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PHENOMENOLOGICAL HIEROHISTORY IN ELIADE AND CORBIN²

Abstract: This article starts from the premise that both Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin were intrinsically linked to the phenomenological tradition. As far as Eliade's phenomenology of history is concerned, the interpretation keeps in mind the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions within his theory. That is, for Eliade historicity is at once a fundamental element of the human condition, a sign of the primordial or modern fall of human existence, a terror to be avoided, and a plane of being to be abandoned. The article also devotes attention to Eliade's personal life story and his political engagement. As regards Henry Corbin, special emphasis is placed on the fact that, although he was an important recipient of Heidegger's phenomenology of history, he departed from it in essential points. Attention is given to the way in which Corbin's phenomenology analyses sacred space (and time) as being related to eternity, thus opening up the possibility of metahistory.

Keywords: phenomenology, religion, sacred, history, historicity, historicism, Eliade, Corbin, Heidegger, hermeneutics

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This article deals with two scholars of religion, both of whom have developed their ideas about history (and “counter-history”, metahistory, hierohistory) in some way intertwined with phenomenology: Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin.

In Eliade’s case, the link to phenomenology is obvious. His analysis concerns *sui generis* religious phenomena as pure appearances. In his case, the *epokhé* focuses on what is irreducible in the experience of the sacred, that is, on what is not reducible to psychological, sociological etc. factors, and first of all not reducible to historical circumstances. In *La nostalgie des origines* Eliade explicitly accuses historicists who believe that religious phenomena have no meaning beyond history and, on the other hand, also claims that we should not fall into the error of searching for Platonic essences (as he puts it, “the historicists have evidently neglected Husserl”³). However, if we place Eliade in the tradition of phenomenology of religion, marked by Rudolf Otto and Gerardus van der Leeuw, among others, we find him ambivalent, for while on the one hand he brackets the truth and reality of the phenomenal, on the other hand his message has a strong normative dimension, which uses religion as a code towards cosmic meanings, usually to planetary Christianity or something else, depending on the period in which Eliade made his statements (one might also say that, as a “soft Traditionalist”, Eliade has even certain hidden messages in your writings⁴).

As for Corbin, he translated and presented Heidegger’s famous article under the title *Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?* Scholars have recognized the important function of this volume, first published in 1938, in shaping the reception of Heidegger in France. In addition to the full translation of Heidegger’s inaugural Freiburg lecture *Was ist Metaphysik?* and excerpts from division two of *Being and Time*, Corbin’s volume contained a complete translation of the essay *Vom Wesen des Grundes* translated into French as *Ce qui fait l’être-essentiel d’un fondementou ‘raison’*) and the fourth and final section of *Kant und*

3 Eliade, M., *La nostalgie des origines. Méthodologie et histoire des religions*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. 69.

4 See: Sedgwick, M., *Against the Modern World. Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/NY, 2004, p. 112-114.

das Problem der Metaphysik.⁵ It is worth noting that these things, his interest in Islamic mysticism and his interest in Heidegger, run parallel, with him translating Suhrawardi in 1933-35 and Heidegger in 1938. However, as Corbin puts it in *En Islam iranien*, he practices phenomenology “without belonging to a specific phenomenological school”⁶. What does this mean? A few phrases from Corbin deserve to be quoted: “[We] did not attempt to produce works of pure historical erudition, since, for our part, we have no inclination to confine ourselves within the neutral and impersonal perspectives of historicism. What we have primarily sought to outline is a phenomenology of the Avicennian symbols in their Iranian context.”⁷ Of course, it is here the sharp contrast between historicism and phenomenology that we will have to pay particular attention to later on. Furthermore: “In every case the revealing light has preceded the revealed light, and phenomenology does no more than uncover later the already accomplished fact.”⁸ This sounds as if phenomenology, with the necessary humility, does not presume to reach the original light, only its derivative form. Elsewhere Corbin defined phenomenology as “the recovery of phenomena, id est encountering them, where they take place and where they have their places.”⁹ He was also careful to distinguish “pure phenomenology” as History of Religion’s view of theology.¹⁰ “Pure phenomenology,” he explained, was that “analysis which discloses the intention hidden beneath a phenomenon, beneath what is apparent, beneath the *zahir*. So phenome-

5 See: Golestan-Habibi, M., *La réception de Heidegger par Henry Corbin*, https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/18788/golestan-habibi_masoud_2016_%c2%admemoire.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y, 2/13/2024.

