

Soldier of Sidon writeup

The Urth list — 18 messages, 4 voices, 24 Mar 2018

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6785>

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Marc Aramini — 24 Mar 2018, 20:11

Here are the write-ups for Latro in the Mist and Soldier of Sidon. They are very long because they are meant to serve as annotated commentaries in the absence of annotated editions.

Latro in the Mist

<https://pastebin.com/26eeCgit>

Soldier of Sidon

<https://pastebin.com/Pg615bEW>

Marc Aramini — 26 Mar 2018, 14:24 · in reply to Marc Aramini

It occurs to me as I re-read the start of the essays that Wolfe, as Milton did before him in "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (and is a quite common trope of earlier poetry as well), is playing with the associations of Pan and Christ not only in the first volume, but in a negative way in the third, when the All-beast (panther) Beteshu (another name for Apep) is introduced as the visible manifestation of Angra Mainyu, the evil spirit or dark god contra Ahura Mazda in Zoroastrianism. This makes me wonder if Jove actually is suffering from a case of MPD in these books.

On Sat, Mar 24, 2018 at 1:11 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
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David Stockhoff — 02 Apr 2018, 01:10 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Marc, I'm working through your write-up for Latro in the Mist. I've barely scratched the surface, but your voice is authoritative, your writing is clear, and your arguments are logical and yet sensitive to all the mysteries and motivations of Wolfe's story and characters. It's more than solid---it's definitive. I stand in awe!

You note, regarding the Great Mother's aversion to iron, that "Beyond the fairy tradition, it does not seem that a clear reason for the aversion to iron is ever given..." This issue has always bothered and fascinated me---the reasoning behind the fairy tradition and how it is (inconsistently) used in literature as well as specifically how it works here. Why would the Mother behave like a fairy, and why would Ares behave like a human? If this is the case, is either entity diminished or enlarged by this treatment? Does it reveal basic assumptions about gods, or is it a forcing of categories necessary under some strict Wolfean scheme, or merely a convention?

The question of why fairies dislike iron may be one of those that can't ever satisfactorily answered. All sorts of arguments have been made, including contradictory ones. For example, (1) "Iron has magical properties" such as magnetism; it was first known and used in the form of meteoric iron (literally, "sky iron") and was used in lightning rods on church steeples (2) "Iron signifies ironworking and other human skills"? that are naturally inimical to fairies, who only use "natural" materials or magic and can't even tie shoes (3) "Iron is from the earth and fairies are sky creatures."

These principles can be applied to good effect in fairy stories that address a limited aspect of the magical world (e.g., the meteoric elf-armor-slicing sword in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, or the glamours of *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*). But theories #1 and #2 are generally negated by the fact that fairies (and gods) can be both skilled ironworkers */and /*masters of magic. And #3 is just lazy new age nonsense.

Comprehensive discussion of fairies---and hot babes---here:
<http://www.medbherenn.com/faerie-lore.html>

I'm not sure we actually know anything concrete about historical worship of the Great Mother. Maybe Wolfe is just applying Occam's Razor to fill in a gap where it serves his plot. But somehow the Mother's aversion to iron has to fit with both the universal folklore tradition about the (un)dead and the worship of Pleistorus as you describe it: "the War God of the Thracians receives sacrifices to an iron sword planted in the ground which represents him both in Herodotus and in *Soldier of Arete*."

How can the natures of the Mother and Pleistorus be so fundamentally incompatible that they respond differently to the same elemental material? Or is this something operating above the level of elemental divinity? Perhaps it makes sense to assume an opposition of the divine female principle to the male, but (a) why represent this opposition with iron blades (b) why force Ares into representing the male principle just because he wields a sword?

Three lines of thinking could apply to both fairies and the Great Mother, and I think they are instructive.

First, iron can symbolize the life force, because it channels lightning, smells like blood, and can be reshaped, meaning that fairies, being originally dead (originating in ancestor worship, are hurt by it. When Tolkien's blades are forged and reforged, this is in part iron/steel being used to represent the life force (though it can also signify the death force in the form of "satanic mills"). Because iron has "life" in it, it can be used to bind the spirits of the dead. This belief underlies iron cemetery fences, knives under the cradle, and iron-bound coffins for detested (i.e., vampiric) individuals.

