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**IVAR LASSY AND HIS ADVENTURES
IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL FIRES**

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IVAR LASSY AND HIS ADVENTURES IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL FIRES

1.

Ivar Lassy (1889-1937?), who began his career as a scholar and ended up as a politician, was a chronic failure and, as a logical consequence, an irreparable "in-betweenner" in the hands of later generations. Despite the shortness of its subject the historiography of Finnish anthropology generally progresses very cursorily. In its most concise form the Westermarckian School consists, in addition to the Master himself, of Rafael Karsten¹ and Gunnar Landtman², a wider presentation might bring forth Ragnar Numelin³, Yrjö Hirn⁴, and Rudolf Holsti⁵ — nowadays even Hilma Granqvist⁶. But someone is always missing: Lassy who did his fieldwork in the surroundings of Baku and received his doctorate on the basis of this material in 1916. Luckily for Lassy's reputation Azerbaijan is situated to the east of Finland and, in a scholarly context also, falls within the scope of Oriental studies, under the protection of which Lassy has found a place, albeit only as a marginal person. Neither does the history of Finnish communism readily recollect this eccentric womanizer, who, after an unsuccessful attempt at revolution, ardently championed Islam in a prison-camp. Lassy has also been forgotten by both the history of the Soviet Communist Party and the Communist International as well as by the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic where, as its people's commissar (i.e. minister) of education, Lassy put Rousseau's *Émile*, which he greatly admired, into practice. It would have been a miracle indeed if Lassy with his rowdy self-assertiveness and wild temperament could have avoided Stalin's purges, and thus he disappears from our chronicles in 1937.

Lassy will probably never get a serious scholarly biography, but it would be no wonder if some journalist "found" Lassy and got down to work inspired by Lassy's divers and undeniably very adventurous vicissitudes. Exciting as Lassy's vicissitudes were, I shall here present them briefly with their main points and concentrate on his most interesting literary output from an anthropological and Orientalist point of view.⁷

2.

As an anthropologist Lassy was not the classical outsider, for he was born and spent the summers of his childhood and youth in Baku and its environs, the place of his coming fieldwork. In Lassy's own romanticized words:

I do not know if my place in eternity is amidst the eternal fires and tortures. I only know that I am, in a way, already the child of the eternal fires. I was born amongst the eternal fires, far from civilization, in the centre of a wonderful, completely barren nature, which usually destroys the little seeds of life which stray there. (Lassy 1920b:28)

In the reminiscence quoted above Lassy calls for reasons of modesty, — after all a workers' publication is in question — his father a seaman, although in actual fact he was Captain Esaias Lassy in the service of the Nobel Oil Company. His mother Eveliina's maiden name was Clement.

Lassy attended school in Helsinki and matriculated in 1909. At university he studied aesthetics, Oriental literature, theoretical and practical philosophy and economics. He received a master's degree in 1913 and a doctorate in 1916. Professor of aesthetics Hirn and professor of practical philosophy Westermarck stand out as his real teachers in the foreword to his doctoral thesis.

After receiving his doctorate Lassy worked as a foreign correspondent for both of Helsinki's large bookshops and additionally wrote two popular treatises (Lassy 1917a and 1917f). His political activity of that time was represented by his membership of an entente-minded group which, in 1917, edited three numbers of a Swedish-language periodical *Ad Interim*. Hirn was the foremost arranger; two articles by Lassy also appeared in the paper (Lassy 1917b and 1917c).

The year 1918 and the civil war between the Whites and the Reds (on the civil war see e.g. Upton 1980) drew the borderlines anew, and Lassy's life also underwent a radical change. Lassy's idealistic leftism was faced with a real choice, and he made his decision by offering his linguistic skills to the Red Government (the Finnish People's Deputation) in Helsinki. Later he worked in the leadership of the local government of Espoo, the parish neighbouring Helsinki (Tuomisto 1978).

The war was lost and the court awarded Lassy a nine-year sentence which was soon changed to two years and after he had sat in prison for seven months he was conditionally discharged. Although Lassy still wished to continue his academic career, which had been checked at its inception, it was impossible for an intellectual who had belonged to "the wrong side" to get a post in the

academic world or even a publisher for his popular studies.⁸ The press offered a natural place for a left-wing intellectual and thus Lassy became the *primus motor* of a left-wing theoretical periodical *Sosialistinen Aikakauslehti* [The Socialist Journal]. The journal represented the Social Democratic Party's radical left, and when Lassy in addition to his prominent rôle was also a temperamental figure due to whom there was once a "punch-up" in the party conference when Lassy had used his secretary-lover to spy on the right wing, the common name for someone belonging to the left wing was soon "a Lassyite". As well as his editorial work Lassy administered the Press Agency of the Workers' Papers (TUT) which he had founded, and was also a correspondent for the Swedish *Folkets Dagblad Politiken* [The People's Daily Politics]. His political activities soon lead to the court-room again and a one-year nine-month sentence for planning treason-felony.