6 Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituelsetphilosophiques. 2. Sohrawardi et les Platoniciens de Perse*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. I.

7 Corbin, H., *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Spring Publications, Irving, Tex., 1980, p. VI.

8 Corbin, H., *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Shambhala, Boulder, Colo., 1978, p. 144.

9 Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien. Aspects spirituels et philosophiques. 1. Le shi'isme duodécimain*, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p. 90.

10 See: Wasserstrom, S. M., *Religion after Religion. Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henri Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton University Press, Princeton/New Jersey, 1999, p. 27. As regards the reconstruction of Corbin’s phenomenology, we owe a debt of gratitude to Wasserstrom above all. On Corbin’s view on phenomenology, see also his review of Gerda Walther’s book on mysticism: Corbin, H. *Phänomenologie der mystik. Compte-rendu. Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* (1958) 153 (1): p. 92–101.

nology is exactly *kashf al-mahjub*, *kashf al-asrar* (a revealing of the concealed, a revealing of secrets).¹¹ This definition, however, relates phenomenology more to the original layer, to the “revealing light”.

Accordingly, phenomenological research, Corbin observed,

“is based on the rule *sozein ta phainomena*, saving the appearances—that is to say, of taking account of the underlying ground of the phenomena, as these phenomena appear to those to whom they appear. The phenomenologist is not interested in material data as such—it is too easy to say of such data that they are ‘out of date’... What the phenomenologist endeavours to discover is the primordial Image—the *Imago mundi à priori*—which is the organ and the form of perception of these phenomena.”¹²

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Eliade’s use of the term “history of religions” or *histoire des religions* is misleading, because it is actually the German word *Religionswissenschaften* which best describes his position, which does not include history. Taken overall, it is important not to reduce Eliade’s approach to history to a single attitude, but to accept and understand it in its heterogeneity. First, there is an Eliade for whom there is no contradiction between phenomenology and history, and indeed the aim is to “seek a broader perspective into which both approaches can be integrated”¹³. However, this Eliade, similarly to Raffaele Petazzoni, knows about the dangers of a phenomenological interpretation that “consists of constantly referring to history”. This Eliade sometimes equates history with personal events, *Erlebnis*, actually lived experience. “Man is ineluctably conditioned,” he says, “not only by his physiology and his heredity, but also by History and above all his personal history”¹⁴. History in this sense indicates all that is concrete and authentic in a given human

11 Corbin, H., Force of Traditional Philosophy in Iran (lecture delivered in Tehran, 13 November 1967); *Comparative Religion* 2 (1968) 18 (1): 12-26.

12 Corbin, H., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Kegan Paul, London, 1993, p. 275.

13 Eliade, M., *La nostalgie des origins*, p. 69.

14 Eliade, M., *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1957, p. 238.

existence.¹⁵ This Eliade relies also on philosophy of history. As models, Eliade cited Montesquieu, Vico, Gobineau, Marx, Chamberlain, and Spengler, among others, as men who “have seen over and above matter, certain concepts: race, class, culture”¹⁶. In the preface to *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade even commented that “had we not feared to appear overambitious, we should have given this book a subtitle: Introduction to a Philosophy of History”¹⁷. This version of Eliade is almost obsessed with history, not only with the historical documents of religions but also with history as an elementary human phenomenon, as a space for the authentic self-realization of humanity. He writes in *The Quest*: “Today history is becoming truly universal for the first time, and so culture is in the process of becoming ‘planetary’. The history of man from paleolithic to present times is destined to occupy the center of humanist education, whatever the local or national interpretations. The history of religions can play an essential role in this effort toward a planetarisation of culture; it can contribute to the elaboration of a universal type of culture.”¹⁸ Here, the history of religion is organically integrated into a historical process that is teleological and affirmed in its totality, and which transcends particularisms. With this Eliade in mind, David Cave’s formulation is justified: “It is shortsighted, therefore, to say that Eliade is unconcerned with history or that he is ‘anti-history’ when in fact history—existential, chronological, sacred, and secular—is all important to him, either in a positive or negative way.”¹⁹ However, it should be noted that the accusations are, in other cases, true.

