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## The image of temple's priestess in the poetry of "Silver Age"

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### ABSTRACT

The article regards images of priestesses of the temple in the works of Bryusov and Hlebnikov. As an example the poems of Bryusov "Aganat". Phoenician story and "In the, Bela temple", and Hlebnikov's "Dark, black daughter of Temple" are taken. The article contains hierogams' definitions; manifestations of the phenomenon in different other cultures, exactly in India are regarded consequently. The article gives more careful analysis of Hlebnikov's poem "Dark, black daughter of the Temple".

**Keywords:** Hierogams temple's priestess devadasy, bayadera, bharatanatyam, cult of Shiva, sacrifice, priestess of Plyasa, image of the elephant

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### INTRODUCTION

In the Old East, as in the ancient Greece there were different cults of gods and goddesses of fertility, the cult-ritual practice of sexual connection for religious purposes were widely in use, it included hierogram or sacred marriage which were conducted as a rite of fertility and other consecrated sexual rituals. In the temples, there were priests and priestesses who dealt with those rituals and very often they were raised to the rank of cult persons. In Shumer, there were fixed legal differences between a simple prostitute and a "naditu" (temple prostitute), reputation of whom was under the protection of a law in the Code of Hammurabi[1]. Temple prostitution in Babilon is described by Herodot (History / Story, I, 199). It say that the temple prostitution was tightly connected with the cult of goddess Ishtar (Astarta). In Ancient India there was such a phenomenon as – in many Indian temples there were lady dancers who stepped into sexual connections with the parishioners from the highest caste. They were called "devadasy". Indian term "devadasy" in Europe was called "bayadera" (fr.bayadere, referred to Portuguese balladeer - dancer). Devadasy were tough sacred art of dancing (bharatanatyam) and were temple dancers who obtained the other styles of Indian ritual dancing. Practice of the Indian temple prostitution have survived till present days and caused protest from fighters for human rights and in 1988 it was outlaw.

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### Methods (methodology) of an experiment:

What is the reason of that phenomenon? Ancient Dravidian orgiastic dancing's and ritual copulations made during blood sacrifices connected with magic and performances on fertility and productivity of the earth, cattle and people were regarded as vestige of matriarchal. But it was not the only reason, likely an important reason was in economic moments. Since, the beautiful and intelligent devadasy attracted wealthy pilgrims and it helped the temple much.

The image of those priestesses infrequently appeared in western oriental literature, culture. Perhaps, the bright example of the balada "God and bayadera" ("Der Gott und die Bajadere") I.V. fonGoethewritten in 1797. In "Indian legend" of Goethe where a love of a fallen maiden" to the "land lord" – Magadev was carold; on that reason she forgets her "direct obligations" ("... Gifts are not necessary for her // No will for dancing") [2]. Image of temple dancers appeared not only in literature, but in theatres, operas and bullet. For instance, "Bayadere" – bullet of four acts and seven scenes with the apotheosis of the choreographer Marius Petip to the music of Ludwig Minkus. Literature source of the ballet are a drama "Shakuntala" and balad of Goethe "God and Bayadere". The plot basis is a romantic legend about unhappy love of a bayadere and a brave warrior. One more brighter example is "Bayadere" (germ. DicBajadere) – operettas in three acts of the

Hungarian compose ImreKalman. Libretto was written by Brammer and A.Grunvald. "Bayadere in love" – two – act opera of Daniel Ober on libretto of EdjeneScrib (Paris, Opera Le Perete, 1830).

As we know, Russian writers and poets of the Silver Age looked for a muse in ancient culture, religion, mythology of the East. In the literature of Silver Age the masters had referred to different cults. As Valery Brusov refers to the cult of goddess Ishtar (Astarta). Initially Astarta had appeared in the poems "Aganat. Phoenician tale" (1898) and "In the Bell temple" (1903). As it was mentioned the temple prostitution was highly connected with the cult of goddess Astarta.

The start of Brusov's plan was to write these works in his student's years, in his diaries. That time the poet got involved in the assyrian culture and In December, 1897 in his notebook he wrote: "That day Aganatis had to sacrifice her virginity to goddess. For she was already 14 years old. Aganatis was dressed into a purple fluffy dress; her [bracelets] wrists were golden and rang when moving; her earrings were made of solid diamond. With a crowd of female slaves she walked by the streets to the temple [Ishtar-Melit] Melitt... <...> A young man in assyrian clothes first stood in front of her. He was handsome well-dressed too "[3]. A.L.Sobolev found this note and he considers it as a plot of an unwritten story.

