

## **Chronology of a discovery**

In 1938, a team of researchers discovered a major archaeological site among the caves found in the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountains which range across the north-east of presentday Pakistan and Afghanistan. Led by professors Robert Jenkins (1909-1982) and Jacquelyne Dutillon (1914-2007), excavations proceeding the discovery would reveal a number of fragments of pottery which when analyzed were dated to the 3rd millennium B.C. Soon after, a theory was forwarded which posited that these artifacts could well have been relics of the Urnosians, a matriarchal group of shepherds who lived on the fringe of the Harappan civilization (in the Indus valley from approximately the 5th through 3rd millennia B.C.). These conclusions were deemed to be supported by a number of references to the Urnosians found in the Rigveda. Throughout the 1970's, the decryption of Harappan texts provided corroboration for this theory and substantially supported the fascinating idea that the form of writing developed by the Urnosians had been essentially musical in nature.

After the Second World War, a new series of ambitious studies, undertaken in the Kabul region under the supervision of the renowned archaeologist Alexander Von Stratten (1906-1983), would conclude that the system of Urnosseen writing had been a surprisingly precise one. Early in the 1980's, the son of Von Stratten, Einrich (born in 1937) presented the very first transcription into modern musical notation of the arabesques and symbols adorning the numerous clay tablets discovered in Kabul during excavations which had been led by his father. These discoveries were also attributed to groups of Urnosians.

However, more recent decryptions of Harappan texts would put into question Von Stratten's theories. In 1994, British anthropologist Tom Blake (1946-1996) drew from these new readings of the ancient texts to postulate that while the clay tablets did indeed represent remnants of the famous Urnosseen musical notation, this notation did not constitute a system of writing of distinct rhythms and pitches – as with Ancient Greek notation – which had also been the position of the original thesis proposed by the Germans. Blake, a specialist in the history of spiritual practices of Antiquity, proposed instead that the notation represented tonal states which, in his opinion, were associated with manifestations of the soul as well as with the spirit world. Showing that there were parallels with practices in Middle and Far-Eastern civilizations, Blake proposed that these tablets were able to represent a series of states based upon the fundamentally opposed notions of emptiness and proliferation, and these, for the Urnosians, could have served as the basis for all things, possibly in conjunction with stellar vibrations and the world's creation. Blake

was as bold as to suggest that the Urnosians, with a musical language but lacking a written form of language, had lived in relative silence.

Blake's theories implied, therefore, a complete reconsideration of the earlier theories. His thesis, associating each of the clay tablets to both a spiritual state and a distinct sonority, ultimately proposed that these were organized in different sequences during spiritual gatherings. Were the sequences decided in advance or did this "rosary" develop during the course of the ritual? These new theories were firmly opposed by the German archaeologists, most notably by Einrich Von Stratten. The controversy did not lessen over time, despite Blake's death (from uncertain circumstances) some years later.

### **Stages of the reconstruction**

It was altogether by chance, thanks to research he had carried out while completing his Master's degree, that composer André Hamel first learned of the interpretations put forth by the Von Stratten's. Fascinated by this series of discoveries, he decided to dedicate a part of his work to this subject (Université de Montréal, 1993). This led to the two-part composition *Deux pièces pour cornemuse* (1991) of which the first, *À la recherche des Urnoséens*, appears at the conclusion of the present album. Following Hamel's project of the reconstruction of Urnosian music initiated during his Master's Degree, the idea of a public presentation to reflect the most current research was born. It was with this in mind that the Urnos collective was founded in 2001. At that time, as Blake's interpretation was considered to be the authoritative position on the subject, the collective's members chose to pursue this new line of thinking, which seemed to them more likely to correspond to reality. Inspired by the controversy surrounding the discoveries of the British anthropologist, their efforts led to two series of performances, in May 2004 and February 2011. The reconstruction itself unfolded in three stages. The first involved artist Guy Laramée reproducing some Urnosian artifacts from the collection of the Indian Museum. Focusing on those among them that represented individuals with instruments, he was able to study their forms and build a whole range of instruments closely related to the bagpipe family. Along with these, a variety of percussion instruments were also added. Secondly, André Hamel, proceeding from Blake's ideas relating to spirituality and Urnosian practices, composed music appropriate for a ritual. Finally, director Martine Beaulne developed the narrative framework of the ritual by combining Hamel's music, which represented different musical "states", and Blake's interpretations of Urnosian mythology in relation to the symbols engraved upon the clay tablets.

## **The ritual as the recreation of the founding myth of Urnos**

The account proposed by Blake represents the founding myth of the world as understood by the Urnosian peoples, of which the most significant elements would have been repeated each year in a ritual form, in all likelihood during winter solstice. According to the interpretation of the symbols given by Blake, the people of Urnos were born from a carnal encounter between a half-woman/half-animal Goddess and a male goat. When, after a long and difficult gestation, the Goddess gave birth, the emergence of the hybrid being shattered world order and plunged it into a bloody war. Wanting to protect her offspring, the Goddess entered the battle, but died. The child was thereafter condemned to wander. Blake associated this to the nomadic existence of his Urnosian descendants.

Seven sound states make up the telling of this founding myth, and Hamel took his inspiration from these seven states when writing the music of the reconstitution which was presented in public. First, we have the appearance of the Goddess (“Genesis”), punctuated by the voice of a woman overseeing the celebration of the ritual. An ensuing hunt for love enacts the seduction sequence which concludes with the union of Goddess and goat, the human and the animal (“Hunt”). After the union is consummated, the woman finds herself alone (“Solitude”). She seeks to embrace the silence. The Real then manifests itself as the sound of the “freeing pipe”, eliciting the sexual pleasures, the appeals, and the charms of life on Earth. A duet of peacocks are linked together, evoking the impulsive passion which had carried away the Goddess and the goat (“Desire”). This state evokes the vitality of the fetus as well as the eroticism of desire. The presence of percussion brings an end to these amorous impulses, signalling the discord about to be unleashed upon the world. The birth of the infant is accompanied by the sound of two female voices in song (“Birth”). The next state evokes the celebration that takes place following the death of the Goddess (“Victory”), and precedes the final state of the ritual, which represents the sacrifice of a female goat to the memory of the Goddess (“Sacrifice”).

Notes by Paul Bazin (translated by Anthony Collins)