There is a kind of morphology in Eliade within which the balance between history and phenomenology is upset. This morphology minimizes the historical development (diachronicity) of a form within a tradition, preferring instead structural connections (synchronicity) between traditions. This version of Eliade is aware of the creative ten-

15 See: Eliade, M., *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p. 171.

16 Quoted by: Cave, D., *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism*, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1993, p. 8.

17 Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1974, p. IX.

18 Eliade, M., *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 69.

19 Cave, D., *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism*, p. 195.

sion between the “structural” and the “historical”. Accordingly, hierophanies must manifest themselves in history and, on the other hand, symbols have to approximate archetypes, even if they are not themselves historical – morphology does have a certain historical evolution. Therefore, to put it carefully, “the sacred cannot manifest itself in any other way except in history; yet it is not confined to history.”²⁰ Almost needless to say, there are various views in the literature on Eliade, as some say, for example, that Eliade has moved from a systematic approach to a historical one. We will not go into these details.

Furthermore, Eliade also presents phenomenology of the sacred as something that points to a certain counter-history, as the following quote shows: “myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the ‘beginnings.’”²¹ Thus, sacred history is prehistorical, counter-historical, metahistorical, trans-historical, supra-historical. Namely, according to Eliade, in pre-modern times there was no history as the process of irreversible and unforeseeable time, but much more there was a wish to get back to what happened in *illo tempore*, that is, mythical time was considered to be reversible. Accordingly, from the current or former point of view, secular time as such should be abolished (as liberation from the conditionings of history as in yoga, analyzed by Eliade himself) or redeemed (as in Judaism). That it, secular time should be abolished either “1) ‘continuously’, ‘occasionally’, or ‘periodically’; 2) at propitious profane moments; 3) ‘rhythmically’; 4) as a ‘cumulative chain of efficacy’ (*karma*); or 5) in a progression of history from ‘paradise’ toward the kingdom of God.”²² Nonetheless, there is a dialectics of the profane and the sacred, that is, myth coexists in a dialectical relationship with chronological, irreversible history, and, what is more, what is sacred often manifests within the coordinates of everyday banality. To put it briefly, the sacred symbols incarnate in historical phenomena.

However, there is also an Eliade who is often even being accused for his anti-historicism and his deductive approach to historical interpretation. It also follows that his phenomenology is unaccountable to history. Without a doubt, there is some justification for this accusation and inter-

20 Ibid. p.53.

21 Eliade, M., *Myth and Reality*, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, p. 5-6.

22 Ibid. p. 75.

pretation. Besides identifying the first fall with the break from primordial cosmicized times, Eliade also points at a second fall: the fall into historical consciousness. As Cave claims, according to Eliade, “with the coming of historical awareness, the immediate relation with the cosmos was suppressed to the unconscious level.”²³ This means that the historical person was distanced from the divine archetypes. In this context, by “historical being” Eliade means a “radically profane mode of existence, a mode of existence which has withdrawn itself from an awareness of the transcendent, and immersed itself in the immediate temporal moment”²⁴, and cannot rely on what could provide constancy amid historical change and flux. So Eliade was challenging “the inability of modern thought to provide a meaningful escape from the terror of history” (an idea formulated by Eliade already in India, in 1932), “to invest modern life with significance, and to escape the *anomie* of the existentialists”²⁵. As Eliade puts it, the truly religious man “refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present”²⁶. In a certain sense, the terms “sacred history” or “primordial history” are misleading because Eliade claims that sacred time “is a mythical time, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past”²⁷. Obviously, this meaning does not have to do anything with a secular chronological past.

