organic farming, as well as from old churches and new esoteric and religious cultural movements. One general aim of these movements is to establish a new relationship with nature, with a new *agriculture* as important element. We will come back to this point at the end of this chapter. But what was it—'yesterday's yesterday'—the religious cultivation of the soil in Europe?

16.1.3 *Some Core Mental Characteristics of European Agrarian Culture and this Paper's Source Material*

How can the mental characteristics of the 'pre-enlightened' and pre-industrial agrarian culture of Europe be described? From the modern perspective of European and American culture, the first impression is that there was an enormous and confusing variety of customs, religious beliefs and magical-religious practices around land cultivation and crops. Some examples:

- God was evoked to be the good master of the field instead of the devil. (The mental background is that in any case, spiritual forces were able to dominate the field—and not the farmer himself.)
- Special rituals with objects like the Christian cross, holy water, fire, or green boughs were considered effective in helping to insure successful agricultural work.
- Agricultural omens and oracles were generally acknowledged as predictors.

Because it would be impossible to offer, within the framework of this book chapter, a detailed exploration of the mental world of European agrarian culture, the

material is presented in the form of examples that illustrate the following main descriptive axes:

1. The Christian notion of God and divine involvement in agriculture.
2. Unorthodox spirits of the fields and soil.
3. Effective magical symbols.
4. Clues about the future, and the right time for action.

The main source used here is a collection of manuscripts from the 1860s from Central Europe, which is for the most part yet unpublished. These manuscripts were gathered by Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880), a pupil of the famous, fairy tale-collecting Brothers Grimm. Mannhardt attained most of his material as result of a huge survey: he distributed hundreds of thousands of detailed questionnaires within central Europe with the help of journals and regional distributors. His supporters in this effort were mostly sixth-form students (*Primaner*) from grammar/high schools and members of teacher training colleges, but also included folklorists, pastors, and estate owners. Their actual informants had been mainly farmers and estate owners.

Out of the huge Mannhardian collection [about 10,000 manuscript pages in the Mannhardt estate (Berlin State University), used by Mannhardt for his 1875/77 publication], mainly the small part coming from Switzerland is used here [published in Patzel (2010)], complemented by some material from the German and Austrian collections. Some additional information is taken from folkloristic literature of the 19th and early 20th century; only specific quotations from this literature are cited.

16.2 The Christian Notion of God and Divine Involvement in Agriculture

The soil where men worked was seen in 'pre-enlightened' European societies as a highly contested place. Like *Adam* or *Homo*, the human made out of soil, agricultural soil was seen as a part of nature influenced by different forces, following the Christian notion of the *powers that be*. The strongest of these competing forces was God himself. Therefore, evocations of God had played a central part in successful soil cultivation. God was evoked as the master of the fields. Therefore, set phrases like "Beginning in the Name of God" were used to express that whatever was done, was done on behalf of the Lord and with the hope to get his His support. Another of these phrases, which were very important when starting to sow or to harvest, was the liturgical sentence: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (that is the Holy Trinity of the Christian God image). Here, and also when starting an action with longer prayers, the work with soil and crops was obviously a holy action—an invitation to the divine to be effectively present here and now on earth. But this presence and action of God on earth was not always taken as a given. Therefore, an appeal to God's *faithfulness* was often an important element of the invocation: "Oh God, act truly."