But Wolfe probably would not go for this explanation, since his gods (unlike the Nazgul) are actually positive forces who reflect the true God. It also seems like a later, rationalizing response to technological development and the Carolingian relegation of the pagan gods to superstition, rather than true Iron Age belief. However, this principle would allow life-sucking undead entities to be weakened by or have reason to fear iron.

Second, iron's best-known feature is that it can be made sharp (sharper than stone or bronze) and tough and thus is (obviously) associated with war. War means constant use of weapons against armor: constant repair and sharpening of swords, as contrasted with the ongoing making of new slingstones and spear and arrow heads. The fact that Pleistorus is represented by a sword is telling. In fact, in Hellas it might especially be associated with the Doric invaders

of the Iron Age, some of whom became the warlike Spartans, whose slaves tell Latro (as noted) about their worship of the Mother and the Spartans' destruction of her forests. Unlike spears and arrows and bronze daggers, which feed people (iron plows came later, with the Romans), swords are purely instruments of war (like an AR-15 vs. a "hunting rifle").

On the other hand, it seems likely that a goddess of harvest and hunting would deeply prefer her sacrificial victims to be offered up intentionally as a gift of value rather than as waste. The Mother would not want battle corpses piled on her shrines or to be offered victims killed in anger. But then, she is not in fact made weak by iron, like a fairy, but simply "refuses to drink the blood of any sacrifice which has touched iron." Indeed, she could reasonably abhor all violence other than that needed to gather food, since it diminishes her worshipers and their reliance on her, or sanction only violence that does not shed blood (such as strangling).

This theory seems to support your overarching thesis of beating Martian swords into plowshares, without necessarily relying on traditions of fairies or the dead. But it resonates with these traditions because they tell us both the gods and the dead are sensitive to such matters. Furthermore, the methods of killing men in war are also quite different from those used to kill animals; similarly, methods of corpse disposal are different for honored humans as opposed to hated ones, criminals, or animals.

Regardless of how the gods felt about it, ironless animal and human sacrifice was real. Forensic archaeology suggests that when humans were ritually executed and committed to the bogs in northern Europe, they were neither drowned (despite the obvious convenience of that method) nor burned (even though that was the norm for that time and place), nor killed with swords (perhaps too noble a death?), but were instead strangled, hit on the head, axed, and/or had their throats cut. Cutting throats does not need a strong blade that cuts through bone and remains sharp.

Their deaths were highly intentional, in other words, and resembled animal sacrifice; they were performed with full knowledge of an audience, whether human or supernal/infernal, and whether being killed in this way was honorable or dishonorable. This seems to fit with the traditions regarding fairies and the undead, but it's not obvious what the underlying logic might be. If the spirits of the dead were feared enough to need fending off with symbolic iron---but never with swords---this might be explained by the "life force" theory. Perhaps iron swords sent the warrior's spirit directly to the afterlife without the gods' devouring it, while iron's life-affirming properties denied the restless dead a return to this plane. Maybe the sacrifice part was simply forgotten in folklore, for obvious reasons.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/03/were-europes-mysterious-bog-people-human-sacrifices/472839/>

Personally, I am skeptical that human sacrifice to gods or elements was routine, or that it occurred other than in times of famine or other crisis. I suspect that at least some of these people were hated and feared as malevolent beings (rightly or not) who required denigration and treatment as animals. Whereas respected people might be killed in battle and burned or buried with their retinues, the "staged violence" and location of the bog peoples' deaths must have been meant to deliver them and their spirits to the underworld in such a manner that their spirits were destroyed, while others' spirits were welcomed whole into the underworld. If that was the case, then it could not have been the sacrificial victims whose spirits were feared, but everyone else's, because the power of ritual was strong.

And that is why the restless dead fear iron, water, and fire and not string, clubs, or bronze (and it has nothing to do with "life force"). (Other evidence suggests a similar logic for decapitation.)

