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# The Enigma of Samos

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salt? And, if I remember correctly, the small change the kids from the next street stole off me was, for sweet Jesus' sake, mother, it was just a nickel or two!

*Translated by N. C. Germanacos*

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RICARDO REY BECKFORD / ARGENTINA

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## The Enigma of Samos

*This work, fundamental to the understanding of phagyanalysis, was published by Professor Wilhelm Wagner in the journal Anthropologie und Erwartung only two years ago. The echo of the controversies it stimulated in the most prestigious scientific centers of the old world has reached us even here. Our journal is honored today to publish, for the first time in Spanish, the text which renews the explosive and prolific dispute which the theories of Wagner and his followers have provoked in the scientific world.*

Almost three years ago I published the results of my investigations under the title *Phagyanalysis: A Theory of Ingestive Conduct in Human Beings*.<sup>1</sup> Of all the criticisms which the single printing of this work provoked—and they certainly were not few in number—the only ones which a scientific spirit can and, in fact, should consider valid, are those which question the data and the concrete observations which would support my theoretical propositions. The other criticisms, whether they stem from certain sectors of the society or from individuals poorly acquainted with the proper concerns of scientific investigation, do not even take into account, in the majority of cases, the grounds on which to raise the question.

However, in spite of the emotional nature of the majority of these attacks, of their virtually total inability to dispute facts pertinent to a discipline which they begin by ignoring in a manner that is at times alarming, we must admit that they gained (and not only among the greater public!) an acceptance which has little to do with the merit of their position. The preceding, however, should not greatly surprise us. It was predictable—one

might almost say inevitable, even at the risk of excusing those whose behavior is inexcusable.<sup>2</sup>

As a matter of fact, all the known cultures to date, from the most primitive to the furthest advanced, have expressed—as no one would deny—a variety of the same basic attitude and identical sentiments of fear and shame when confronting the human need for ingesting food. The observed forms of conduct in satisfying this basic need—common to all living beings—have been established, insofar as they relate to man, with reference to criteria and evaluations which neglect or disdain the true appetites of the individual and the biological nature of the process.

In terms of this, one single exception can be presented, although, for the time being, it is of a purely conjectural nature. It deals, however, with a hypothesis of such magnitude that its very existence is sufficient, in our judgment, to question seriously the universality of some of the concepts and assumptions which enjoy the greatest credence within the area of the social sciences. If, in addition, we consider its importance to the future of phagyanalytic theory, one can understand our need to deal with it and with the current state of research related to it.

The excavations on the island of Samos conducted two years ago under the direction of W. T. Richards were responsible for discovering the remains of a completely unknown civilization. To the sagacity and perseverance of Richards and his aides we owe also the partial reconstruction of two dwellings which belong to this culture. The interior layout of these dwellings surprised archeologists, and continues, today, to evoke a tremendous interest.

Every house familiar to us—with the exception of those on Samos—contains the same number of dining rooms as there are adult members in the household, and a single bedroom to be shared by all. This arrangement, with certain modifications, had always existed, up to that memorable date. The houses of Samos, however—and here lies the marvelous novelty—have, each of them, four bedrooms and a single dining room.

This unusual arrangement has led many—W. T. Richards among them—to assume that in the previously mentioned civilization the ingestive function was performed with absolute promiscuity. In the opinion of Richards, the ancestral taboos did not apply to the act of ingestion. Rather, as seems to be suggested by the unusual number of bedrooms, these same taboos were transferred to the act of sleeping.<sup>3</sup>

L. Lesfilles' expedition to the island of Samos was undertaken immediately after Richards'. His findings were certainly not any less valuable than those of his predecessor. During the early part of last year, Lesfilles worked in a region very close to that explored by the British archeologist. The few pieces of sculpture that he succeeded in finding—the only ones found in Samos to date—compensated for all the difficulties which the ex-

pedition had to overcome. They consist of seven heads, sculptured in marble, belonging to individuals of a distinct social class and of both sexes.

