

# Introduction

Ulf Drobin

Stockholm University, Sweden

Torgny Segerstedt is the most publicly well known representative that the Department of Comparative Religion has ever had, and it is thanks to him that it was possible to initiate such a department in Stockholm. He, if anyone, was a man of polemics. During the war, as a newspaperman, editor-in-chief of *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, he was the clearest anti-Nazi voice in the country. But he was also a source of considerable anxiety to the war-time coalition government, whose prime concern it was to keep the country balancing on the difficult and dangerous tightrope of neutrality in order to avoid a German occupation. As professor of the history of religions he was – outside the theological faculty – more conventional and less dedicated: he resigned from the professorship after only three years.<sup>1</sup>

The two persons that meant the most for the Stockholm department's development and distinctive character are Professors Ernst Arbman and Åke Hultkrantz. The distinctiveness lay in the anthropological-folkloristic perspective they gave to the department; the choice of subjects in particular was the concept(s) of the soul and shamanism.

Arbman (1891–1959) graduated in theology at the University of Uppsala in 1914. He continued his studies there, majoring in Sanskrit, and in 1922 completed his doctoral thesis “Rudra. Untersuchungen zum altindischen Glauben und Kultus”,<sup>2</sup> a religio-historical work within the framework of Indology. The dissertation made him docent/ associate professor in Indian philology and in the following year also in the history of religions. In 1933 Arbman became head of the department and acting professor of the history of religions at Stockholm's Högskola (as Stockholm University was called then). In

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1937 he was called to the professorial chair of history of religions, a position that he kept until his retirement in 1958. Arbman died suddenly and unexpectedly during the year after his retirement.

Ernst Arbman had wide interests within the history of religions. One such interest was in the meaning of the concept of “soul”. Buddha denied the existence of a soul but nevertheless believed in *samsara*, loosely translated as “transmigration of souls”: what was it then that transmigrated? Here, Arbman tried to find more original Indian conceptions that should have preceded the advanced philosophical terms found in Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, he was of course also interested in the concept of the soul because it was the point of departure for the evolutionistic theory proposed by Edward Tylor, a theory that was much discussed at that time. As a consequence Arbman developed a strong interest in the conceptions and worldviews of non-literate peoples. This would be called comparative anthropology in today’s language, and he, in his own geographical sphere, extended this interest to Saami and the Old Norse religions. In addition to this he had a deep interest in the psychology of religion. The concept of the soul was to him primarily a psychological concept.

His magnum opus is *Ecstasy or Religious Trance. In the Experience of the Ecstatics and from the Psychological Point of View*. It consists of three parts: 1) Vision and Ecstasy; 2) Essence and Forms of Ecstasy; and 3) Ecstasy and Psychopathological States.<sup>4</sup> Examples referred to come from many areas of religion, not least from Catholic mystics. The tomes comprise 1705 pages. This was the result of more than two decades of research and his manuscripts were at the time of his death in 1959 in an unorganized and incomplete state.

The starting point for this huge work came from reflections concerning the Old Norse shamanism, or *seiðr* in Old Norse language. After Arbman’s death, Åke Hultkrantz, his pupil and successor, completed the arduous task of editing *Ecstasy* with the aid of a colleague.

In my opinion *Ecstasy or Religious Trance* is a gold mine for the research on psychology of religion and for anyone interested in this subject. Unfortunately this great work has not received the attention and distribution it deserves. Stylistically Arbman wrote

in a somewhat old fashioned, hypotactic Swedish modelled on the Latin periodic syntax. Originally, he both wrote in and had his works translated into German as well. The German language can support such hypotactic syntax better than Swedish; the opposite is true of English. In the 1930s he chose to publish in English for ideological reasons. Due to lack of both time and funds – and without Arbman's assistance – his translator was unable to render the Swedish text of *Ecstasy* into syntactically normal English but transcribed the Swedish virtually word for word into an English that causes an alienating impression on the reader. If one overcomes the surprise that the texts are written in an “artificial” language and simply reads, one discovers that they are fully logical and comprehensible and extraordinarily interesting! The three parts were published in English in 1963, 1968 and 1970 by the Swedish publisher Norstedts in its Scandinavian University Books series.