When Lassy was freed, accounts with the fatherland and science were clear. In 1923 he moved to Soviet Karelia, where he worked as minister of education and as leader of the party school. Later he moved to Moscow as head of Comintern's Scandinavian department. In Moscow he also functioned as a translator and lecturer at the university. The purges of the thirties, which tried the Finns in the S.U. severely, did not pass Lassy either, whose literary output (e.g. his textbook *Marxismin perusteet* [Fundamentals of Marxism], publ. in 1931) were declared, according to the decree given on June 3, 1937, antirevolutionary. The last news about a then sick Lassy came from a prison hospital in 1937.

When Lassy was practising the rudiments of Azeri in Baku, at the same time in the same town Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili was practising the rudiments of revolution. They met again in Moscow and the circle had closed.

3.

Lassy's thesis *The Muharram Mysteries among the Azerbaijan Turks of Caucasia* was examined in the spring of 1916. The central material had been collected during the winter of 1913-14 and summer 1915 but, as was mentioned above, Lassy spent the summers of his youth in Baku, and the first study connected with this subject appeared as early as 1912 in a leading Swedish-language cultural paper (Lassy 1912). This shortish descriptive article includes rather disconnected observations about the religious life and rituals of the area; a festival called "*Schachsej-Vachsej*" (i.e. *Šähsey-Vähsey* from "*Šäh-Husein, Vā-Husein*", Muharram Mysteries) has attracted most attention. Lassy's prediction of the potential political power of Shiah is also worthy of note.

In the foreword to the thesis Yrjö Hirn is called the spiritual godfather of the subject, which is no great wonder, for Hirn himself had, in his research connected with the origins of art, set out partly from ritual ecstasis which the *ta^cziya* offered in abundance — according to Lassy it was the culmination of Shiite fanaticism.

It has usually been considered a characteristic of evolutionist anthropology that the name of the research takes the form "The Origins of...". Another distinctive feature is that the research was carried out using the comparative method from an armchair. A closer acquaintance with the phases of the Westermarckian School clearly shows, however, that it is sometimes worth the bother to visit the sources themselves. Every anthropological textbook and the picture given by history includes a stereotype about evolutionist armchair anthropology and, harnessed alongside as its antithesis, about Bronislaw Malinowski and the tradition of fieldwork. The same delusion has, surprisingly and totally uncritically, passed into the Finnish texts; forgotten are Westermarck's "third home" (Helsinki, London and Tangiers) and his numerous years in Morocco, Karsten's journeys to South America, Landtman's journey to New Guinea, Lassy's years in Azerbaijan and Granqvist's journeys to Palestine.⁹

The search of origins is, at its worst, fruitless speculation and the comparison at its worst is a crushingly dull listing for the reader. Lassy escapes both dangers moderately honourably. In his introduction he states his task to be "the first attempt to fully describe and scientifically analyse the great Muhammedan Passion Festival". The first part equals "describe the facts" and the second part a corresponding scientific analysis "describe the relation of facts". The first chapter includes a short introduction to the landscape, people and language. In the second chapter Lassy presents the legend-material as such connected with Ḥusain as it was known when he was in Baku. As his sources he has used the oral information of the *rovzāhans* participating in the ritual as well as five printed ceremonial texts at his disposal. The chapter "History and legend", in which Lassy makes a settlement between Oriental studies and himself, is interesting:

"There is at present, I think, neither any possibility nor any need critically to treat the actual tradition of the old events in question. We are, in this case, in search not of the facts themselves, but of the form in which they have been preserved, the form they have assumed in the minds of the present generations. Thus the Tragedy at *Kerbelā* lies, not to the Tartars, of course, but to us, outside the boundaries of history, and belongs to the science of popular ideas, tastes, and beliefs." (p. 50)