The "nudité scandaleuse"—to use Lesfilles' own words—is the common denominator of these sculptures. In effect, the heads of Samos display the human face in all its terrible nudity. The buccal zone appears offensively exposed, without any attempted subterfuge or veiling. In one of them—as Lesfilles relates it—the artist, going beyond the boundaries of the most basic conventions, has not only allowed himself to reproduce the contours of the lips, but has also dared to let us glimpse certain dental parts of the model.<sup>4</sup> It is unnecessary to state that none of this has the slightest precedent in all the history of nude sculpture.

The discoveries of Lesfilles—apparently, unquestionably—would seem to confirm some of the hypotheses proposed by Richards, based on the houses of Samos. However, in his interpretation of the facts, Lesfilles differs considerably from his illustrious colleague.

As we all know, the dispute between these two investigators is already little less than proverbial and has its long and not always edifying history. With reference to the case at hand, an article which Lesfilles published a short time before starting out on his explorations and investigations on the island of Samos might be of precursory interest. In this article, Lesfilles presented a series of observations and objections critical of the work in which Richards summarizes his far-reaching discoveries on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Riddled with the suspicions and ambiguities which are apparently his trademark as a writer, Lesfilles' article carefully scrutinized every conclusion arrived at by Richards, and particularly those referring to "the surprising plurality of bedrooms." With regard to this, he suggested the possibility that the large number of bedrooms is not related to the act of sleeping—as Richards maintained—but to the sex act.<sup>6</sup>

Such a groundless and tenuous interpretation as that presented by Lesfilles was not worthy, at first, of any rebuttal from Richards. However, Lesfilles has insisted on its veracity, to the point of converting it into one of the key ideas in his book.<sup>7</sup> In the book he not only enumerates all of his differences with Richards, but also elaborates a complete theory in support of this idea, and goes so far as to say that if paintings or sculptures reproducing the human body in its entirety are ever discovered in Samos, the sexual parts will be found to be covered or altered in some way.

In spite of the respect due to a scholar of Lesfilles' caliber, we are in full agreement with Richards in this instance when he labels these hypotheses as "unfounded, absurd, and fantastic."<sup>8</sup>

Karl Albernogel, director of and spokesman for the so-called Bavarian Club, has, on his part, recently devoted a series of articles to the Samos theme. These have been collected and published in an elegant pamphlet by

the Department of Anthropology of the National Bavarian University, under the title *Mythos and Wahrheit*.

Those who are familiar with Albernavogel's ideas find it difficult to become even slightly stimulated by reading his works. This investigator's habituated loyalty to certain orthodox principles does not allow him any latitude. His obstinate and severe judgments, always inopportune, are notorious.

But we will allow the Bavarian to elaborate. "The dull incompetence of Richards and Lesfilles obliges me, once again, to put things in their proper place," he says. Further along: "The things in their place, without subterfuge or vagueness, the problem here is the dining room." Further along still: "Let us get to the matter without additional delay." On page 42 it appears that Albernavogel is about to begin dealing with the matter. On page 45, however, he reminds us of "the urgent need to grasp the bull by its horns."

To avoid prolonging this indefinitely, we will summarize his major point. Albernavogel, before considering the dining room in question, finds it necessary to distinguish between two concepts which he believes to be fundamental: the concepts of "common use" and of "simultaneous use." Beginning with this distinction, he concludes: "There is not, therefore, the slightest impediment to assuming that the famous single enclosure, designated for the activity of mastication in Samos—which has led Richards and Lesfilles to make such foolish and perplexing statements—was used separately and successively by the inhabitants of each dwelling."

In short, Albernavogel is repulsed by the possibility that the inhabitants of Samos lived "in the unacceptable promiscuity which a common and simultaneous use of the same dining room by all the residents of a house would indicate." Consequently, he maintains that while the men of Samos designated a single place for the feeding activity, they used it strictly in turn.

But all that Albernavogel succeeds in doing with his precarious explanation is to jump from one enigma to another even more inexplicable, from the "unacceptable promiscuity" of the members of the household, to the unacceptable stupidity of the Samos architects. Why a single dining room? Why several bedrooms? The questions remain unanswered.

Up to this point we have presented, in too succinct a form, what we feel to be the most important theories currently being debated by the disciples of the authorities in the field. We now intend to present our own solution to the problem of Samos.