On 3/24/2018 4:11 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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Ab de Vos — 02 Apr 2018, 09:13 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Both group-internal violence as in human sacrifice or external violence as in war are both embedded in myth and ritual. Nowadays, propaganda and scapegoating groups of people are comparable to myth. The concept of the sacred was involved in both acts of killing as in holy war (O.T. Israel, Uria the Hittite, Gideon) or even burials (Human sacrifice in graves excavated at Ur). Of course the sacrificial patterns change over time and culture. Even the economy may be viewed as a sacrificial pattern with its own glory (capital), power (money), sacraments (consumptive wealth) and divinity (the invisible hand of the market system). If we take technology into account and the way it is fetishized we have one underlying pattern to both fantasy and science fiction and indeed (modern) culture. Biblical Cain is represented as the father of smiths which may be an example of early culture criticism.

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David Stockhoff — 02 Apr 2018, 14:05 · in reply to Ab de Vos

Yes. I think the fact that war dead can and have been seen as a form of sacrifice strengthens the Great Mother's distinction between war and worship, especially in Wolfe's hands. Refusing to honor men sacrificed in that manner would be---and has been---a major political and religious statement.

On 4/2/2018 5:13 AM, Ab de Vos wrote:

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David Stockhoff — 02 Apr 2018, 14:06 · in reply to David Stockhoff

It is striking that, from our vantage, that association just seems wrong. And yet, upon reflection, so right. I suppose Sol Invictus must be a link somewhere.

On 4/1/2018 10:54 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

Wolfe really brought things full circle by having Latro wind up on the Island of Philae at the end of Sidon ... a place where Christian iconoclasts effaced all the Egyptian gods but the war god Horace and his winged disk because they felt he somehow resonated with Christ. Awesome bit of historical synthesis.

David Stockhoff — 03 Apr 2018, 00:55 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Expanding on my comments of yesterday (apologies if they were long-winded), because I find the topic fascinating and relevant to the Christian syncretistic theme.

Marc goes on to quote Herodotus about the Scythians' human sacrifices to Ares: ">[62] ? [I]n Ares? case things are different. In every district, within each province, a sanctuary has been constructed to Ares. — Bundles of sticks are piled together into a block about three stades by three stades wide, but not so high off the ground. — Each year they add a hundred and fifty cart-loads of sticks, to make up for the subsidence caused by the winter's storms. On top of this structure the inhabitants of each district plan an ancient iron *akinakes* [a small, straight sword of Scythia and Persia], which is taken to represent Ares. The festival takes place once a year, and at it they offer this *akinakes* more domestic animals and horses as sacrificial victims than all the other gods receive. They also sacrifice prisoners of war to this *akinakes*, though the method is different from when domestic animals are the victims. One prisoner in every hundred is selected; they pour wine over the prisoners' heads, cut their throats so that the blood spills into a jar, and then carry the jars up on to the pile of sticks and pour the blood over the *akinakes*. While the jars are being taken up there, something else is happening down below, by the side of the sanctuary: they cut off the right arms of all the slaughtered men — the whole arm, from shoulder to hand — and hurl them into the air. Then they sacrifice all the rest of the victims and leave. The arms are left lying wherever they fall, detached from the corpses. (255)"

One can't help but notice that there are really only two slight but very deliberate---and almost illogical---differences between the sacrifices of animals and these humans. I say "illogical" because it seems easier to simply kill the victim directly with the sacred sword, as Elric would wield Stormbringer. But: (1) Wine is poured on the victim's head. Maybe this is in token exchange for the blood? Is wine then a kind of blood equivalent, with life symbolism? (2) The victim's drained blood is applied to the iron sword rather than the reverse.

So what is so important about this overly complicated means of getting blood in contact with the iron sword? Truly, this is hardly a "different method" at all. The victims are slashed at the throat and drained as in any animal sacrifice. It is plainly important that this part of the normal cult ritual be maintained; it may satisfy unknown requirements, it may be the oldest part of the ritual, it may have a specific magic effect, or all of these.

But the description also suggests that the victims' throats are *not* cut with iron blades, because that would logically interfere with the most sacred, symbolic, and difficult part of the ritual: applying the blood to the sword. Especially if iron has its own magical significance, you'd want to keep it away from the blood. Whatever value the blood carries must reach the sword intact, as though iron interferes with it in a way that stone and bronze do not. And since the soul departs the body long before the blood reaches the sword, you have to wonder if this segregation also serves some sort of hygienic purpose regarding the spirit.

We can conclude from this that if the Scythians actually performed these sacrifices, the ritual use of an iron sword was grafted onto older rituals involving animals and stone or bronze blades. For Wolfe, the Great Mother has good reason to disdain iron blades. But Herodotus shows her distaste is not for violence or the worship of Ares. *Even Ares doesn't want the blood of men killed with iron.