An Orientalist would have approached his subject differently, and would not have condemned Weil and Dozy as Sunnis as Lassy does further on (pp. 50-51). Naturally the Finnish Orientalist par excellence, Knut Leonard Tallqvist, professor of Oriental literature, who had been designated Lassy's opponent, did not like this. In his official statement he snaps at Lassy:

To the contrary I must observe that the criticism the writer gives about the Western Orientalists' and historians' attempt to show the untrustworthiness of and contradiction in the announcements of the refined historical sources about the happenings at Kerbelâ is unjustified. To divide our Orientalists into allies of Sunna and Shiah is wholly and completely unheard of. A Dozy has a fully objective reason when he described the Shiites falsifiers of history. In this connection it should be noticed that the writer himself so wholly and firmly follows his own Shiite informants that he did not find it necessary to e.g. in the section pp. 18f. make a distinction between which is generally Muhammadan, which specifically Shiite. (Tallqvist 1916:2-3)

The third chapter includes, from a modern point of view, the most valuable part of the description, Lassy's own field observations which he — characteristically of a sociological frame of reference — has shaped into a certain kind of ideal type. It is vexing that he included only English translations and not his own transcriptions which would certainly have given his presentation a valuable addition. After the third chapter — the beginning of the scientific analysis — his opponent Tallqvist falls by the wayside, which is not as such any wonder, since Lassy's hold loosens gravely and it is difficult to find some thread of reasoning. With goodwill we can say that, in this way, Lassy implicitly expresses the impossibility of mechanistic evolutionism. Lassy's intention in the analysis is "to estimate the ethnological value of the facts presented" and, for that reason, the facts must first be seen "in relation to their own development" and then outline "their modification in different conditions of culture" and thirdly "their connection with kindred phenomena of the ethnological entity to which they belong". In the fourth chapter Lassy sets out to find answers to the problem he last presented by dealing with the customs and beliefs connected with dead in general. The following are included in the treatment: martyrdom, immortality, the ritual impurity of the corpse and blood, the last judgement, numerical magic connected with death, mourning and the cult of saints. His purpose is to separate from the Muḥarram rites the material which is characteristic to them alone and, on the other hand, the elements which are associated with the broader context and their origin. The greatest problem is that Lassy did not succeed in chrySTALLIZING his thoughts. It is easy to endorse Tallqvist's statement

when he writes that, "in its totality this chapter surely leaves a splintered and uneven impression" (Tallqvist 1916:4).

The fifth chapter is given to the same problem, the object of comparison is the New Year festivities to which the Muḥarram Mysteries offer no points of contact, according to Lassy. In the same context he gives a short description of the Azeri calendar tradition. The sixth and last chapter tries to find answers to the two problems presented first, history and diffusion. The chapter is tersely descriptive and rather a small quantity of literature has been used as source material. About this Tallqvist states in astonishment that Lassy had not quoted the patron saint of Finnish Oriental studies Georg August Wallin's (1811-1852) *ʿašhūrā*' description from Baghdad in 1848 (Wallin 1866:257-267). India, Sumatra, Egypt and the Maghreb are used in the comparison. The thesis ends beautifully inductively with an accurate definition and a great vision of future research possibilities. Let us then quote the whole of Lassy's definition:

"... we might characterise the *Muḥarrām Mysteries* ... as a festival which during the New Year's month of *Muḥarrām* in various ways, though chiefly by imitative and dramatic means and through mourning ceremonies, commemorates the tragic death of the Šîca Martyrs, above all that of *Husein* and his Family." (p. 282)

Lassy had planned a continuation to his theme in which he would deal with the pre-Islamic roots of the Muḥarram Mysteries, obviously connected with Osiris, Adonis and Tammuz. However this sequel remained unfulfilled, but the popularized Swedish version of this thesis included a short chapter (Lassy 1917f:218-237) which touched on the matter. The Swedish version, from which the thesis' central analysis — chapter four — has been left out, is also interesting for being lavishly illustrated. There are pictures of artefacts which Lassy sold to the Finnish National Museum (Varjola 1981:73) as well as samples of the Finnish Colonel Alexander Ijas' (who had been working in the same area) large collection of photographs (see below).

In 1920 while Lassy was sitting in prison, two articles connected with the subject appeared in two labour publications. The former (Lassy 1920a) was a summary of the legend material of the events at Kerbela and the latter (Lassy 1920c) was a description of the dramatic performance of the events. Both were extracts from the Swedish version of the thesis and added nothing new to the subject. The most interesting thing in them is the former's analogy — deliberate or accidental — about the red victims of the civil war, "red martyrs of the class war", for the text is under a picture which shows "Members of the Red Guards shot in the pulp factory at Varkaus on February 23, 1918".