Richards and Lesfilles share an "amoral" hypothesis or, more properly, "heteromoral," in assuming that no taboos related to the alimentary activity exist. They differ, on the other hand, in what is referred to as the multiplicity of bedrooms. For Richards, the tabooed act is the act of sleeping;

for Lesfilles, the sex act. Albernavogel, with the results we have already seen, is opposed to heteromoral explanations. In what he says about the bedrooms and the sculptures he maintains a silence easy to fathom.

In contrast to the heteromoral theories of the former and the ingenuous moralism of the latter, we, in keeping with the fundamental principles of phagyanalysis, present an explanation intermediate to and, in part, conciliatory to both. Our theory, which we do not hesitate to call neomoralistic, includes and synthesizes, so to speak, the two irreconcilable extremes of the controversy.

We shall begin by confronting one of the most difficult problems: that of Lesfilles' sculptures. The ingenuous moralistic position does not even attempt to state this problem which, clearly, from its point of view, could have no possible explanation.

The nudity of the faces—together with the single dining room—would, then, seem to lead us to either of the heteromoral positions. However, it is neither prudent nor advisable to begin with such peremptory assertions. As support for our position, we cite a fragment from J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, whose authority is indisputable. He states: "The Warua do not permit anyone to see them eating or drinking . . . when they are offered a drink, they often ask for a cloth so that they may conceal themselves while drinking."

In short, the concealment of the buccal zone takes place only during the actual moment of ingesting food. In every other circumstance the Warua—a primitive society lacking the modesty, delicacy, and, therefore, the tremendous repression of highly evolved civilizations—leave their faces completely exposed.

Here, at least, we have a historical precedent for a position which stated in other terms has no antecedents in the history of mankind. It is neither the strict, unhealthy morality of civilized societies, nor the total absence of ingestive taboos, which occurs only in the world of hastily conceived scientific theories.

This historical explanation of the sculptures is, in our judgment, the only one which does not require bizarre events to explain satisfactorily the nudity of the heads found by Lesfilles.

We are left, finally, with a fact more significant than the single dining room—namely the plurality of bedrooms. Albernavogel ignores this. Neither Richards nor Lesfilles succeeds in explaining it. The act of sleeping was never tabooed. The sex act—even to think it is ridiculous. Our explanation is as simple as the naked truth. If what abounds are bedrooms, the simple explanation is that the residents of Samos were in the habit of eating in bed.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> No Spanish translation exists. (Trans. note.)

<sup>2</sup> Apparently, the eminent scientist is here alluding to the predicted attacks from the Bavarian Club and the University of Ghana, (Ed. note.)

<sup>3</sup> Richards, W. T. *Samos and the Bedrooms*. Oxford University Press, 1964, Vol. II, p. 528ff.

<sup>4</sup> Lesfilles, L. *Le Pays aux Visages Impudiques*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1966, p. 328ff. (For obvious reasons, the work does not include photographs of the sculptures.)

<sup>5</sup> We are of course referring to *Samos and the Bedrooms*, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Lesfilles, L. "Dormir ou Forniquer?" In *Revue Scientifique des Hautes Etudes Archeologiques*, Paris, No. 128, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 215-29, 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Lesfilles, L. *Le Pays aux . . .*, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Richards, W. T. *Fornication and Lesfilles: A Wrong Way*. In *Anthropology*, Vol. XXI, p. 67ff.

*Translated by Joseph Somoza*

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MAGDA SZABÓ / HUNGARY

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## Dreams of Pursuit

### ONE

When he got back from the hospital Mrs. Tóth from the ground floor was lurking by the gate. She pretended to be gardening, pottering about by the flower-bed, but the professor knew that she was in fact waiting for him. From the way she looked at him, came up and put her hand on his shoulder, he knew that she must have rung up the hospital and been told that Valerie had not survived the operation. Mrs. Tóth whispered something, there were tears in her eyes, they shook hands. He hoped he could now finally get into his flat, sit down and sort out his thoughts, but he was not left alone. Mrs. Tóth saw him up the stairs, and as they stopped in front of the door she