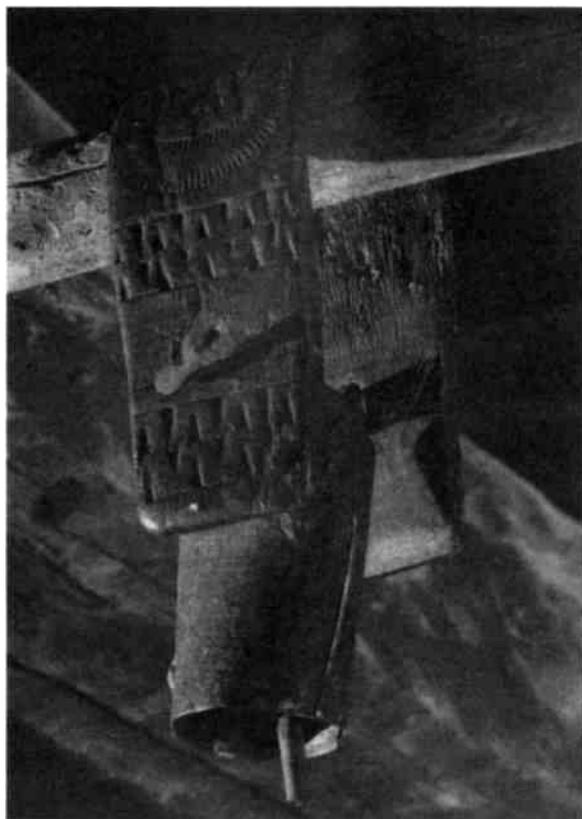


Fig. 16.1 Bell with God's Eye on its neck strap. Reproduced by courtesy of Christof Hirthler

A very important Christian symbol in the religious cultivation of the soil was the *Holy Water*. In most Catholic areas, it was custom (and in some places, up to the present) to sprinkle the earth in spring with blessed, holy water. In processions of the Catholic confession, the most powerful symbols, such as the crucifix, figures of Holy Mary or the saints, and the monstrance [Latin *monstrare* = 'to show': a vessel with the Host (consecrated wafer) with God's presence] encircled the fields, together with the community. During this circumambulation, the priest mediated God's spirit to the encircled soil by means of the holy water, or in a slightly different interpretation, the priest marked God's realm so that no unholy spirits may dare to touch this place. Also, the *Cross* was brought to the fields: The first handful of seeds was sown forming the pattern of a cross, small wooden crosses were buried in the soil, and large crosses or crucifixes were erected on the way to the fields or on a hilltop where the risk of hail was high. This can be seen as a magic-religious protective action, or as an action of centring and ordering all relevant forces into a structure, where nothing, not even the Evil One, was able to dominate the scene.

The latter interpretation can be given, because the cross is—not only in Christianity—a well-documented symbol of an ordered world, where the crucial centre is present, and *everything* important has its place. In India, for example, the cross-ploughing of the fields symbolises the fertile union of heaven and earth, where the earth is symbolically reinforced in its structure and linked with the heavenly order (Högger 2000).

But the God of the fields was not only seen as the God of Love who is predominant in the New Testament. The *fearsome notion of God*, manifest prominently in the Old Testament, was very present too. Therefore, for the farmers, a question of highest practical value was: Are the disappointing yields and evil that I perceive in my fields the work of witches or sorcerers, with the Satan's power behind it—or is it a sign of the furious God, showing those who are withdrawn from him who is the master of everything? In the first case, it was important to appeal to God's love and power to see what happens on earth. This was done by praying, and by inviting him to the fields by bringing his symbols close to them. In the second case (misfortune caused by God), it was important to reconcile with God by the way of prayer and/or repentance. For example, the case was reported, that farmers in southern Germany vowed, after several years with heavy hail, no longer to put manure on the fields on Saturday, in order to respect better the holiness of Sunday (Eberhard 1907, p. I).

Another very important part of the Christian notion of God, involved with the soil, was the *Holy Mary*. Maybe it was in or through Mary that God—after Christ's assumption to heaven—was felt closest to the earth. Mary was sometimes depicted bearing a cloth with painted ears (spikelets) of grains, or grain was given in homage to statues of Mary. The ears of grain were seen as symbols for Christ, appearing as the fruit of a human, after having conceived God's spirit. Or conversely, as an appeal to Christ—who was born out of the earthly body of Mary and who resurrected after his burial in the dark earth—as a role model for the new life bringing plants, emerging at the soil's surface after the burying of the seeds.