4.

How then is Lassy's thesis to be related to by present-day Oriental studies and anthropology? The researcher's attitude is usually textual in Orientalist research, this can clearly be seen in e.g. Pentti Aalto's comments on Lassy (Aalto 1971:56-57). Aalto remarks that "he very seldom mentions any sources" which is somewhat irrelevant criticism about research based on fieldwork. And when it comes to the historical and comparative share of research Lassy has made use of numerous anthropological (e.g. Frazer, Westermarck, Tylor and Douffé) and Orientalist (Goldziher, Lane, Browne, Muir, Weil, Dozy, etc.) studies. As Aalto points out the work has neither an index nor a bibliography, but when I had gone through all the footnotes I had a catalogue of 87 works in all.

From the point of view of a textual approach — and just as naturally of folklore research — it is of course destructive that Lassy has, in the context of the oral material presented in the process, published only the English translations. Correspondingly destructive is his sociological method; with it he has formed one generalization, an ideal type, from the observations he made on a variety of different occasions. In modern terms one of the greatest values of pedantic and descriptive evolutionism is that the material it uses is easy to submit to a new analysis with new methodological weapons — dry as ethnographic descriptions, according to Edmund Leach, might be. Generalization does not allow this.

When it comes to anthropology whose unity has, via functionalism and structuralism, dispersed to the four winds of heaven — from the symbolism of body movements to problems of the biosphere — it is difficult to relate Lassy to modern research. Certain studies about the *ta^cziya* do indeed refer to Lassy (see Robson 1955/56, Monchi-Zadeh 1967 and al-Haidari 1975) but this is only a question of taking descriptive exemplary cases. Most modern studies on the *ta^cziya* (among others Peters 1956, Thaïss 1972, al-Haidari 1977, Waugh 1977, Vieille 1981 and Hjärpe 1982) can, from the method of approach, be classified as functionalist, where the problem may be e.g. the functional change of the passion play accompanying the change taking place in the structures of society. If the problem is one way or another situated on the symbolic level, it too could often be reduced to some kind of functionalism. In these circumstances the way Lassy sets the problems has no relevance nowadays, and, taking into account the limitations due to the generalization mentioned above, its use as raw material is also not very promising. Thus we have arrived at a paradoxical situation in which research, which tries to rid itself of old-fashioned evo-

lutionism, falls uselessly between potential source-material and methodologically stimulating research. The other fall comes into the vexingly often unbridgeable chasm between two branches of science.

5.

Lassy's other popular treatise *Bakom gallret och slöjan* [Behind the Lattice and the Veil] moved further away from the scholarly world as the subtitle to its Finnish edition, "frank tales about my Persian girl friends", indicates. The work was intended to be the first part of a longer series of monographs *Solens och lejonets folk* [The People of the Sun and the Lion], but no sequels ever appeared. The texts, which saw their birth in a prison-camp, remained in the table drawer as the letters to Yrjö Hirn preserved in the Helsinki University Library show.

Some ethnographic value can be given to Lassy's frank reminiscences, for there is undoubtedly a great deal of factual information scattered amongst Lassy's adventures, Ijas' showy photographs and Hafiz's verses. It is, however, in vain to carry coals to Newcastle for Lassy's text has preserved its vitality as such without any instrumental increase in value. In its own genre, the field of Oriental travelogues, Lassy's reminiscences stand up to comparison with any of his Finnish colleagues. When pondering possible additional values one could however anachronistically add a touch of modern anthropology and the fundamental questions involved in fieldwork. Over the last fifteen years in numerous articles and monographs the subjective experiences of the anthropologist doing fieldwork and their implications have been demanded. Here we have a young anthropologist who openly talks about conditions in the field before Malinowski had even invented fieldwork.