*For some reason, iron must be kept away from all sacrificial victims for all the gods. And this seems to hold for the bog people too.

David Duffy — 03 Apr 2018, 01:06 · in reply to David Stockhoff

I have been seeking in vain for any evidence that Latro meets Jews or Judaeans along the way. The most obvious place would have been at Yeb a.k.a. Elephantine Island, from where there are a heap of papyri dating from exactly the time that L. visits (spans 525 to 420 BCE), written by members of the Jewish community there eg

"On the 18th of Paophi, in the 4th year of Artaxerxes the king [461 BCE], in Yeb the fortress, said Malchiah b. Joshibiah, Aramaean, holding property in Yeb the fortress, of the detachment of Nabukudurri...I should challenge you by Herembethel the god before 4 judges: I did not enter your house by force..."

They were originally Judaeans mercenaries manning the fortress. Their temple has five doors that probably represent Yahu (the God of Heaven), but also Bethel (Canaanite, Herembethel is "house/temple of Bethel"), Anathya'u (possibly Syrian, the queen of heaven) etc.

My original thinking was that Seven Lions might have something to do with Ethiopian Beth Israel Jewry, Sheba etc etc - he originally came from the south.

Cheers, David Duffy.

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Marc Aramini — 03 Apr 2018, 03:13 · in reply to David Duffy

It's actually in an interview with James Jordan here
<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>

GW: Not tremendously. It was just at the time I was planning a third book and I wanted to get him into the Semitic world. [Moving from] the Hellenic world that these two books were laid in very largely and to involve him with the Phoenicians and the Jews and the Syrians and that part of the world. When I originally conceived the series I wanted to do a tour of the ancient world so to speak. And I had hoped in fact to get him into the new world where there were the Mayan and the so on the various American Indian civilizations. They really dislike the term Native American, Indians. I realize Indians is not a very good term for them I don't think Native Americans is a good term either. I wanted to do all those things and after the second book David Hartwell, my editor, called me up and told me not to write the third one. He now denies that by the way but he did.

On Mon, Apr 2, 2018 at 6:06 PM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimrberghofer.edu.au> wrote:

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Ab de Vos — 03 Apr 2018, 12:14 · in reply to David Stockhoff

It is hypothesized in anthropology that human sacrifice came first and all other forms of animal and plant sacrifice came later. Animal husbandry and food planting supposedly took place originally within the confines of the ritual-sacrificial system. War among the Aztecs was for the purpose of human sacrifice. Myth further was the verbalization of sacrifice and only later took on a life of its own as in the Homeric vision of the Gods.

Rene Girard says the sacrificial mechanism of the scape goat is the basis of human culture. He analyses Greek tragedy and the Gospels as forms of discourse in which this mechanism reaches the threshold of cultural awareness after millennia of simply being lived. The development of human culture is basically the evolution of the sacrificial mechanism and the way it structures and channels violence. It suffuses all aspects of culture and has its own logic of differentiation. Some classicists consider his theory 'gnostic' because it is a master key to analyzing human culture and not historically specific. Girard has developed the theory of mimetic desire and violence as the core of his anthropological and literary criticism.

I guess "it's all about Eve".

Op 3-4-2018 om 02:55 schreef David Stockhoff:

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Ab de Vos — 03 Apr 2018, 12:46 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I cannot reach the site.

How is Wolfe's health by the way?

Op 3-4-2018 om 05:13 schreef Marc Aramini:

It's actually in an interview with James Jordan here
<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>
<<http://mysite.verizon.net/%7Evze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>>

*

*

GW:?Not tremendously. It was just at the time I was planning a third book and I wanted to get him into the Semitic world. [Moving from] the Hellenic world that these two books were laid in very largely and to involve him with the Phoenicians and the Jews and the Syrians and that part of the world. When I originally conceived the series I wanted to do a tour of the ancient world so to speak. And I had hoped in fact to get him into the new world where there were the Mayan and the so on the various American Indian civilizations. They really dislike the term Native American, Indians. I realize Indians is not a very good term for them I don't think Native Americans is a good term either. I wanted to do all those things and after the second book David Hartwell, my editor, called me up and told me not to write the third one. He now denies that by the way but he did.