Mary was not only important as a symbol for the living soil. She was also a bridge from the farmers and their soils to "God Father in Heaven". That means as Heaven was often imagined being above the sky—to an aspect of God felt to be very distinct and, in some moments, distressingly far away from earthly and human reality. For example, in a special Austrian Church bell (of Höchst in Vorarlberg) there was incorporated "a hair of the Mother of God". This bell was exclusively rung, when the fields were threatened by a thunderstorm. On the bell's surface was engraved, as on many bells of this type: *O rex glorie Christi veni cum pace* ("Oh Christ, glorious King, come with thy peace"). Having the hair of Mary inside, this "hail-bell" can be seen as symbol of the spirit and tone of Mary. Her sound, as *voice of the earth*, appealed on ringing to God in heaven to prevent the destruction of the fruitful land which he gave to Adam and Eve for cultivation. The ringing of bells and the making of other sounds (e.g. shouting) for similar purposes can be found in many different cultures. Thus, as for most of the magical-religious actions mentioned here, the consideration of more comparative material could show a symbolic layer, which is not specifically Christian, but common to humans of all religions.

16.3 Unorthodox Spirits of the Fields and Soil

Given the dominance of the Christian notion of God and the Devil in 'pre-enlightened' Europe, it is of interest to examine how people addressed those 'spirits' one felt existed within and around the soil, whose existence was *not* part of the religious dogma. One of the most commonly reported earthly spirits were *dwarfs*. In the Mannhardt sources, the dwarfs appear directly from the soil and enter into a relationship with the humans working with the soil. One of the reported actions of dwarfs was that they nourished the fieldworkers. For example, humans smelled baking breads or cakes when ploughing, and sometimes they perceived "bread from those living below". The fragrance was said to come from the dwarfs' subsurface bakeries. The legend was handed down that farmers taking a mid-day nap in the field would awake to a nourishing meal served on silver dishes. After eating this meal, they fell asleep again for a short time; the dishes were then taken back by those who lived in the earth.

The reverse action was reported in legends in which humans (mostly women) gave nourishment or other help to the dwarfs. A common tale here involved human women going to a cavern of the dwarfs, and there, helping a woman from below give birth to a new being. On the other hand, it was often part of dwarf tales that the blessing from below disappeared at the moment when some human transgressed the limits of fair behaviour towards the dwarfs, *e.g.*, stole their precious dinnerware. All of these stories seem to be commenting on the proper relationship with Nature and the sustenance coming out of the earth. People in Central Europe found ways to integrate the dwarf legends into a Christian worldview. The following legend was reported in the Alp Mountains: When God expelled Satan and angels adhering to him from Heaven after the appearance of Christ on earth (see Luke 10:18), not all of angels fell as deep as Hell. People—in some tales, not the worst ones—who were stopped by the trees and by the earth's surface became the dwarfs, living in the soils, rocks and woodlands—that is, just between Heaven and Hell.

A second important group of 'unorthodox spirits' involved with soil and crops was built around the "Corn Mother" ('corn' meant in the broad sense as 'grain') and similar figures, imagined to live in the fields and woodlands. Some of the harvest was *left* in the field, or *given back* to her after taking it, so that she would not have to give all of her bounty and fertility to humans. She was also represented as a figure made out of sheaves, which had similar proportions to the many figures of the Earth Goddesses found in all places throughout history.

But the European corn mother could also become dangerous to humans, especially to their children when going into the fields: "If you go to the fields, the Corn Mother may take you!" Out of the many such stories, two interpretative approaches seem to be meaningful. First, there seems to have been a fear among humans that somebody, who is naturally ruling the fields, may practice revenge. As humans have taken her children, she may steal the children (symbolically, also the future) of humans. The second approach to this motif suggests itself out of stories,

which put forward behavioural rules, *e.g.*, "don't go into the fields before harvest, children", or "don't pluck unripe hazelnuts". The functional hypothesis is well known—that ghost-like figures are used as a threatening means to assert social rules. But the *numinous* quality [a mysterious, majestic presence inspiring dread and fascination; from *lat.*: *numen* = Spirit] of the legendary figures, and especially tales where *they* tell the behavioural rule to a man or a woman, suggests the following hypothesis: There may also have been the feeling that *the other side* (a spiritual side *within* Nature) wants certain behavioural rules to be respected by those humans who profit from the crops.