The following quotation from *Images and Symbols* can also be considered very symptomatic:

“although it is true that man is always found ‘in situation’, his situation is not, for all that, always a historical one in the sense of being conditioned solely by the contemporaneous historical moment. The man in his totality is aware of other situations over and above his historical condition; for example, he knows the state of dreaming, or of the waking dream, or of melancholy, or of detachment, or of aesthetic bliss, or of escape, etc. and none of these states is historical, although they are as authentic and as important for human existence as man’s historical existence is.”²⁸

23 Cave, D., *Mircea Eliade’s Vision for a New Humanism*, p. 81.

24 T. J. J. Altizer as quoted by Rennie, B. S., *Reconstructing Eliade, Making Sense of Religion*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1996, p. 28-29.

25 Rennie, B. S., *Reconstructing Eliade, Making Sense of Religion*, p. 36-37.

26 Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Mariner Books, Boston, 1968, p. 70.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

28 Eliade, M., *Images and Symbols*, p. 33.

To summarize: awareness can be over and above historical conditions, transcending them into an unhistorical or supra-historical state. However, it is worth noting that this quote suggests that historical existence is also authentic and not the result of distortion. Let us quote another symptomatic phrase as well, from *Myth and Reality*, which offers a kind of historical genesis of historicity:

“It is only through the discovery of History, more precisely by the awakening of the historical consciousness in Judeo-Christianity and its propagation by Hegel and his successors, it is only through the radical assimilation of the new mode of being represented by human existence in the world that the prophets placed a value on history, succeeded in transcending the traditional vision of the cycle (the conception that ensures all things will be repeated forever), and discovered a one-way time. [F]or the first time we find affirmed, and increasingly accepted, the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of God. Historical facts thus become ‘situations’ of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. [T]he Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God. But we hesitate to say that mythical thought has been abolished. As we shall soon see, it managed to survive, though radically changed (if not perfectly camouflaged). And the astonishing fact is that, more than anywhere else it survives in historiography!”²⁹

Many criticism is focused upon the fact that the Chinese or Greeks or Romans also contributed to the discovery of historical time. However, Eliade’s case is more complex. In certain moments he certainly acknowledges that “Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Iranians, Romans and Islam”³⁰ etc., all contributed to the historicization of humanity. The bigger problem is that some of the interpretations turns out to be wrong when examined in detail. For example, on the one hand, Moshe Idel has demonstrated in his *Mircea Eliade: From Magic to Myth* that Eliade himself admitted that even Jewish messianism seeks the abolition of profane time and history, and, on the other hand, Idel also argues that Jews have a very complex view of temporality, for instance they also

29 Eliade, M., *Myth and Reality*, p. 113.

30 Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 74.

have an elaborated concept of cyclical time as in the case of Kabbalah or Hasidism.³¹ Eliade's interpretation of Judaism is thus pretty one sided.

Let us summarise the claims made so far. The modern historical man is fully immersed in the terror and nightmare of history, and they have no escape, that is, their entire being is reduced to historicity and the hope for constant novelties. Contrary to that, the archaic man defended themselves from history by abolishing history through cyclical time or by, as Eliade claims, "giving historical events a metahistorical meaning, a meaning that was not only consoling but was above all coherent, that is, capable of being fitted into a well-consolidated system in which the cosmos and man's existence each had its *raison d'être*."³² It is also suggested that "traditional humanity had been unable to adequately valorize their actual lived experience without specific reference to some non-historical reality"³³. From the viewpoint of Eliade, the archaic man was not immersed in mere repetition, on the contrary, they were imitating archetypal exemplary events in a dynamic way.