Inspired by Arbman's interest in non-literate peoples' conceptions of the soul as well as of the practice of shamanism, Åke Hultkrantz (1920–2006), besides studying the history of religions, acquired a solid education in ethnography (as anthropology was then named). Specializing in the study of North American Indians, he became licentiate in the history of religions *and* in ethnography in 1946. With its 545 pages, his doctoral thesis, *Conceptions of the Soul among North American Indians*,<sup>5</sup> which was submitted in 1953, is one of the largest dissertations ever presented at the faculty of humanities in Stockholm. This important dissertation earned him the position of docent/associate professor in the history of religions *and* docent competence in ethnography.<sup>6</sup>

In 1958, five years after Hultkrantz' dissertation, another doctoral thesis was published in Stockholm: *Die primitive Seelenvorstellungen der nordeurasischen Völker*, written by Ivar Paulson (1922–1966) – an Estonian war refugee in Sweden who, due to his background, was fluent in both Finnish and Russian.<sup>7</sup> The thesis gave Paulson the position of docent/associate professor in the history of religions. During these years, more might have been written on the concepts of the soul at our department than anywhere else in the world.

In 1961 Ivar Paulson published the monograph *Schutzgeister und Gottheiten des Wildes (der Jagdtiere und Fische) in Nordeurasien*.

*Eine religionsethnographische und religionsphänomenologische Untersuchung jägerischer Glaubensvorstellungen.*<sup>8</sup> This work has become a classic in the ethnographical literature on religion.

In 1962 Ivar Paulson, together with Åke Hultkrantz and the West German ethnographer Karl Jettmar, published *Die Religionen Nordeurasiens*. This book is the third volume of the large international series of books on the religions of the world entitled *Die Religionen der Menschheit* – which today consists of 33 volumes. This emphasizes how well established Hultkrantz and Paulson were in the field of international research on religion. In this volume Ivar Paulson wrote about the religions of the peoples of Siberia and of Finnish peoples and Hultkrantz about Saami religion, while Jettmar dealt with the archaeological evidence of North Eurasia's history of religions. Paulson died in 1966, only 44 years old.

Åke Hultkrantz was made full professor in 1958 at the age of 38. Through his ethnographic–anthropological schooling he came to have an innovative influence in the subject of history of religions. He gave visibility to non-literate peoples in the field of the subject, whereas earlier the Near East and India had dominated. Through his extensive reading of ethnographical, ethnological and folkloristic literature his knowledge was outstanding, especially concerning the formations of theories within those disciplines. This contributed to the expansion of the boundaries of the history of religions and to the refinement of the general cultural perspective of the discipline.

Åke Hultkrantz was a dedicated man. To him the history of religions was a vocation rather than a profession. He was always working: reading, lecturing and writing. His exceptionally good memory and stylistic gift allowed him to work faster than most of his colleagues. His bibliography is proof of this: it contains more than 25 monographs and when articles on scientific subjects are added it comprises 471 publications! Practically all of these publications were of the highest quality. The bibliography, compiled by Hultkrantz' wife, Geraldine Hultkrantz, is available through the department's home page to all who are interested. Åke Hultkrantz is known as one of the leading experts on North American Indians. Today he is far better known in the USA and

Canada than in Sweden. His international fame led researchers from these and other countries to come to our department to study and in some cases to take their Ph.D. on the religions of the North American Indians and in one case of the Inuit. Hultkrantz retired in 1986 and died in 2006 at the age of 86.

To conclude the history of the department of history of religions I maintain that it has sustained much of the distinctiveness and vitality that it had under the now deceased Arbman, Hultkrantz, Paulson, and others who are not mentioned here.

Among the living representatives for our subject the following successors to the chair should be mentioned: professors Louise Bäckman and Per-Arne Berglie. Louise Bäckman, herself a Saami, was attracted by Hultkrantz' intimate knowledge of the Saami culture and religion and by his ability to see the Saami in a wider geographical cultural context. She is a very valuable asset because of her inside perspective and her knowledge of the Saami language, i.e. having Saami as her mother tongue. The fact that she is a Saami also provided her access, as a researcher, to especially good contacts among the Saami. She and Hultkrantz have together written a monograph on Saami shamanism, *Studies in Lapp Shamanism*.<sup>9</sup>

Per-Arne Berglie's doctoral thesis is entitled *The Gods Descend. Ritual possession among the Sherpas and Tibetans*.<sup>10</sup> In his later research he has studied the beliefs and practices of spirit-mediums, primarily in Burma, an interest in line with that of Arbman's and Hultkrantz'.