The spirits of the fields did not appear only in the shape of a Corn Mother or other feminine beings. There were also a multitude of male figures in the fields and in the soil. These were figures like the "Hook-Man", who is able to pull children down into the earth with his hook. The multiple male figures were generally reported as being harmful, except the central one: the "Old One" (*der Alte*). He was mainly documented in northern and (former) eastern Germany. The Old One was also represented as a figure made out of a sheaf, with a remarkable phallus. Like the Egyptian phallic Earth God named Geb, the Old One can be considered a symbol for the creative powers out of matter—in this case, a symbol of soil fertility.

Numinous field-beings in the shape of animals have been described by Mannhardt as almost always being positive. They were called, for example, the "sow", the "billy goat" or the "rabbit". There were harvest customs, where the fieldworkers "catch the sow" or they shouted-out "the rabbit escaped". Also, the last sheaf was given such a name and carried home, often in an adorned form. And finally, it was a common harvest custom to call the man who cut the last ears with a name similar to that given to the last sheaf. He then, being for example the "sow", was on one hand honoured, and on the other hand laughed at, and had to play a special role at the harvest festival.

Within the interwoven magic-religious elements of 'pre-enlightened' agriculture, the link between the numinous harvest beings and the new sowings have been especially tight. The rituals and ideas which are documented, hint at the following meaning: There are numinous beings, living in the soil or the field, often also having a relation to the woodlands, who are involved with soil fertility and plant growth. These beings appear in an ancestor aspect (Corn Mother and Old One), in an aspect closer to humans (Corn Maid, Corn Child, Hook-Man ...), or in an animal aspect (Wolf, Sow, Billy Goat, Hare ...). The latter two aspects can be considered, in mythological logic, to be children of the first one. In some way, these beings were believed to incorporate into the harvest plants or to *be* them; and these had to be partly left in the field or returned to it ("don't take them all") in order to prevent anger and revenge of the numinous mother and the end of the blessings. Because the, basically religious, paradox of taking and non-taking the *other side* had to be respected. Complementary, but less prominent, was the idea of the death and resurrection of the 'corn spirits', showing some structural similarities with religious ideas in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, or the Christian belief of Jesus' death and resurrection.



Fig. 16.2 Man of Corn and Flowers. Reproduced by courtesy of Berlin State Library from the Mannhardt estate, K. 4, folder "Abbildungen"

16.4 Effective Magical Symbols

Magic is, from the viewpoint of contemporary Westerners, always an especially irritating and sometimes fascinating part of ancient, 'archaic' or 'primitive' cultures. The use of Christian and other symbols in agriculture had a magical-religious aspect. The term 'magical-religious' is used here because there is so much overlap between 'magic' and 'religious' practices and ideas, that their conceptual distinction appears to be more of a normative valuation (however important in theology) than an empirically suitable classification. (A more differentiated discussion of this topic is given in Patzel 2010.) It was important that the symbols came *physically* close to the soil and crops, or that they stand *physically* in the way of a thunderstorm.

Water, from the moment that it was blessed by a priest, was no longer considered to be normal water. *Holy Water* was considered to be capable of causing or provoking more effects than satisfying the thirst of humans, animals or plants. It was seen as a carrier or mediator of divine forces. But not all magic objects had to be blessed or made a 'carrier' in order to have special effects. For example, "Agatha bread", baked in the form of female breasts, was thrown out of the window to protect against thunderstorms. Saint Agatha (3rd cent. AC) was a Christian martyr from Catania, near Mount Etna in Sicily. Part of her martyrdom was that her torturers cut off her breasts. After her death, it was said that Agatha made a threatening lava stream deviate from its way to Catania. Agatha then became patroness of Catania and the patron saint against fire, thunderstorms and some other perils. We see here that the Agatha bread had been created as a

(magically used) symbol, carrying an ultimately invincible feminine power that is able to provide protective borders against the most destructive actions and therefore also may shield against disastrous scourges like fire or hail. This story of the Agatha bread also gives a general idea of how the magical-religious involvement of "Saint souls" (other cultures would say: "great ancestor spirits") was introduced into agricultural folklore and practice.

Palm branches represent another class of important magical-religious objects: the forceful plants. These green boughs from various plants were erected at the corners of a field to protect it against pests and other hazards. They might be the blessed palm branches from the church. Alternatively, they could be taken during the night, and under special ritual conditions, from a tree or bush. The magic power of those special branches came, in most cases, out of their quality of being evergreen or greening anew. The boughs probably symbolised the eternal forces of life, being the source of protection or enhanced vitality.