Once again, we should keep in mind that Eliade's diagnosis is very complex. Namely, he identifies a certain tension. As he suggests, the modern world „is not entirely converted to historicism; we are even witnessing a conflict between the two views: the archaic conception [for instance, in societies that have remained agricultural such as Romania – M. L.], which we should designate as archetypal and anhistorical; and the modern, post-Hegelian conception, which seeks to be historical."³⁴ Simply put, modernity also has the potential to transcend or avoid the narrowness and limitations of historicity. Modernity is therefore not simply a commitment to historicity, but precisely the tension between, or even the opposite of, historicity and a certain counter-historicity. But what is historicity or historicism at all? At one moment Eliade tries to define it precisely: "in the various historicist and existentialist currents of thought, 'history' and 'historic' seems to imply that human existence is authentic only insofar as it is reduced to the awakened consciousness of its historic moment. It is to the latter

31 Idel, M., *Mircea Eliade: From Magic to Myth*, Peter Lang, New York, 2014, p. 135-157.

32 Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 147.

33 Rennie, B. S., *Reconstructing Eliade*, p. 94.

34 Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 141.

‘totalitarian’ meaning of history that I am referring when I take issue against ‘historicisms’³⁵. In another place he adds something that may be particularly relevant from the perspective of the phenomenology of history: “Heidegger had gone to the trouble of showing that the historicity of human existence forbids all hope of transcending time and history”³⁶. From what we have seen so far, there can be no doubt that Eliade is here opposing the Heideggerian, entirely secular interpretation of existence as human finitude.

One might say that it is not history as such that disturbs Eliade, but historicism that reduces man to historical circumstances, devoid of the deeper and sacred meaning that could be otherwise discovered by a universal hermeneutics of *homo religiosus*. So when Eliade claims that for a long time “humanity opposed history by all possible means”³⁷, he refers to confinement within immanent historical suffering. Furthermore, “the justification of a historical event by the simple fact that it is a historical event, in other words, by the simple fact that ‘it happened that way’, will not go far toward freeing humanity from the terror that the event inspires”³⁸. Eliade’s criticism is of the ultra-historicism of Hegel which, according to Eliade’s interpretation, emphasizes the unalterability and thus necessity of historical events. Of course, Eliade was aware that Hegel’s was not the only philosopher of history, nor the only “historicist,” and he also crams mentions of Rickert, Troeltsch, Dilthey, Simmel, Croce, Karl Mannheim, Ortega y Gasset, Meinecke, Heidegger, Gentile, and Karl Löwith onto one page.³⁹ “Historicism” was created and professed above all by thinkers, Eliade claims, belonging to nations for which history has never been a continuous terror. These thinkers would perhaps have adopted another viewpoint had they belonged to nations marked by the “fatality of history”.⁴⁰ To put it simply, according to Eliade, historicism is both nihilistic and relativistic.

At this point it is worth reviewing the literature on Eliade to become more aware of the interpretative tensions and dilemmas. For instance, Bryan S. Rennie pointed to a contradiction. He argued that

35 Eliade, M., *Images and Symbols*, p. 172.

36 Eliade, M., *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 150.

37 Ibid. p. 90.

38 Ibid. p. 150.

39 Ibid. p. 150.

40 Ibid. p. 152.

Eliade failed to clarify the concept of history, and failed to clearly distinguish his own use of the term from philosophical uses of the term, and from common sense and archaic interpretations. This, Rennie says, leads to a serious unresolved problem: “How can archaic humanity ‘oppose history’ if they lack the concept? ... How can archaic man, how can anyone, set themselves in opposition to history, regarded as something which they refuse to regard as history?”⁴¹ George Weckman considers another flaw in Eliade’s thought since it confuses us by using the term “sacred history” to refer to myths about *illo tempore*, the time before time, and not as a translation of *Heilsgeschichte* as it is commonly used to refer restrictively to Israel’s perception of God’s role in human events.⁴² Charles Long meaningfully summarizes what is at stake: Eliade recognises that historicity is a given in the context of modernity, and only rejects the historicist notion of historicity as allegedly the only legitimate and authentic way of accessing reality.⁴³ However, paradoxically, Eliade seems to offer a response to the loss of meaning in modernity that is itself historical in nature, insofar as it is a hermeneutics of the historical sources it possesses. As Seymour Cain claims, “To the historical sources”⁴⁴ would seem to be his phenomenological-hermeneutical motto. To put it simply, history is essential for Eliade, both as *erlebte Zeit* and in the sense of historiographical sources. Accordingly, in *The Quest* Eliade even claims that “the history of religious meanings must always be regarded as forming part of the history of the human spirit.”⁴⁵