In the first and most wide-ranging chapter of the book (a part of this chapter also appeared as a magazine article; Lassy 1917e) Lassy talks about his dwelling place at Haji Mäsum's and his naively moving romance with Mäsum's daughter Baghdagül, who was, in addition to everything else, married. The romance made up of shy glances and kisses blown to each other culminated in one real kiss and ended sadly when her husband took her away. As a sample of Lassy's style can be given this, perhaps most passionate scene, in which the act takes place while they are separated by two windows and a courtyard:

Her natural beauty shone still more dazzlingly because her hot blood, erotically excited, filled her finest veins and tightened her most sensitive nerves. You wanted to be beautiful, oh little Baghdagül, when you stood, lit by the sun, framed as a picture, and I readily admit that you were as beau-

tiful as nature could ever create a beautiful female being. You wanted me to watch you. I did it and I want to whisper to you that a mist has fallen before the pages of my book and before my eyes, so that my body swells with the foaming power of my blood and so that my throat swallows my emotions which want to burst out. (Lassy 1917a:29-30)

If a little grin in Malinowski's direction is still allowed, then it must be stated that in these matters Lassy had no difficulties in "going native", whereas Malinowski's morals did not want to endure the fact that he saw erotic dreams about the "savages", which he would not have fallen into when awake (Malinowski 1967, *passim*).

Lassy may have received some kind of moral pang for, in the second chapter of the book, he naturally moves on, after Baghdagül, to deal with adultery and matters concerned with chastity and later *sīgha* marriage (the same as Arabic *mut^{ca}*, 'marriage of pleasure'). His informant was an old woman who had had personal experiences of it. Lassy also touches upon the customs and conceptions connected with free love and incest. In the third chapter Lassy lets the aforementioned old woman present the charms and spells characteristic of women and, from a modern point of view, this forms perhaps the most valuable part of the book ethnographically speaking.

In the following episode Lassy again moves into a more subjective sphere. He tells the story of his stay in a smaller district on the shores of the Caspian Sea, where he lived in a tent in the courtyard of a certain Sultan Kuli. Sultan Kuli's sister was a sixty-year old widow who became interested in Lassy and they spent very many fascinating moments together during moonlit nights when the old woman secretly crept to Lassy's tent. Their conversations generally revolved around religion and the old woman had the intention of converting Lassy to Islam. Later she tried to persuade Lassy to marry a widow called Balasa but nothing came of it and Lassy never had the chance of seeing Balasa, although he would have liked to have done so out of curiosity.

In the last chapter of the book Lassy moves to an inland village where, among other people, he meets Näfäs Khanum, the coming wife of Haji Mäsum's (who was mentioned in the first chapter) son Musa. However, the most important of his conversational companions was his host's, the merchant Kälbilya's (Kerbelai Ilyas) wife Mariam whom the merchant treated badly due to her childlessness. The empathic Lassy was a most suitable companion for poor Mariam who was in the habit of cheering Lassy up nearly daily by telling him fairy tales about kings and dervishes, etc.

From a purely literary point of view Lassy's description is undoubtedly one of the best of its kind in the Finnish repertoire, but it must be admitted that Finnish travelogues concerning the Near East and the Islamic countries have not been of a very high standard. Orientalists in their expertise are rather dry, visitors of the Holy Land slavishly obey the conventions and stereotypes of their genre and laymen on the other hand fall into misconceptions resulting from their superficiality and ignorance. Lassy unites the anthropologist's empathy, the Orientalist's literary breeding and a youthful imagination in such a way that a readable and multilevelled text is produced. The delicate nature of the book's subject has not succumbed to cheap sensationalism, although it is no doubt thanks partly to this work that Lassy gained his reputation as a womanizer, which burst out later during the Social Democratic Party's 1919 party conference into public insults, faithfully copied down into the minutes by the recorder.

Contemporary critique also looked on Lassy favourably. True Knut Tallqvist takes a slightly reserved view of Lassy's brave subjectivism, but otherwise praises him (Tallqvist 1918). The critic writing about Landtman and Lassy in *Dagens Press* was, on the other hand, quite taken with Lassy's bold style and states at the end that "we too have men who penetrate deep into the life and conceptual world of strange peoples" ("S-m." 1917).

Additionally over twenty pictures taken from Colonel Alexander Ijas' collection make up one chapter of the book. Ijas worked for the Russian army in, among other places, Turkestan, Khorasan and later as consul in Soudj-Bulag (Soujbulak, Persian Azerbaijan). In 1914 he was killed by Kurds in Miandoab. Ijas, about whose life Lassy wrote briefly in *Suomen Kuvalehti* (Lassy 1917d; see also Aalto 1971:139-140), had a photographic collection comprising about 1000 pictures, which his sister Adele Tschalenko placed at Lassy's disposal in Helsinki. Ijas also knew numerous Oriental languages. On the basis of such a small sample it is difficult to say much about the ethnographic value of the pictures, but a part of them is the stiff studio photography typical of the time and as such non-genuine. Some of the pictures of women are clearly posed urban prostitutes. There is, however, undoubtedly the need to unravel the later vicissitudes of the picture collection and of the hundred Persian carpets belonging to Ijas which are also mentioned by Lassy.