Another popular principle was to use an object or action for *property transference* or analogy magic. A very simple example: "Jump high on the fields then the flax will grow high." Or it was said: "Cabbage, become as thick as my legs!" These actions and the associated evocations were meant to attract a property to an object by means of something that already has this property. There is no physical causality. Instead, they draw on a relation and on non-causal 'effects' of the magic-religious ritual. Talking to the crops or making contact with them by shaking or other palpable actions was also seen as beneficial. These were often combined with the aim of property transference. For example: fruit trees were beaten with sticks during wintertime (often on the night between the 24th and the 25th of December, the 'Holy Night' when Christ was born), in order to "wake them up", so that they may prepare for bearing many fruits in the season to come. These customs show that the plants were considered to be receptive to the expressions and intentions of humans.

Swiss psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz, who devoted much of her attention to a new Western understanding of magical-religious practices of ancient cultures wrote (von Franz 2006, p. 30): "*What we scornfully call magic is, however nothing else but a more archaic form of religion which is characterized by treating matter as containing a divine and psychic element. Magic relates to matter instead of only manipulating it. It tries to influence matter, not by technological means but by psychological means. In other words, the goddess of matter has to be propitiated and devotedly worshipped. Even the stupidest magical recipe presupposes this a 'religious' handling of the materials. It also belongs to the traditional form of magical systems, which believe that man has to put himself in the right attitude in order to be able to influence matter positively. His soul then communicates with the soul of matter.*" Magic can be interpreted as a kind of religious treatment of *matter*, the latter being considered to have mental or spiritual qualities. Therefore magical-religious practices are of special interest for the analysis of the old European agrarian cultures and non-Western modes of soil (fertile matter) cultivation.

16.5 Clues About the Future and the Right Time for Action

Hints or predictions about future events and the right time for specific actions have forever been of greatest interest. In the religious European agrarian culture, three main approaches to the future existed. The first one was built up on correlation rules, the second given by signs and oracles (divination), and the third resided with people possessing special knowledge and/or abilities (*e.g.*, weather prophets). The first two approaches are represented in our source material from Wilhelm Mannhardt.

16.5.1 Correlation Rules and Other Calendar Rules

Correlation rules concerning the future had been mainly transmitted in the form of country sayings such as weather proverbs. These were often rhymed short sentences, describing a relationship of different events in time. The majority of weather proverbs showed a direct predictive value for the harvest. For example: "Dry March, wet April, airy May with some of either side, fills the sacks with corn and the casks with wine", or "Rain on Good Friday—this year will be blessed with fruits". Some weather proverbs refer to correlation patterns between different weather periods; others refer to the quality of spiritually intense moments of time, like Christmas, Easter or Whitsun (Pentecost), the latter ones being seasonably quite variable. Where weather rules are linked to saint's days, it is sometimes hard to distinguish if they concern natural patterns or spiritual time qualities. In the rituals and ideas connected with the crucial times of the spiritual year, it was as if the divine drama was to be lived through the whole of creation at these observances, the dangers (demons threatening the crops) as well as the beneficial and salutary events. In this perspective, calendar rules sought to bring the farmer's action into harmony with the spiritual rhythm of the year.

16.5.2 Signs and Oracles (Divination)

The so-called "interpretation of *signs*" was popular among the people, particularly concerning the future. For example, based upon the numbers of "eggs" found in the small cup of the "Bird's Nest Fungus" mushroom [*Cyathus striatus*, called "lucky cup" (Swiss German: Glückshafeli) or "dear one" (German: Teuerling)] conclusions were made on the future price of the corn still in the field. The birdcall of the quail was also interpreted with regard to the future harvest. Among the agricultural *oracles*, the "onion oracle" was the most popular in 19th century Switzerland and Germany. An onion was cut in two pieces. The cup-like layers were laid side by

side, up to the number of twelve, and some salt was put on all of them. After a night had passed (often the Holy Night) people looked at the water content of the onion layers, every layer representing a month of the coming year, in order to get ideas about the abundance of rain in these forthcoming months. Other oracles were done with the behaviour of tree branches, either being planted on the field for a certain period of time, or put in a vase in the house.