It is worth to mention that Aganatis is a Greek male, name and later Brusov changed it into Aganat to sound Semitic [4.p.603]. Melitta – greek pronunciation (through akkadMullissa) of a name Nynli – goddess spouse of Enlil who was called Bel in the I century bc. In Assyria Mullissa was considered to be Ashur's spouse. Consequently, it speaks about a saint marriage in the main temple of Ashur – Esharr. Girl's age is indicated randomly because there is no information about the age of priestess – entum prepared for the saint marriage.

A poem about Bel's temple is a poetic fantasy and consequently there are many historical mistakes and mis-coincidences. For example, a name Bel (Master, Lord) could be given to EnLil, Ashurat Marduk but not to a God of Son – Shamash. We can conclude that a priest of the Sun – Shamash. We can conclude that a priest of the Soun could not be a partner of a priestess – entum in the temple of a Principle God of Assyria. One more example, a lady from Mesopotamia could not celebrate the thirteenth spring because neither Persians nor midians did not celebrate their birthdays nor a spring New Year was a temple holiday but not a family holiday. Probably, by "Bel-Assur" according to Brusov are meant gods Yahve and Baala mentioned in the Old Testament. Baal

claimed to give him his twelfth share of the harvest and a girl and through his connection with the girl he gifted people his mercy. According to data from history, nothing of the kind existed in Assiria and Babilon. Basing on this speculations we consider that poem's plot is a poetic imagination of Brusov. In the rite of saint marriage only unmarried devoted priestess elected for lifetime service could participate. Marriage procedure took place at the presence of a big number of priests and it was regarded as a public holiday. Priestess could know her partner well because it was a King himself performing the ritual part of God. So, remains from historical facts are only names of Bel and Astarta. Melitta – Nynlil appeared in draft. The rest are only attempts to narrate connections between a young man and 14 years old lady and her feelings. Much more interesting is a poem "Aganat. Phinikian story"[4,p. 240 - 245]. The poem had been started in December, 1897 was a story of Aganatis was thought out and a poem "Assargadon" was finished.

Astarta is called there assidonian and is regarded as a reflection of Asher – "goddess of lust and passionate nights". Consequently, it must by narrated about phoinikian cults. The poem is preceded by epigraph from Ashurbanipal's library about two Ishtars; male Ishtar – rising Venus, female – setting. A mix of two cults is obvious – phoinikian and assirian. A heroine of the poem had sacrificed her virginity as a gift to gods after her fiancé's death and she became a temple prostitute. But her fiancée had escaped from prison and joined her. The image of a temple priestess is mentioned by Hlebnikov. His creature "Dark, black daughter Temple..." speaks about a temple's dancer in ancient India. As it was mentioned, they were called devadasy and Hlebnikov uses a word combination "A Priestess of a dance". This word combination expresses the exact image of devadasy because one of main duties of hers was to learn by heart the ritual dances.

Text of the poem:

Smugla, chernadoch' Hrama.  
A v perstnekaplyayada, yada.  
Ten' mesyaca, ne padaj, kakgromada,  
Na ehtouzkoekol'co.  
Il' smert' vojdet v nee neravno,  
I stanetmelomvselico.  
Sary, chernyslonyizkamnya,  
Ihhobotyopushchenyvomgle.  
A v perstnekaplyayada, v perstne.  
Bylknes' oputantelomgada,  
A ejbyt' zhriceljPlyasanado,  
Ona ne plyashethramavne.  
Bylvyrvandlinnyjzubizzeva.  
Kakzajcy, zmeidobrodushny.

A v perstnekaplyayada, yada.  
 I vidyablizkoprizrakgneva,  
 Onatuda, gdesmolydushny,  
 Ushlaviden'yamzhiznirada,  
 Kaksvechibelye, bela.  
 Letyat, kakchernyjsokol, kosy,  
 CHerneevoronanadsnegom,  
 A nogicherny, smugly, bosy  
 Veduttolpu k vechernimnegam.  
 A v perstnekaplyayada, yada.  
 Zachemsurovayabor'ba  
 Eenazemlyupovalila?  
 Rukaotcavsegdagroba,  
 Kogdapospeshno i gruba,  
 Na nozhikperstnyanadavila,  
 Smertel'nyjnozhik s yadomzhala,  
 Gluhojprikaz, chtob ne bezhala.  
 A v perstnekaplyayada, v perstne.  
 Skazalstarik: „Umriteper' snej!“,  
 Skryvborodyodezhdoyustydlivoj  
 Vsevyatovrazhdebnyumokom.  
 Onavsegdabyllalish' ivoj  
 Nadsmertimchashchimsyapotokom.  
 A v perstnekaplyayada, yada.  
 A v perstnekaplyayada, v perstne.  
 Byt' mertvojsloniheotrada.