On the whole, while there is a large criticism towards Eliade formulated as the “primacy of the nonhistorical”, or “antihistorical normative basis”, “deemphasis on history”, etc., we can still speak of a historical-suprahistorical, that is, dialectical interaction in his works. This could be even more directly phrased: according to Eliade, if it were not for the historical presuppositions of our existence, we would have

41 Rennie, B. S., *Reconstructing Eliade*, p. 97.

42 Weckman, G., Mircea Eliade and the Role of History in Religion, *Journal of Religious Studies* 10 (2) (1983): 918.

43 Long, Ch., The Significance for Modern Man of Mircea Eliade’s Work.” In *Cosmic Piety, Modern Man and the Meaning of the Universe*, ed. C. Derrick, New York, P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York, 1967, 136.

44 Cain, S., Attitudes towards History, *Religious Studies Review* 6 (1) (1980): 13.

45 Eliade, M., *The Quest*, p. 9.

nothing to deviate from in the direction of the suprahistorical. In order to understand the structures and relations of the sacred, we should not deny and completely avoid historicity, but, on the other hand, we should certainly not identify with it completely. The reintegration into primordial totality points beyond history, but it always starts from a historical situation. The most counter-historical formulations of Eliade are probably the following ones: “my essential preoccupation is precisely the means of escaping History, of saving myself through symbol, myth, rite, archetypes.”⁴⁶ What is more, Eliade thought that there are strategies of hibernation and sabotage with regard to history, but also a possible complete exit from it. In 1932, Eliade wrote a short text entitled *The Confessions of a Young Man of the Century*, in which he wrote about his desire to recreate Bucharest: “I would like that history would cease – to allow life to start from the beginning, to create freely, without superstitions”⁴⁷.

It remains to demonstrate further the tenseful nature of this conception of history through the example of Eliade’s life and his political engagement. On the one hand, there is a part in Eliade’s *Diaries* where he dwells in a London basement, hiding from bombings, and he is scared by the terror of history.⁴⁸ This situation provoked Eliade to make personal comments that best express his desire to escape from history. However, on the other hand, in certain parts of his life, Eliade “rediscovered” the myth of (re)generation, awareness of historic mission, the “new man” and the new meaning of life in the “new Legionary aristocracy” (within the Romanian Iron Guard). In 1939 he wrote of the “new aristocracy” of the Legion: “Legionarism has reintroduced to Romania the joy and the pedagogy of the honest, open struggle. . . . It has created the awareness of an historic mission, the feeling that we were born in order to carry out a unique revolution in the history of the

46 Cited in Virgil I., “The Literary Work of Mircea Eliade,” in Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long, eds., *Myths and Symbols: Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 351.

47 Eliade, M., *Nuvele inedite*, ed. Mircea Handoca, Oras, Bucuresti, 1991, p. 192.

48 About this in details, see: Zirkuli, P., “A történelem rémülete”, *Eliade mítoszelméletéről*, <https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00015/00002/zirkuli.htm> , 2/12/2024.

nation ... a new, Legionary aristocracy.”⁴⁹ Obviously, Eliade’s notion of history has to be interpreted contextually and keeping in mind that it is often arbitrary, sometimes a mere projection of personal existential destiny, and often even an ideological manifestation.