As might be clear from this retrospect of the research history of the Stockholm department of history of religions, concepts of the soul and of shamanism have been at the forefront of the research and have also internationally become associated with our department.<sup>11</sup> I shall here describe, in a somewhat simplified form, the concepts of the soul that Arbman, Hultkrantz and Paulson, in the language of the time, called "primitive" concepts, by which they meant that the concepts were more original ones independent of Christian or other religious dogmatics. Arbman, Hultkrantz and Paulson designate the system of concepts of the soul, which they found globally (i.e. in ancient times in India, among North American Indians and among North Eurasian peoples), as "dualistic pluralism". They maintained that influential researchers such

as Herbert Spencer and Edward Tylor had erroneously applied a uniform coherent (monistic) concept of the soul, which had become generally accepted.

Dualistic pluralism consists of the oppositional character between the so-called “body-souls”, which are active when a person is awake, and the homogenous “free-soul”, which represents the human being outside the body during dreams and shamanistic ecstasy.

Body-souls in turn consist of two spheres of concepts. On the one hand are “life-souls”, which manifest the difference between life and death. To these phenomena belong breathing (breath-soul), the heart (heart-soul, etc.), the pulse, body heat, the gaze (the difference between the gaze of the living and the so-called broken gaze of the dead) and the blood. The life-soul is not to be seen as identical with its physical corporal basis. It expresses itself via the organ’s function and the organ is the abode of the life-soul.

The second conceptual sphere is made up of the so-called “ego-souls”, i.e. those which are the origins and bearers of man’s psychic manifestations such as thought, memory, willpower and emotional life. Unlike the free-soul, these ego-souls are not expressions of the individual’s whole personality, but represent different hypostasized psychic qualities such as love, empathy, courage, hate, jealousy etc., which are localized in different bodily organs such as the heart, liver, lungs, kidneys or gall bladder. These psychic properties are concretized to ego-souls and relate to bodily organs in the same way as the life-souls described above. The heart has a special position as a psychic organ. Expressions such as “broken heart” and even German’s “Sinn” and English’s “mind” might linguistically be derived from denotations of such ego-souls. Regarding the brain as the centre of thought and reasoning is of a much later date.<sup>12</sup>

The dead in the realm of the dead are often designated as “surviving-souls”. It would be precipitate to believe that it is the free-soul that survives in the realm of the dead. The free-soul is thought of as the *living* person’s manifestation beyond the body. Concepts of the dead in the realm of the dead are usually vaguer, and are often equated with the survivors’ memorial picture of the deceased.

As Bremmer suggests, no research has been carried out to explain how the idea of the unitary soul arose. I think a possible guess could

be to assume that when the “high religions” became, or were about to become, part of the state, the doctrine of punishment and bliss in the afterlife was developed, since the religion’s function to socialize came into focus in a new way, and created a doctrine which, logically and morally, demanded complete identification between man in this life and in the afterlife.<sup>13</sup>

It should here already be emphasized that the concepts of the soul and of shamanism are related notions in the sense that the concept of the free-soul is a precondition for shamanism. In the dream the free-soul is believed to leave the body and to have experiences far beyond its owner’s corporal limits. In shamanism, the shaman, using willpower, sends out his free-soul on expeditions to geographically distant places, or to other worlds, as the celestial world or the realm of the dead in the underworld. This possibility of the free-soul to act outside the body applies not only to the shaman’s own free-soul, but also to those of others, as shown by phenomena such as the curing of “soul-loss” (where the shaman cures through finding the patient’s disappeared free-soul, which perhaps has been captured by supernatural beings), or the shaman’s acting as a “psychopomp” (when he aids the dead by taking the deceased’s free-soul to the realm of the dead). And of course mediumism also occurs, at times unwillingly, but mostly willingly by possession by spirits as alternative or complimentary phenomena of acquiring supernatural knowledge. (In this case, the shaman has contact with the spirit world and has obtained a number of helping spirits, among other things.) However, the crucial criterion for shamanism still is the shaman’s own free-soul journey.

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When the department of history of religions decided to invite three prominent researchers as guest speakers, it was natural to choose shamanism as the theme. Carlo Ginzburg is a versatile and eminent historian, who through his book *Benandanti. The Night Battles* has cast a radically new light on both the Inquisition’s early witch-trials and a hitherto unknown form of shamanism. He has written a detailed commentary on the Benandanti (339 pp.) in *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*.<sup>14</sup>

To this could be added that according to Ginzburg it was Arne Runeberg's doctoral thesis, *Witches, Demons and Fertility Magic*,<sup>15</sup> that made Ginzburg aware of the connection between the concepts of witches and fertility cults. Runeberg was visiting associate professor (gästdocent) at the department of history of religions from 1962 to 1964 and a close friend of Åke Hultkrantz'. It can thus be maintained that for a long time there have been bonds between our department and Carlo Ginzburg, and a survey of his scientific production also bears witness to a considerable commonality of interests.