P.E. Tartakovsky considers this poem as “an image of artistic introduction into the definitely taken environment of the definite époque, restored not in accepted traditional exotic forms but in thought out and gained discoveries in the world of India with its manyfaced religious and spiritual types of conscious which is fixed in the national totems, mythological narrations, unspoken vaults of customs, spell rituals with their system of temple rituals, sculpture and icon graphics, a living man open to kindness and joy and bow down to invincibility of gods’ will...” [5].

The image of the Ancient India appears in poem, the moment of its history is connected with “intermediate” (Vedic brahmanism) state of a sacred self-consciousness and a system of ideas of existence, a place of a man in the world of gods and priests of temple; even a poetic anachronism is possible because the poet aimed at gathering early (ritual sacrifices) and late (temple dancers) historical events within the frame of one creature work.

The central image of priestess Plyasa, who was preparing for death as a festive ritual, probably became a reason for some of prohibitions (more possibly an anger spirit), or possibly was an award for service to gods giving a right a right for new, different life after death (to be dead <<...>> is pleasure). Besides the image of a Priestess there is an image of death in the poem. The image of death

appears in its exposition part of the poem, in the second rhyme of the poem it appears in the symbolic emblem - a ring with snake poison – a ring which must strangle the life as reptile’s rings stifle a human body, wrap around the body and ready to stab a sting: This image of death is coherent with images of rings and snake (a ring – a snake and a ring – finger ringer with poison) appears throughout the whole poem.

Hlebnikov uses seven folded refrain ( A drop of poison in a ring, with variation A drop of poison in a ring, a finger ring) . What does this refrain mean? It could be an attempt to demonstrate rhythm of the repeated movements of hands, body of priestess Plyasa. Also, it could be regarded as a ritual spell which refers to the Indian totem – topic and image of cobra. This point of view is seen in one of spell “Atharvaved” (cycle “Against a snake”):  
 You are a daughter of asurs,  
 You are a sister of gods.  
 Born from heavens, from earth,  
 You make poison free from its juice (VI, 100,3) [6].

Likely, there is no direct link between this Indian spell of the ancient veda and Hlebnikov’s poem. But we refer them to the poetic imagination of an artist. Perhaps, Hlebnikov’s heroine also could be called “a sister of gods” and “a daughter of asurs” (sky demons), exactly serve to Shiva and perhaps to Kali. It is worth to mention that Kali (translation – “Black”) is a goddess - mistress of evil spirits and is honored by shivaitis as one of hypostasis of Shiva’s wife. Perhaps that is the start of gloomy colors of “supporting” image of the priestess but rather an essence which is expressed in color, in epithet- ritual – mythological meaning: black is a daughter of temple, black are the stone elephants as black as falcon, braids are more black than crowns <<...>> and legs are black.

One of the key historical – mythological traits of the poem “Dark, black is a daughter of Temple...” is connected with a theme of Plyaska, dance. This term is rather an expression of the known type of consciousness of all people. It is well known how important a dance is in the culture of India, it is a type of consciousness lifestyle, philosophy and mythology also could be reflected in dances. Theme of a dance reflected in the image of priestess Plyas is one of the significant in Indian mythology and poetry, initially it expresses not random but highly valued connection between a man and a movement which symbolizes life. God Shiva whom temple priestess serves is a god of a dance (ritual of Indian temple cults and appearance of the institute of priestess Plyas is determined), a dance is an anthological expression of Indian

national world and character which is witnessed by numerous literature masterpieces of India.

So, Hlebnikov's vision of Plyas priestess is based on the reality of Indian national lifestyle and environment cherished by customs. Everything referred to Plyas priestess is connected with Shiva cult. Shiva bears a name of Nataradja which means "A king of dance". In Shiva's movements there are reflections of "rhythms of planet's cycling in the sky and shaking of small items which are always in movement, rhythms of blood running and energy burst - rhythms of creation" [7 p.203].