On Mon, Apr 2, 2018 at 6:06 PM, David Duffy
<David.Duffy at qimrberghofer.edu.au
<mailto:David.Duffy at qimrberghofer.edu.au>> wrote:

I have been seeking in vain for any evidence that Latro meets Jews or Judaeans along the way.
The most obvious place would have been at Yeb a.k.a. Elephantine Island, from where there are a heap of papyri dating from exactly the time that L. visits (spans 525 to 420 BCE), written by members of the Jewish community there eg

"On the 18th of Paophi, in the 4th year of Artaxerxes the king [461 BCE], in Yeb the fortress, said Malchiah b. Joshibiah, Aramaean, holding property in Yeb the fortress, of the detachment of Nabukudurri...I should challenge you by Herembethel the god before 4 judges: I did not enter your house by force..."

They were originally Judaeans mercenaries manning the fortress. Their temple has five doors that probably represent Yahu (the God of Heaven), but also Bethel (Canaanite, Herembethel is "house/temple of Bethel"), Anathya'u (possibly Syrian, the queen of heaven) etc.

My original thinking was that Seven Lions might have something to do with Ethiopian Beth Israel Jewry, Sheba etc etc - he originally came from the south.

Cheers, David Duffy.

David Stockhoff — 03 Apr 2018, 12:57 · in reply to Ab de Vos

That may well be the case, but it would have happened long before the Iron Age. I'm not suggesting that animal sacrifice came first, but pointing out that the use of stone and bronze blades came first, and arguing that iron blades were kept apart from those rituals even when they were the center of them, like the *akinakes*.

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Op 3-4-2018 om 14:57 schreef David Stockhoff:

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Marc Aramini — 03 Apr 2018, 13:58 · in reply to Ab de Vos

<http://web.archive.org/web/20140725102806/http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfejbj.htm>
I

Let's try that one. I am not really certain - he is not quick to answer correspondence lately but appears to be in decent spirits in a recent Easter family picture.

On Tuesday, April 3, 2018, Ab de Vos <foxyab at casema.nl> wrote:
I cannot reach the site.

How is Wolfe's health by the way?

David Stockhoff — 03 Apr 2018, 14:48 · in reply to Ab de Vos

I am of course speaking in extreme generalities. But "in anger" usually means fighting, and rituals have to be followed carefully to count as such. Generally a sacrifice is understood to be carried out without overt hostility, even if the victim is a slave, a deformed person, or a king.

On April 3, 2018 9:49:18 AM EDT, Ab de Vos <foxyab at casema.nl> wrote:
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Ab de Vos — 03 Apr 2018, 16:25 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Thanks,

This link works.

Op 3-4-2018 om 15:58 schreef Marc Aramini:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20140725102806/http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>
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Ab de Vos — 03 Apr 2018, 17:10 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Or possibly all at one as in the scenario that a deformed slave is a substitute for the divine king who is about to be slaughtered. Mock fighting is often a part of the proceedings like games. I suppose it all has to be part of the rite and not external to it. There is a gray area in between, I think, to allow activities to evolve separately, less tightly bound to ritual and becoming more or less independent.

As for the blood and wine they are both libations. There is the christian equivalence in mass.

Also when an ox? is sacrificed in Homer some grain is poured over its head. An atonement perhaps, a small sacrifice within a big one? If the sword represents Ares it seems that the blood is dedicated to the sword. Wielding the sword is dedicating the sword to the act of killing. Bringing the blood to the sword is like paying a tribute to a king. Maybe they threw the arms in the air to imitate the battlefield as well as by pouring wine-blood.

The process of making wine is a violent one because the grape has to be destroyed for the wine to be made. The same goes for grain and bread. All these activities are originally connected to the dying divinities later to be reborn and often suffering dismemberment.

You must be familiar with the term berserker rage. Even now some people around here have as their name Berserkeris. It is from the german past meaning an extatic state of divine possession of a warrior which enables him to keep on fighting even heavily wounded. Comparable to the menos of Achilles or his battlefield rage when his looks alone would scare his? opponents. Is this connected to Ares?

Op 3-4-2018 om 16:48 schreef David Stockhoff:

even if the victim is a slave, a deformed person, or a king