The implicit assumption with these signs and oracles might have been that there is an 'objective knowledge' which can be brought in touch with human consciousness by signs or symbols. Oracles exist all over the world, but most of them are much more sophisticated, with more variables to be interpreted, than those of 19th century Europe. This may suggest that the European agricultural oracles and sign interpretation rules were expressions of the psychic need to have hunches about the future, but with lesser cultural development and without the sophistication seen in African, East Asian and other cultures.

16.5.3 Rules Referring to the Situation of the Changing Moon

The most important celestial advisor of farmers was the *moon*. Which phase of its changing appearance is actually there? Is it ascending or declining with respect to the ecliptic (going up or down towards a lunar node?), and referring to the horizon from night to night? With which signs of the zodiac is it actually associated? Is it close to or far from the earth (perigee or apogee)? These questions were traded orally and presented and answered in many popular farmer's almanacs, combined with detailed suggestions for actions in tune with the moon. Sowing of plants with above-earth fruits was preferentially done when the moon was growing and/or ascending, and sometimes also, when it was full and close to the earth. Sowing of plants whose edible parts were underground was preferentially done with a descending moon. Manure was applied to the soil when the moon was close to the earth (perigee sign) and/or descending. These practices led to sayings like: "Bring dung out when the moon goes down. Otherwise, it will not stick to the earth." Of all the luminaries in the night sky, the moon was considered to be in an especially close relation to the earth, with the plants and water-holding matter (like manure) being strongly influenced by its times.

The *zodiac signs* in relation with the moon were mainly acknowledged following their symbolic properties, for example, "bitter" (scorpion; *Scorpio*), "watery" (fishes *Pisces*), "not coming up" (*Cancer*), "buckled" (like the Capricorn horns; *Capricornus*) "bearing a lot" or "being well-adjusted" (like the balance; *Libra*). Thus, in addition to the primary time qualities coming from the moon's phase and orbit, there were secondary qualities, mediated by the moon from the twelve zodiac signs, which were considered to represent fundamental time qualities. From this perspective came sayings like: "Sow beans in the [moon-]sign of the virgin, then they will flourish again and again."

16.5.4 Hints for Action Received from Dwarfs or Other Unusual Phenomena

The dwarfs, as important 'spirits of the underground', were already addressed above in this chapter. Legends from the Alps tell of additional attributes that have not been mentioned by the Mannhardt-sources: Dwarfs, as well as woodland fairies and other figures, may tell a farmer the right time for action. In such legends, for example, a farmer was urged to sow at a time when it was not typically done following common practice. The others laughed at him, but then afterwards, the weather conditions showed that he did right. We may interpret such legends as symbolic expression for 'irrational' intuitions, coming to a single farmer's consciousness from a part of the unconscious close to Nature, telling him to break the rule in order to do the right thing at the right time.

16.6 A Brief Glance at 'Cultic Cultivation' Today

Some of the former beliefs and practices of magic-religious cultivation of the soil are still alive within regional and cultural minorities of European farmers—in traces in many places, more intense in some cultural 'island positions'. In 1997, for example, a farmer near the city of Schaffhausen (Switzerland) told me that he would always start sowing in a field by sowing a cross. In explanation, he said that it "would not be the same to get 40 or 70 quintals of wheat per hectare". Accordingly, it is his belief that he would risk to get low yield if not doing the cross. Some regional case studies in form of PhD studies are interesting to quote here: In 1992, the rural sociology investigation done by Reinhard (1992), showed that in the Swiss Emme valley (Emmental), 60% of the farmers at times still observed the zodiac signs; one third believed in folk tales, inexplicable events, and abilities of special individuals. And for Austria, Burger-Scheidlin (2007) and Christanell (2007) found in two regions (Western Styria and Great Walser Valley/Vorarlberg), similar customs and beliefs that Mannhardt had reported 140 years before. Some of them abundant: *e.g.*, the observance of moon times and weather proverbs, rituals with palm branches, weather blessings, and processions; others rather rare: *e.g.*, rituals with holy water, with Good Friday eggs, or outside praying.

