

WHEN THE “WORD” ERASES THE BEAUTY OF IMAGES

Giampiero Minasi

The image - when it is not a figure, that is, a simple reproduction of reality - is the expression of an internal fantasy and, when it is linked to a doing, it can become free artistic expression. It is also, essentially, language, thought. Non-verbal thought, an essential moment in the process of knowledge.

For a very long period of human history, the image was the only means of expression of symbolic life, with verbal language being a reality still in progress. A period - it is important to highlight - in which the role of women was central and in which the rational thought of consciousness was not even visible on the horizon.

The reference is to the so-called “prehistory”, to everything that precedes the advent of writing. The reference is to the cave paintings of almost 50,000 years ago, in which women very often appear as authors. Which, idealized as the only miraculous “creators” of life, are then represented in the marvelous Venuses of the Paleolithic.

Only later – probably in the transition between the Mesolithic and Neolithic, when the agricultural revolution brought familiarity with animals and the observation of their mating – man discovered that he could have an active role in procreation. He became more self-confident, but not to the point of becoming the master of women.

That was the era of the Great Goddess. The era in which the image continued to reign supreme, also telling us about the peaceful coexistence between the two large groups, farmers and shepherds, in which humanity began to differentiate itself. Even the word, now adult, became image in myths and fables.

Towards the middle of the fourth millennium, another decisive passage happened: in Uruk the history of the extraordinary Mesopotamian civilization began. Which, shortly thereafter, thanks to the marvelous invention of writing, will give us the first poem of humanity, the *Saga of Gilgamesh*.

We certainly cannot ignore the many negative aspects of the polytheistic world – wars; inequalities; male preeminence, even in representations -, however, from Mesopotamia to Egypt, from Anatolia to Crete, it managed to maintain for millennia its image-based character and on a resized, but not overwhelmed, female role. This characteristic was

maintained even after, between the 6th and 5th centuries BC, its mortal enemy will begin to emerge from its bosom: monotheism.

It appeared almost simultaneously among the Jewish exiles in Babylon and in the thought of Xenophanes, Parmenides and Plato in Greece.

The common ground was the written word and the condemnation of images: for the former pure idolatry, for the latter a deceptive simulacrum.

With reference to research already carried out in the context of the V Conference Psiche e Arte 2018 (organized by Ipazia Immaginepensiero Odv) and four meetings on the origin of monotheism held in 2019 by a study group of the Association Amore e Psiche, it can be stated that there, in the transition from polytheism to monotheism, a split was produced between image and word, which – written – proposed and imposed itself as the only possible means for achieving real knowledge, supported by the sacredness of the transcendent god and the lucidity of the philosophical *logos*. These elements are completely absent in the Mesopotamian polytheism.

“In the beginning is the Word” is the religious affirmation that reason makes its own, causing the split. The custodians of Good are the mind, the rationality, the word, the man. Evil is everything that represents diversity – the body, the irrational, the image, the woman. For the former they are the seat of the demonic; for the latter are imperfection and negativity.

The word is the law of the invisible god, who reveals himself and demands unconditional faith. It is the conceptual and rational thought of the philosopher. The word loses its connection with the image and, losing the image, it loses its relationship with the woman, with the body, with the feeling.

So what is passed off as truth, the split, is only belief. The word, which recognizes its own origin in the image, joining it, can become an instrument of knowledge capable of expressing the profound meaning of human reality.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

- J. Assmann, *Dio e gli dèi. Egitto, Israele e la nascita del monoteismo*, il Mulino, 2009.
- *Non avrai altro Dio*, il Mulino, 2009.
 - *Mosè l'egizio. Decifrazione di una traccia di memoria*, Adelphi, Milano, 2000.
- Associazione Ipazia Immaginepensiero Odv, (2018) *Psiche e arte*: Vol. 5. Immagini e parole nel tempo sospeso tra monoteismo e politeismo. Roma: Author.
- M. Bettetini, *Contro le immagini (Le radici dell'iconoclastia)*, Editori Laterza, 2006.
- *Distuggere il passato*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2016.
- M. Bettini, *Elogio del politeismo*, il Mulino, 2014.
- H. Bredekamp, *Immagini che ci guardano. Teoria dell'atto iconico*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2015.
- G. Buccellati, "Quando in alto i cieli". *La spiritualità mesopotamica a confronto con quella biblica*, Jaca Book, 2012.
- F. D'Agostino, *Gilgames. Il re, l'uomo, lo scriba*, L'Asino d'oro, 2017.
- V. Domenici, *Contro la bellezza*, Sperling & Kupfer, 2015.
- C. Enzo, *Il progetto di mondo e di uomo delle generazioni di Israele*, vol. I, Mimesis, 2010.
- M. Fagioli, *Bambino, donna e trasformazione dell'uomo*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2013.
- *Religione, Ragione e Libertà – Lezioni 2009*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2014.
 - *La scultura blu*, in *Il Sogno della farfalla*, Nuove Edizioni Romane, 1/2006.
- G. Filoramo (a cura di), *Storia delle religioni. Ebraismo*, la Biblioteca di Repubblica, 2005.
- H. e H. Frankfurt, J.A. Wilson, T. Jacobsen, W. A. Irwin, *La filosofia prima dei Greci*, Einaudi, 1963.
- G. Furlani, *Sul cosiddetto monoteismo di Babilonia e Assiria*, in *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, 1929.
- A. Lemaire, *La nascita del monoteismo*, Paideia, 2003.
- M. Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia. Storia antica di Israele*, Laterza 2015.
- *Antico Oriente. Storia, società, economia*, Laterza, 2011
- S. Maggiorelli, *Attacco all'arte*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2017.
- G. Pettinato, *I Sumeri*, Rusconi, 1994.
- L. Profeti, *L'identità umana*, L'Asino d'oro edizioni, 2010.
- G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, vol. I e II, Ed. Università cattolica, 1987.
- F. Restaino, *Storia della Filosofia 2. La Filosofia tardo antica e medioevale: Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islamismo*, ed. Utet Università, 1999.
- T. Romer, *L'esilio a Babilonia. Crogiolo del monoteismo*, da *Il mondo della Bibbia*, 47, Facoltà teologica dell'Università di Losanna.
- P. Sacchi, *L'apocalittica giudaica e la sua storia*, Paideia, Brescia, 1990.
- S. Sand, *L'invenzione del popolo ebraico*, Rizzoli, 2008.
- M. L. Satlow, *E il Signore parlò a Mosè. Come la Bibbia divenne sacra*, Bollati Boringhieri, 2015.
- M. Smith, *Gli uomini del ritorno. Il Dio unico e la formazione dell'Antico Testamento*, Essedue ed., 1984.
- J. P. Vernant, *Le origini del pensiero greco*, Feltrinelli, 1962.