Jan Bremmer, who also has ties to our department, is a most knowledgeable historian of antiquity focussing on classical Greece. In 1983, Princeton University Press published *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul*,<sup>16</sup> where he follows the "dualistic pluralism" developed in Stockholm in his view of the phenomenology of the concepts of the soul. Bremmer's study of early Greek concepts of the soul has contributed to make the Stockholm investigations on the soul internationally known.

Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer is a well known and prestigious field researcher specializing, *inter alia*, on Siberian shamanism. She has been chosen as a guest speaker to guarantee that our discussions on shamans should not be about shamans merely as theoretical products but also as human beings of flesh and blood: the institute's first field researcher was Åke Hultkrantz – after him field research has almost been as natural for us as it is for a department of social anthropology.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

1. Ancker 1962; Hedin 2013.

2. Arbman 1922.

3. Arbman 1926–1927.

4. Arbman 1963; 1968; 1970.

5. Hultkrantz 1953.

6. It can be mentioned here that the thesis was re-published 44 years later, in 1997, this time in the USA, on an American initiative and in



an abridged (from 545 to 233 pages) and popularized form – popularized so far as the language was simplified, i.e. made less academic and more American (the original thesis was translated by an Englishman) and thus more accessible to non-academic (including native American, or “Indian”) readers. The word “primitive” was taken away and the term “North American Indians” was replaced by “Native Americans”. Hultkrantz took part in the changes. However, an error was made: Hultkrantz’ name was confused with that of a distant relative of his, who was also a professor, but in a different subject, and at the University of Uppsala, which is why the book cover states: “Åke Hultkrantz is a professor emeritus in ethnology and religion at Uppsala University, the oldest and most distinguished university in Scandinavia.” The complete title of the American publication is: *Åke Hultkrantz. Soul and Native Americans. (originally published as Conceptions of the Soul among North American Indians) edited with a foreword by Robert Holland. Woodstock 1997.* For a doctoral thesis this represents a strange fate that, apart from the confusion of names, undeniably signifies appreciation.

7. Paulson 1958.

8. Paulson 1961.

9. Bäckman & Hultkrantz 1978. *Louise Bäckman. Samlade studier i samisk religion.* [Studies in Saami Religion. Collected articles written by Louise Bäckman in Swedish and English] was published as the beginning of Stockholm History of Religions’ Centennial Series, Part 1 (The Departments of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, the University of Stockholm). Additional parts of this series were planned but unfortunately could not be completed due to lack of funds.

10. Berglie 1983.

11. Here the Canadian visiting researcher Daniel Merkur could be mentioned, who at our department presented his thesis *Becoming Half Hidden: Shamanism and Initiation Among the Inuit*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 24. Stockholm 1985 and Åke Hultkrantz’ *Shamanic Healing and Ritual Drama. Health and Medicine in Native North American Religious traditions*. Crossroad, New York 1992.

12. It can be mentioned here that when prior to this publication I presented this preface to the department’s research seminar, there were

some participants who thought that the great number of concepts of the soul made a slightly ridiculous impression. My response to this is that the last element “-soul” should not be taken too literally. It is a pedagogical term, which is attached to *all* the psychological observations/concepts that *together* constitute the background to the later uniform (monistic) concept of the soul. If the “part” (“-soul”) is unreflectingly associated with the “whole” (“soul”) of course a certain confusion arises due to the words’ power over thought.

13. This reminds me of Martin Persson Nilsson’s classic work: *Helvetets förhistoria. Straff och sällhet i den andra världen i förkristen religion* [*The Prehistory of Hell. Punishment and Bliss in the Other World in Pre-Christian Religion*] 1963.

14. Ginzburg 2004; 2013c.

15. Runeberg 1947. Ginzburg refers to this (as far as I can see, in a clearer way than in the English translation) in the Swedish translation of *I benandanti. Stregoneria e culti agrari tra Cinquecento e Seicento, Benandanti. De goda häxmakarna* (1991a, p. 265 f., note 10).

16. Bremmer 1983. This book is an adapted version of the thesis presented at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 1979.

17. For a review of Åke Hultkrantz’ field research, see Christopher Vecsey’s *Introduction to Åke Hultkrantz. Belief and Worship in Native North America. Edited, with an Introduction by Christopher Vecsey*. Syracuse University Press. Syracuse. New York 1981.