In addition to the continuation of older customs, there are new individual ideas or social movements springing up, where traditional and/or new religious ideas are considered important for soil and land cultivation. The most important social movement is the bio-dynamic branch of organic farming, where some acknowledgement of "elementary beings" (*e.g.*, dwarfs) can be observed. In this context, I have been told in 2006 in southern Germany of the private ritual of feeding such beings porridge and considering them to take "the essential" out of it. In 2009, from the same region, I learned of a newly introduced ritual in which the farm community invited the beings to thanking rituals on Sunday by walking around with bells. The current observations of religious cultivation of the soil can be interpreted as traditional remnants—and/or as an indication of the new emergence of these psychic-spiritual patterns in present-day people.

16.7 Dealing with the Unconscious when Cultivating Nature

16.7.1 The Typical Split and the Longing for Connection

It is a recurrent phenomenon of Western societies that people are fascinated by foreign cultures that they perceive as 'primitive', 'archaic' or 'indigenous'. One of the motivations has been to find an inspiring contrast to its own present cultural state, and perhaps a glimpse at one's own psychic and spiritual roots, and cultural history. Examples of individuals who have undertaken this quest are Paul Gauguin (1897) as an artist, Sir Laurens van der Post (1952) as a diplomat and writer, and Frank Speck (1935) as an ethnologist. Another aspect of the search for orientation, or the longing for reconnection with one's own roots, is to look for traces of our own ancestors and their cultural space. This was the motivation for the Grimm brothers to collect the German fairy tales, and also the motivation for Wilhelm Mannhardt to document the religious cultivation of the soil in many European countries—something that was fading away, but, against expectation, did not disappear, since the rational enlightenment had reached the minds of rural people.

Such looking back and looking abroad can also have—other effect—*finding these irritating and fascinating strange things living with one's own soul!* At this moment, the personal relationship to them acquires a new quality. Then, a new task may be faced: to achieve new insights by the effective connection of that which found us from our inner world (emerged from our soul and/or gotten as inspiration) with that which became conscious to us from the outer world. Something of the inner human view of the world is manifest in traditional or new folk-religious belief-knowledge, and some of the outer human view of the world is condensed in current scientific pedological knowledge-belief. Each refers to aspects of reality, which are perhaps complementary but which belong together.

An *unconscious coalescence* of inner and outer world perception, when appearing in the present Western culture, can show serious problems as well as does the usual inner split between 'rationality' and the soul-and-spirit realm. To deal with these issues is a very personal venture and at the same time a major scientific research and cultural renewal undertaking.

Now, how is one to deal mentally with the attempts at religious cultivation of the soil described above, and the conflicts that arise from them within a modern 'rational' consciousness? Stepping back to a former cultural and mental state is always possible, and is indeed observed in some esoteric and fundamentalist religious movements of Western and other cultures. But this looks very much like cultural regression instead of renewal, and cannot bridge the gap between the aboriginal experiences and all of the religious traditions of humankind on one side, and the cultural achievements of a new consciousness of matter and individuality—often labelled with terms such as 'enlightenment', 'scientific worldview' or 'modern freedom'—on the other side.

16.7.2 Concepts of C.G. Jung's Psychology may be Useful for Bridging the Gap

The Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung introduced an interesting new notion of *symbols* into psychology and cultural sciences. He definitely did not understand living symbols as 'signs' or 'codes' for something intelligible. Instead, he worked with the hypothesis that symbols were tentative bridges between a given human consciousness and the realm of the "unconscious" (e.g., Jung 1968). The term 'unconscious' is used here, to name what is not part of our consciousness, but appears, when touching it, mentally. For example, what is called the beyond, appears in a way that it can also be perceived as part of the unconscious.