Judging Hlebnikov's poem we can guess that he knew a lot about peculiarities of "professional" being of "Devadasy": She is to be a priestess Plyasa. // She does not dance outside the temple. Truly saying, a performance of "bharat - natyam" dance only priests and prayers could enjoy. [7 p.266 - 267]. We see that a poet restores all little but significant realities and details of a ritual action and unwritten laws of life of "devadasy". Devadasy's laws of life were severe and Hlebnikov does not "soften low truth" concerning severe and miserable destiny of the heroine. Hlebnikov's lines **Her feet are black and bare**// to lead a crowd to evening bliss make a hint on those sides of "profession" which were connected with temple prostitution. Hlebnikov's heroine, as well as her phoinikian sisters like Brusov's Aganat, was obliged to combine her ritual dances with others deeds which were profitable for the temple. The image system of Hlebnikov's poem surprisingly exactly corresponds to factual details and realities of the old Indian environment. As for environment and circumstances, Hlebnikov does not give poetic fictions, metaphors, conventionalities based on actual or hidden range of scientists' historical observations and factology of national monuments of art and poetry. Here is an example from a poem: "Walking there, where resins are hot. In any description of an Indian temple we can read:" In the temple <...> there is a mysterious purple twilight, it is wet: stone walls are wet because of breath and temple's kitchen, and torch's smoke <...> It is incredibly stuffy, it smells camphor, flowers, sandal, smoking. <...> [8].

A poet of unexpected imaginable associations, a master of changing a range meaning into the different one, an artist of "none motivated" locations turn into a comprehensible and clear in case we manage to reach his level of "vision" and depth of penetration into the social-historical and nationally determined world, psychology, mythological conscious of other people.

Outside this world and conscious the final line of the poem "Dark, black temple's daughter" turns out to be unclear and a suddenly appeared central image is also unclear without this – **it is a pleasure for a female elephant to be dead.**

Elephants' images which appear in the exposition of the poem refer to the "outer", visible – item range:

Old and black are stone elephants,  
Their trunks are lowered in the darkness.

From the books about Indian culture it is known that "one could see elephants in relief ornaments of Indian temples or in sculptures supporting gates or even buildings"[9].

The combination of these "outer" details of temples, cult environment with the image of elephant cow from the conclusive poem seems us non casual.

P.E. Tartakovsky had supposed that the heroine serves not only Shiva but also his son - Ganesh God who is pictured with elephant's head [5]. So, she is **elephant cow** – not only "god's slave" but also elephant headed deity temple's daughter ready to die with pleasure. In this sense a word "father" referred to a man committing a ritual of sacrificing could be explained the way that there are no blood ties - with the priestess because she is a lifelong daughter of Temple according to laws of Shiva and Ganesh cults; an old man who had pricked her with poisoned fingering – most likely one of brakhmans or supreme priest; according to the same statements – he is "vice" of gods in all activities concerning their cults and rituals.

Possibly, there is the other interpretation of elephant cow's image. This poem could include all the notions of induistic conceptions on the human being – as transmigration of souls - carma teachings. Carma is a restoration of a human spirit after man's death in the body corpus of the other living thing. Heroine's transformation into elephant cow could raise to the teachings about carma. Priestess of dancing could be killed not because of punishment but as an award, sacrifice to omnipotent god who would transform her from "slave" into "tevadiyal" (prostitute) accounting her good deeds, "tevadyal" is a living thing which is more close to Vedic pantheon, especially to elephantheaded Shiva's son. Perhaps to dead for elephant cow is pleasure?

Throughout narration the poet distances from the heroine for better understanding her and comes close as if he wants to warn her, save and take her from fortune. Immediately after initial lines of the poem which create an outer image of priestess (Dark, black temple's daughter) and notes of alarm

of fatuma (there is a drop of poison in fingering) after which a poetic addressing to the Moon resembles cult spell – cosmogony anthems to lights from “Rigveda”: Moon shadow, do not fall down as something big, on this narrow ring! <...>

Who does this prayer-spell belong to? Perhaps to the priestess Plyasa, who is aware of the fact that as soon as Moon rises (night comes) her death will die according to ritual: <...> Death will enter her, <...> // Her face will chalk white <...>

## CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps this spell is perceived like a voice of the author who feels a tragedy with his heroine.

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The article performs alike images of the priestesses, their social status, life styles. It is worth to mention that Brusov’s image is a part of his imagination, and there many mistakes and mis-coincidences from historical point of view. Hlebnikov’s image coincides with real images of devadasy and his poem could reflect the old India’s cultural, social, religious peculiarities. Hlebnikov’s poem “ Dark, black temple’s daughter” is rather a social – historical human’s tragedy. It is created by a man who hosted an inventor of “game of words”, philosopher who is far from understanding true ways of tragic gap between a man and a world; along with it – an outstanding artist – humanist, continuator of high traditions of Russian international and humanist literature of Pushkin type and weight.