6.

Of Lassy's other popular Orientalist output the most interesting are two reminiscences. In the first (Lassy 1919b) he describes the Persian (read Azeri)

national character and way of thinking and in the second (Lassy 1919d) his sojourn on the shore of the Caspian Sea among schoolboys.

Nowadays it would be easy — and at the same time obviously fashionable — to criticize the very unscientific notions of past years about national character, and in this respect Lassy is no exception. Where Lassy perhaps deviates from his colleagues is in his over-abundant and enthusiastic sympathy, which was not very common in this kind of speculation, unless Rousseau's "noble savage" was in question which the Azeris most certainly were not.

In his article Lassy relates his conversations about religion and cosmology which he had with his informants, on the basis of which he presents more general observations about the "Persian character". The conversations in themselves are very interesting but I shall, however, ignore them here and present in their place a list of the attributes used by Lassy about the Persians. Features characteristic of them are liveliness, a feeling of their own worth, a profound morality, sincerity, a lack of will power, a strong and simple sentimentality, a concrete imagination (as opposed to a lively one), a feeling of ethnic pride (as opposed to state pride), a naive arrogance and romanticism (as opposed to Arab rationalism). Several characteristics open to negative interpretations are explained in a positive way by Lassy. The picture of Persians which Lassy conveys to his working-class readers is not very clear.

The article remembering his time as a Turkish (note the vacillation in Lassy's terminology) schoolboy is quite reminiscent in tone of the book about his girl friends. It has the same personal hold spiced with humour and, additionally, the description includes that so easily observable "ethnographic value", whose stating comes close to the domain of trivia but is nevertheless necessary. But, as stated above, Lassy's popular texts need no ethnographic apologia to justify their appearance. Although it is possible, recommendable and even desirable to use them, they can also just be read.

Let us mention still the last piece of writing by Lassy (Lassy 1935) which I have found, in which he recalls a foot journey he made in Svanetia in 1934. This is just to show how he lived in close contact with Caucasia all his life. In 1937 the first car penetrated Svanetia. Lassy no longer existed then.

7.

Although Lassy cannot, on the basis of his thesis, be labelled an armchair evolutionist, he redeems this stamp in his study *Avioliiton kehitysmuodot*

[The Evolutional Stages of Marriage] (Lassy 1919-21) which appeared in *Sosialistinen Aikakauslehti*. Obviously it was precisely this article that Pentti Aalto meant when he spoke of Lassy "attacking vehemently his teacher Westermarck".¹⁰ Fifty years later Lassy's study seems some sort of oddity: a waddling ugly duckling in the wrong forum which developed into his anthropological swan song. It can be imagined that if Westermarck had not forsaken Lassy on account of the latter's "lack of patriotism", this kind of article, in which Lassy attacks Westermarck on behalf of promiscuity, would never have been written. Thus has Aalto apparently understood the matter. It has, however, another side too, against which Lassy comes up with noticeably cleaner papers. Engels' work *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* had been published in 1884 (the canonized fourth edition in 1891). This Lewis H. Morgan-*compilation* (Morgan 1877) turned promiscuity into Marxist dogma. Lassy condemns as a bourgeois dogma the Westermarckian monogamy (Westermarck 1891), but, on the other hand, did not undersign the promiscuity of Morgan-Engels' "unbounded sexual intercourse", but rather wanted to see promiscuity more strongly regulated (e.g. exogamy and the incest taboo in the explaining of which Lassy aligns himself with Westermarck against Engels). As one method of regulation Lassy marches out the hair-brizzling concept of the "woman's natural modesty". In the twentieth chapter, entitled "The Original Civilization", Lassy sets himself to oppose Morgan-Engels' mechanistic evolutionism: "... it has become very difficult to talk about any common development of human culture".

All in all it is more fruitful to see Lassy's study as a presentation (the first and, for the present, the last in Finland) of the possibilities of Marxist anthropology and, on the other hand, as an attempt to patch up Morgan's and Engels' deficiencies by using the ideas of, among others, Frazer whom he admired. But, as I have stated, the forum was wrong. Westermarck ignored him totally in academic circles¹¹, and it seems that no one else read the article.¹² Not even so that it would have become a scholarly curiosity.