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The charges against Henry Corbin are quite similar to those against Eliade. For example, Hamid Algar and Charles Adams emphasize Corbin’s unconvincing phenomenological methodology, the essentialized history of Islam and Iran.⁵⁰ Corbin justified his metahistorical theory in part by the religious-mystical material itself, since, as he suggested, for instance, Suhrawardi himself had revived the old saints without regard to historical distances and differences. For our part, however, let us add that his phenomenology was in many ways unique, in the sense that it is by no means reducible to the reception of Heidegger. As Corbin himself wrote: “Heidegger’s ... philosophy did not satisfy me”⁵¹, that is, he sought something that remained unanswered. But first let’s consider what Heidegger has in common with Corbin, or at least what Corbin believes he has common with Heidegger:

“I must say that the course of my work had its origin in the incomparable analysis that we owe to Heidegger, showing the ontological roots of historical science, and giving evidence that there is a historicity more original, more primordial than that which we call Universal History, the History of external events, the *Weltgeschichte*, History in the ordinary sense of the term... There is the same relationship between historicity and historicity as between the existential and the existentiell.”⁵²

49 Eliade, M., “Noua aristocratie legionara,” *Vremea*, 23 Jan. 1939. Cited in Volovici, L., *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism, The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the Thirties*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1991, p. 91.

50 Algar, H., „The Study of Islam: The Work of Henry Corbin”, *Religious Studies Review* 6 (1980): p. 85-91. Adams, Ch., J., *The Hermeneutics of Henry Corbin*. In *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin, Tucson, Ariz., University of Arizona Press, p. 129-150.

51 Cited by Abaza, M., „A Note on Henry Corbin and Sessyed Hossein Nasr: Affinities and Differences”, *Muslim World* 90 (2000): p. 91-107.

52 Quoted by Cheetham, T., *The World Turned Inside Out. Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*, Spring Journal, Woodstock, 2003, p. 7. (cd. Jambet 28.)

According to Corbin, the manifest history is only possible because there is a deeper structure of *Dasein*, which makes possible the temporalization of human existence in a more fundamental sense. The hidden structure is covered over by the superficial everyday layers: that is, still using Heideggerian terms, the ontological is hidden by the ontic. Corbin adds: “For if there is a ‘meaning of History’, it is not at all in the historicity of historical events; it is in this historicity, in the secret, esoteric, existential roots of History and the historical.”⁵³ However, for Corbin, this esoteric order has nothing to do with the Heideggerian being-towards-death—on the contrary, it is oriented towards the eternal, towards that which is “on the other side of death”⁵⁴. There are modes of Presence (here we should first of all think of Suhrawardi’s *ishrâq hodurî*, presential illumination) and the World they entail, which “have become lost to modern historical consciousness”⁵⁵. To put it simply, that World has become for us a lost dimension because the modes of Presence it requires are oriented towards the Eternal and not towards exoteric historicity. This is the World that Corbin wants to make accessible once more, and it is in the Islamic mystical imagination and in that of pre-Islamic Iran as well that he found it. Thus, “the move to Islam is a move out of linear, historical time, the web of historical causality”⁵⁶. What we are stepping into is an alternative, mythic reality, where continuous, quantitative, impersonal time no longer has priority over space. Accordingly, to leave secular time is the same as to get in touch with the presence of the Eternal. Corbin turns to the archaic potentialities of the soul in order to realize the goal of transhistorical experience. For Corbin, when he grasped the deeper historicity of *Dasein*, its ability to stand apart from secular history, this was so decisive because “it was also without doubt the moment when, taking the Heideggerian analytic as an example, I was led to see hermeneutic levels that his program had not foreseen.”⁵⁷

Like Eliade, Corbin believes that there is a remedy for our immersion in the terrors of history. In other words, we are not irremediably

53 Quoted by *ibid.* p. 8. (cd. Jambet 28.)

54 Quoted by *ibid.* p. 8. (cd. Jambet 32-33.)

55 Cheetham, T., *The World Turned Inside Out*, p. 10.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

57 Quoted by Cheetham, T., *The World Turned Inside Out*, p. 8. (cd. Jambet 28.)

lost in a “world of Absence”. And according to Corbin, and in this he is also much like Eliade, this is possible for the transcendent Self by breaking out of objective history and its material causality. Accordingly, we must return to an existential experience of space that is internal, event-like, and opposed to homogeneous and measurable spatiality. The transcendent soul originates from non-chronological metahistory, and the soul must recognize its own strangeness in history (i.e. the purely immanent world of ordinary consciousness) in order to know itself authentically again. Tom Cheetham, one of Corbin’s interpreters, stresses that these insights also have an important religious-historical dimension: “for Corbin, it is this conception of the meaning of history and time that is the most important difference between the official Christianity of the Councils and Islamic spirituality. Islam has simply never had to confront the problems of historical consciousness.”⁵⁸

