

Introduction

It is exactly 61 years ago that Rudolph Otto, then the nestor of religious studies in Germany, suggested the word *Eranos* (banquet) when in 1933 the Dutchwoman Olga Froebe-Kapteyn was trying to find a name for an idea that she had been having for some time. He thought of an "intellectual feast," a banquet of sages. Coming from very different backgrounds, these men subsequently gathered for a six-day conference, in Ascona in the Swiss Tessin. They live together and develop, one by one, their inspirational thoughts on a predetermined theme. The theme of the first *Eranos* meeting was "Yoga and Meditation in East and West." Other topics since then have been "Man and Creation," "Gestalt and Cult of the 'Great Mother'," "Spirit and Nature," and "Man and His Symbols." The meetings have continued year after year, except for 1989, on such diverse themes as (most recently) "Migrations" (1992) and "The Power of the Word" (1993).

Eranos has been supported by an extraordinary variety of disciplines: Comparative Religions, Islamic Studies, Egyptology, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Indian Studies, Zen Buddhism, Philosophy, Literary Criticism, Mysticism, Neoplatonism, etc. and has thus given life to the idea of the unity of the human spirit in its diversity.

The linkages between creative imagination and scientific rigor remain the fundamental principle upon which *Eranos* is based. For this reason it has also attracted the most imaginative scholars in their respective field: Henry Corbin, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Louis Massignon, Mircea Eliade, C.G. Jung, Leo Baeck, Erwin Schrödinger, Ilya Prigogine, Walter F. Otto, Karl Kerényi, Gilles Quispel, Eric Voegelin, D.T. Suzuki, Gershom Scholem, Toshihito Izutsu et al.

Mircea Eliade once wrote about *Eranos*: "One might compare this form of cultural creativity to certain 'circles' of the Italian Renaissance or German Romanticism." Whoever will some day write the history of *Eranos*, will be able to say more about such or similar associations. But it is probably correct to say that for 61 years something wonderful has been happening year after year in

Ascona: the creation of a cosmos of knowledge, within which are brought together subject matters that are otherwise separated.

Even before the encounter of *Diogenes* and *Eranos* in this special issue, the two had a variety of points in common. In the 1960 *Eranos* Yearbook Adolf Portmann, the longtime spokesman of the circle, points to the similarities between the idea of *Eranos* and the concept of “diagonal sciences” that Roger Caillois adhered to.

By bringing together in this volume some very recent contributions on the theme of mythological structures of chaos, Jean d’Ormesson and Paola Costa have recognized this communality of views and have, through a special issue, given tangible expression to this scholarly configuration. The authors of *Eranos* are extremely grateful to them for this.

– Tilo Schabert