Lassy's speculations about marriage apparently so thoroughly used the energy reserved for anthropology that he wrote no other more noteworthy texts. Looking at things today the most interesting of his little pieces used as column fillers is an article in which he deals with the Finnish social sciences of his time (Lassy 1919c) and the field and tasks of social science (Lassy 1919a) and gives reading hints to working youth who were interested in self-tuition (Lassy 1921c). In the last-mentioned he urges the youth "to travel and to love" rather than to read, and states that "much more important than knowing what to

read is to know what should be left unread". However, he gives a long annotated list of recommended reading from different fields which is naturally also very revealing when thinking about his own scholarly profile. And there are many kinds of books:

A book is sometimes living, sometimes a carcass, sometimes wise, sometimes stupid. It is sometimes an idea, sometimes a chapter, sometimes a picture, sometimes a warm heart beating in our hands. A book is the child of the spirit, polluted when we are ourselves polluted, full of dignity when we ourselves are filled with dignity. (Lassy 1921c:258)

8.

Lassy's relation to religion, and particularly to Islam, was peculiar. Before the civil war he never expressed his own viewpoints or personal experiences in his writings, but during the time he spent in the prison-camp in 1918 it seems that the conversations he had there awoke in him very special religious ideas. A certain prisonmate recalled as late as in the 1930s the occasion when Lassy started — and simultaneously finished — his lecture series dealing with the world's religions ("F.P." 1933). A young priest was present and gradually the lecture became a debate about the superiority between Islam and Christianity, which, according to the memoirs at least, Lassy defending Islam won with a clear margin. As a proof of Lassy's quasi-Islam Toivo Koskikallio, who was working in the camp in a spiritual function and was later a missionary in China, recalls as late as the middle of the forties conversations with Lassy (Koskikallio 1974:34). He relates that Lassy had taken "Muhammad as his model" but, nevertheless, professed "the teaching proclaimed by Jesus as the highest morality". Lassy offers his own comments in a lengthy article *Kristillinen Europa — sattuma* [Christian Europe — an Accident] (Lassy 1921b). In the article he frets about the defeat at Poitiers (according to Lassy the opponent was the Christian Church, for the Christian religion had already disappeared from Europe) and finally states:

Thus we cannot, when precisely weighing up all the branches of the matter, other than, in the name of civilization, bewail the unfortunate historical chance which over a millennium ago made Europe Christian and shut out the higher Mohammedan civilization. (Lassy 1921b:70)

Because a journal representing scientific socialism was in question, Lassy had to patch up a very un-Marxist concept of historical coincidence for, according to Lassy, Islam would have been better in the sense that due to its democratic nature the transfer to socialism in Europe would possibly have happened a thousand years earlier. An eloquent and very Lassyian speculation.

Later Lassy forgot his Islam, but caused indignation in the columns of the same paper by presenting a quite undogmatic and tolerant reply to an uninformed comrade who asked about the possibility for a worker to believe in God (Lassy 1922b). Someone using the pseudonym "S." (presumably party activist Sulo Wuolijoki) was not at all satisfied with Lassy's replies or with an earlier article pondering the meaning of life (Lassy 1922a) in which Lassy is inspired into the following existential deliberations:

As naturally as we are born not knowing why, as naturally must we live and die not knowing why. We can only be grateful that we have got even a moment of conscious and happy existence.

In as much as we are of a religious turn of mind, it must include a belief in the values of life, not in the values of death. (Lassy 1922a:241)

"S." calls this "the fatalism of a Chinese coolie" ("S." 1922:253) and offers "the overthrow of capitalism and the enjoyment of the happiness of conscious life" as the meaning of life. Lassy replied jeeringly that, for instance, sleeping and eating were overthrow of capitalism.

Lassy offers his real credo in a four-part newspaper article *Kirjeitä uudesta uskonnollisuudesta* [Some Letters about the New Religiosity] (Lassy 1921a) which is his visionary manifesto of the new religiosity (not though about religion, for frequently Lassy emphatically separated these two concepts) in which sacred values were i.a. love, joy, the idea of work and the development of one's own nature to its peak. The following might clarify his concepts of religion and the holy:

Thus religious longing is as immortal as the love between a boy and a girl. No higher illumination will wipe it from the world. Lovers have their holy values which rule their whole life. (Lassy 1919a:January 21, 1919)

Here it is impossible to go deep into Lassy's metaphysical compost in which the following stewed in liquid harmony: early Christian congregation, the Bible, Marxism, Islam and Rousseau as well as the triangle "the good - the holy - the beautiful" which slips away from the sphere of science, but, anyway, he is very far from historical materialism. Though his thoughts seem, at times, confused and his spontaneous temperament has left its traces in his writings, his whole literary output forms some kind of eclectic philosophy which can also be seen in his expressive and boldly individualistic life, which in its paradoxicality (perhaps in its consistent inconsistency) could not endure the institutions of this world — no more Marxist than bourgeois.