According to Corbin himself, Islam offers something radically different:

“Such a prophetic philosophy moves in the dimension of a pure theophanic historicity, in the inner time of the soul; external events, cosmologies, the histories of the prophets, are perceived as the history of the spiritual man. Thus it obliterates the ‘historical trend’ with which our epoch is obsessed. Prophetic philosophy looks for the meaning of history not in ‘horizons’, that is, not by orienting itself in the latitudinal sense of a linear development, but vertically, by a longitudinal orientation extending from the celestial pole to the Earth, in the transparency of the heights or depths in which the spiritual individuality experiences the reality of its celestial counterpart, its ‘lordly’ dimension, its ‘second person’, its ‘Thou.’”⁵⁹

In this way, the spiritualisation of historical existence is completed: through verticality (sacred spatiality and partly sacred temporality), the Self is freed from its objective historical narrowness and encounters the alterity that infinitely surpasses it. For Corbin, even the hagiography of the 12th imam realizes itself in a parallel world. As Corbin puts it in *Temple and Contemplation*: “It is through this rupturing of time that the truth of all history can finally shine forth; for through it, history is

58 Cheetham, T., *The World Turned Inside Out*, p. 132.

59 Corbin, H., *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, London, Routledge, 1969, p. 81.

liberated and transmuted into parable.”⁶⁰ From Corbin’s point of view, hierohistory is to be found in the imaginal space of symbols – and to be discovered by the soul. It should not escape our attention: this is also basically a counter-historic model. As Corbin puts in *Islam iranien*: “metahistory’s essentially eschatological dimension breaks history”⁶¹.

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It is worth bearing in mind that Eliade and Corbin are not simply enemies of the phenomenology of history as a description of human finitude. On the contrary, they themselves see human existence as capable of being locked into the limitation of historicity, but, on the other hand, they see this state of being as transcendable. The 20th century phenomenology of religion began with Rudolf Otto’s thesis that the sacred is “wholly other” (*ganz andere*). Continuing in this tradition, Eliade and Corbin see in the sacred that which leads beyond history, although they formulate this in a variety of ways, sometimes referring to a kind of hierohistory, sometimes speaking of transcending history in general. Even if we take into account the shortcomings and internal tensions of their theories, we can still conclude that they constitute an exciting counterpoint to phenomenologies of history that ignore the verticality of the sacred.

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60 Corbin, H., *Temple and Contemplation*, London, Routledge, 1986, p. 268.

61 Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien*, p. III.

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FENOMENOLOŠKA HIJEROISTORIJA KOD ELIJADEA I KORBENA

Sažetak: Članak polazi od premise prema kojoj su i Mirča Elijade i Anri Korben bili intrinzično povezani s fenomenološkom tradicijom. U razmatranju Elijadeove fenomenologije istorije, tumačenje u obzir uzima napetosti, dileme i protivrečnosti u njegovoj teoriji. Za Elijadea je, tako, istoričnost istovremeno fundamentalni element ljudskog stanja, znak prvobitnog ili modernog pada ljudske egzistencije, užas koji treba izbeći i ravan bića koju treba napustiti. Članak takođe posvećuje pažnju Elijadeovoj ličnoj životnoj priči i njegovom političkom angažmanu. Kada je reč o Anriju Korbenu, poseban naglasak stavljen je na činjenicu da je, iako je bio značajan recipijent Hajdegerove fenomenologije istorije, on od nje odstupio u suštinskim tačkama. Pažnja je usmerena na način na koji Korbenova fenomenologija analizira sveto mesto (i vreme) kao ono što je u odnosu s večnošću, čime se otvara mogućnost metaistorije.

Ključne reči: fenomenologija, religija, sveto, istorija, istoričnost, istoricizam, Elijade, Korben, Hajdeger, hermeneutika

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