Some contents of the unconscious can be integrated into consciousness, *i.e.* made conscious themselves. That is the objective of Freudian psychoanalysis and similar approaches. Other contents of the unconscious resist being integrated to consciousness. These traditionally are referred to with terms such as 'spirit', 'demon' 'Devil' or 'God'. It has to be disclaimed again, that no 'psychologisation' of God is intended, as if He were nothing but a mental construction. But it is assumed here that the phenomenon of God should not be confused with human consciousness, and is not part of it. Therefore, the empirically perceivable appearances or intrusions of what is named 'God' into human consciousness can be said to come out of the 'unconscious'. Following this viewpoint, *living religious symbols are interface phenomena* between human consciousness, with its structures and knowledge on one hand—and the *numinosum tremendum et fascinans* (Otto 1917), the irritating, fascinating (or repelling) and overwhelming 'other', perceived to come as from 'outside', on the other.

16.7.3 Some Hypotheses

Our main hypothesis here is that the elements of the religious cultivation of the soil ('religious' in the broad sense of the word), presented above, are full of symbols. One may say, that by means of these symbols, people tried to link themselves to the unconscious, including the spiritual and divine dimension within themselves and within the outer world. But more than that, the aim of magic-religious cultivation was to achieve direct, material effects on the fields, not only an effect on one's own mental condition and personality. So, the more precise conclusion could be: *People tried to stimulate processes within Nature, where spiritual factors are seen to be inherent, involved or introducible, by addressing these factors and thereby connecting themselves to them.*

A look from the perspective of comparative religion at the factors or *powers that be*, which were acknowledged in European agriculture, shows that: 1) some are fully in tune with the Christian notion of God. as represented by the churches,

e.g., symbols of Christ; 2) some are in close relation with underground or 'folk' currents of the Christian spirit, *e.g.*, some feminine symbols; 3) some are close to religious patterns of pre-Christian Europe, and of other cultural spaces, *e.g.*, the spirits of soil and vegetation. The use of symbols of Christian origin can be seen as the human attempt of bringing the soil (like Mary) and the Holy Trinity closer to each other, with the good hope to receive meaning and bounty out of that mutual devotion. In particular, the customs where Mary is involved show her with more traits than are canonically attributed the Mother of God. For example, the "hair of Mary" in the ringing Austrian bell, whose sound may symbolically mean the voice of the earth (see above). Other symbols do not show any strong connections to the Christian notion of God. Their mental embedding can rather be found in pre-Christian European religions and religions of other regions. The spirits of the soil and the lands, the magic-religious acts with plants, and some of the divination and premonition complex, contribute supplemental layers and branches to the religious practice of soil cultivation.

The proposition by Marie-Louise von Franz (2006) quoted above, that 'magic' means basically, to address the divine within matter and to try to relate to it, might be a good conceptual framework for understanding material symbols in agriculture. And if one looks at these symbols not with a theological, but with a psychological, anthropological or comparative ethnological perspective, the general, archetypal structures of religious cultivation of the soil, which cannot be fully reduced to or explained by specific religious traditions, become more visible.

Some basic patterns of religious cultivation of the soil seem to occur all over the world (see for example Frazer 1914-18); and apparently they are able to occur in the soul of everyone, coming out of the unconscious, and enabling symbolic bridges to the *inner soil* (see also chapter 13 in this volume by the author, "The Soil Scientist's Hidden Beloved").

16.8 Perspectives

Religious cultivation of the soil means, that more than the outer soil is cultivated. In Europe, attention and care to inner factors of soil cultivation and successful crop growth was an important part of *agri-culture*. It was full of inner tensions and tentativeness, but was trying to have a relation to and to deal with 'the beyond' and the *powers that be*—the unconscious—when cultivating the earth. Maybe a new soil culture is needed: one which is anew in touch with more than what we can grasp, but without loosing its foothold on concrete soil. This development will need a major effort. (A remarkable pioneering work in this direction was done by Abt (1989)). Then, effective symbols which link our consciousness to the unconscious nature may provide good service to us as individuals und to the concerned societies as a whole.

Acknowledgments: Manuscripts in Gothic handwriting (*deutsche Kurrentschrift*) from the estate of Wilhelm Mannhardt (K. 7, Nr. 12, folder "Schweiz"), held by the Staatsbibliothek Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin State Library, Prussian Cultural Heritage).

This research was funded in large part by the Marie-Louise von Franz Foundation, Zurich, Switzerland.

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