9.

In the above I have tried to bring forth only a part of Lassy's life and literary activities — I would like to hope, however, something central and essential. Undoubtedly some sort of penchant for Lassy has clouded my eyes in observing his errors and deficiencies.

Because it is difficult to write anything about science nowadays without mentioning Kuhn's paradigms (1962) and Feyerabend's methodological anarchism (1975) I shall, anachronistically, throw them into game: Ivar Lassy's conventional value to anthropology and Oriental studies may be rather small, but his whole life, which was tossed around amidst great upheavals, is a splendid manifestation of the shattering of the paradigms and of the individual's situation in the cross-currents — be it a question of the social opposition between capitalism and socialism or the opposition in the scholarly world between, on the one hand, evolutionism and functionalism and, on the other, between bourgeois and Marxist science. As for methodological anarchism Lassy's output does honour to Feyerabend's manifesto "anything goes" — both in the good and the bad. There are also dialectic contradictions among the mutually exclusive contradictions.

N O T E S

- 1 Karsten's (1879-1956) more well-known researches connected with South America are Karsten 1926, 1935 and 1949.
- 2 Landtman (1878-1940), for his part, visited New Guinea; Landtman 1927. Pure evolutionism is represented by, among other works, Landtman 1905 and 1938.
- 3 Numelin (1890-1972) researched human migrations (1936) and diplomacy (1950) and then migrated himself as a diplomat.
- 4 As an aesthete and literary researcher Hirn's (1870-1952) anthropologically most noteworthy work is Hirn 1900; see also Hirn 1912.
- 5 Holsti's (1881-1945) contribution to armchair evolutionism was Holsti 1913.
- 6 Granqvist (1890-1972) was an outstanding ethnographer on Palestine; Granqvist 1931, 1935, 1947, 1950 and 1965. She can perhaps be placed somewhere between Westermarckian evolutionism and Malinowskian functionalism.
- 7 The most important sources on Lassy's life are, characteristically, one newspaper article (Yläraakkola 1978) dealing with him, and the research dealing with John Reed in which Lassy appears in a side rôle (Engman & Eriksson 1979). In this connection it is also worth mentioning the novel *Клятва* by the Soviet writer Gennadii Fish. In the pages of this novel one can follow the adventures of a certain comrade *Ярви* (Fi. Järvi), to whom Fish has given the features of Lassy. Superficially the picture seems to be quite accurate.

- 8 His bitterness about this is still reflected in the article he wrote in 1921 in which Lassy lashes the part played by the academic world in the happenings of 1918, stating, i.a.: "The Finnish University — the Finnish Bastille!" (Lassy 1921a).
- 9 I do not wish to transfer "the invention of fieldwork" into Westermarck's list of qualifications, for L. H. Morgan had already carried out research some decades earlier on the basis of the time he had spent amongst the North American Indians. However, Westermarck was, perhaps, the first to scientifically explicate the requirements of fruitful fieldwork.
- 10 Aalto 1971:57. Aalto adds, slightly carelessly, both Landtman and Karsten as objects of Lassy's attack. Lassy really did not appreciate Landtman, but he had nothing bad to say about Karsten, rather the contrary. His attack against Westermarck is also somewhat exaggerated, for in two other contexts (Lassy 1919c:23 and 1921c:234) he clearly expresses his appreciation for Westermarck. The real criticism is that Westermarck "did not understand the basic significance of economic factors in the life of society" (Lassy 1919c:23). What else could a Socialist say?
- 11 Lassy would, apparently, have really longed for a scientific debate with Westermarck, for still in 1921 (Lassy 1921a) he went through a fictive conversation inventing Westermarck's possible counter-arguments himself.
- 12 The only exception may be Maija Savutie's article (Savutie 1937), in which she presents the same themes as Lassy referring to him also; see also Alapuro & al. 1973:214-215.

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