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SFB 1475, DiF group LIGHT

Conference: “More Light on the Metaphors of Light”

CERES, Dec. 12-13, 2024

organised by Carmen Meinert, Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, Claudia Jürgens (sub-project A03)

Abstracts

Mesopotamian Luminous Beings – The Aura of the Gods

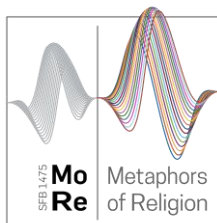
Rosel Pientka-Hinz, RUB, CERES

Metaphor and blending theories will be used to show the extent to which a Mesopotamian deity could act as a luminous celestial body in the firmament, but also as a precious statue in an exclusive temple or even in the form of a mobile standard in public space. 4000-year-old metaphors of light encounter processes of *anthropomorphisation*, metaphors of weapons encounter processes of *zoomorphisation*.

Light Metaphors in the Book of Psalms

Nikita Artemov, RUB, CERES

Analysis of light metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and, specifically, in the Book of Psalms, shows that the image of light can acquire a wide range of meanings depending on the context and becomes associated with a number of situationally constructed and intersecting target domains such as seeing the daylight as tantamount to being alive (Ps 49:19; 56:13), divine favour and mercy granting life, rescue or salvation, and well-being (Ps 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3.7.19; 118:23), awakening and remaining alive and healthy (Ps 13:3), confidence and reliance, triumph, and hope (Ps 18:28; 34:5; 132:17), joy, strength, and a sense of vitality (Ps 19:8; 38:10; 97:11), divine guidance and orientation (Ps 43:3), theophany (Ps 50:2; 80:1; 94:1; 144:16), glory and fame (Ps 76:4), divine presence and omniscience revealing everything hidden and kept secret (Ps 90:8; 139:12), moral orientation, spiritual enlightenment and knowledge (Ps 119:105.130). All of these target domains and aspects of meaning are metonymically linked to diverse human experiences connected with light, which is also true for the (universal?) conceptual metaphors KNOWING IS SEEING and JOY IS SHINING. As light is, among other things, a metaphor for God and YHWH's presence, the main function of the manifold light metaphors in Hebrew psalms is probably to link all the multiple conceptual domains associated with light (life, joy and vitality, well-being, security, orientation and guidance, glory, knowledge and wisdom) to the concept of divine presence and thus to convey the idea that YHWH is the ultimate source of them all. Accordingly, in the only passage in the book of Psalms speaking



of “your light” with reference to YHWH (“for with you is the fountain of life, in your light do we see light”), the light metaphor seems to accumulate all its possible connotations triggering an open-ended interpretation process.

“Spiritual Luminaries” or “Spiritual Illumination”? The Binomial shenming and Light-Metaphor in Some Early Chinese Texts

Licia Di Giacinto, RUB, CERES

The paper intends to reflect on the use of binomial *shenming* within early (400-100 BCE) Chinese texts by exploring and comparing the different nuances of the term in Confucian texts and proto-Daoist literature. Attention shall be devoted to the ways in which the texts employ the light metaphor and address different target domains.

Is the Manichaeian Father of Greatness Light?

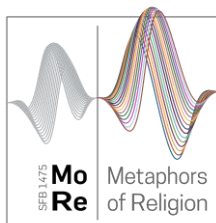
Floriana Marra, RUB, CERES

In Manichaeism, the fundamental principles are Light and Darkness, identified with two distinct deities. Associated with the Light, the Father of Greatness functions as the principal benevolent deity in the pantheon, and as the source for the emanation of numerous other divine entities. How the supreme positive deity relates to the Light, the supreme positive principle, is not clear. Whether he is to be understood as being of light, as producing it, or as living in a light environment, the ‘Light Paradise’ (Sogdian *rwxsšn ’yrδmn*) – is not clear. Is the Light of the Father of Greatness real or a metaphor? The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the relationship between the Father of Greatness and the Light as presented in one Sogdian fragment (M 264a), where the Light is presented as a characteristic of the Father himself. The analysis of other Sogdian fragments dealing with cosmogony and cosmology will provide further material in addition to this fragment. Taken together, they contribute to a better contextualisation of the concept of light within the (Eastern) Manichaeian worldview, its mythology and possible metaphorical dimensions.

The More the Brighter: Proliferation, Patterns of Knowledge, Aesthetic Experience, and Metaphors of Light in the Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra

Nic Newton, independent scholar

This paper will provide categorical analysis of the textual imagery of a selection of early to middle period Indic Mahāyāna *sūtras*. With an emphasis on the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (2nd-3rd century CE), and under the rubric of ‘proliferation’, the paper will posit four modes of the organisation of imagery that proceed from the ability of light, as it is observed in narrative expressions of the knowledge is light metaphor, to ‘illuminate’ and infinitely ‘reflect’ multiple worlds, objects, and individuals. The paper further identifies several patterns of metaphor use and manners of textual organisation such as formulas and repetitions, escalations or crescendos, countdowns,

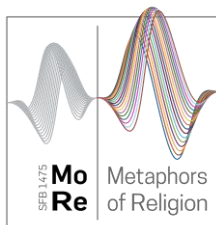


concatenations, reduplication, parallelism, and chiasmus. The paper will argue that the principle purposes of proliferation, and these other congruous types of textual production, are those of aesthetic edification and praise. As such, the representation of the unique abilities of bodhisattvas manifests in textual structures that point towards affect; that is the authors attempt to induce emotional ‘experience’ rather than conceptual knowledge primarily, but rely on existing paradigms of knowledge representation and largely conventional imagery that are reconfigured in order to create a glorious aesthetic experience. Moreover, the paper will propose that these features constitute the Mahāyāna intellectual project’s claim to superior states of knowledge. It is, therefore, the paper’s contention that the narrative representation of knowledges (Skt. *jñānas*), liberations (Skt. *vimokṣas*), and concentrations (Skt. *samādhis*) relies on poetic techniques that invoke basic conceptual metaphors and make use of individual expressions of metaphor extensively, including the metaphor of light. The analysis will, it is hoped, demonstrate how a particular metaphor functions in religious language, and show how the conventions of religious language are transformed in a particular literary context to suit that function. The paper will close with discussion of the broader theoretical implications of the examples studied with reference to Blumenberg’s contention that Light is an “Absolute Metaphor”, exploring the similarities between his “model representations”, and “implicative models” (Blumenberg [1960] 2010, 7–10) and the ‘conceptual’ metaphors of Lakoff and others.

What the Flame of a LED Butter Lamp can Tell about our Mind. A Light Metaphor in the Field of Meditative Practice

Jan-Ulrich Sobisch and Claudia Jürgens, RUB, CERES

This case study demonstrates how a metaphor of light interacts with all four fundamental dimensions of religion (knowledge, experience, materiality, action), and thereby contributes to religious meaning-making. In a video teaching from 2016, Garchen Rinpoche, a contemporary Tibetan Buddhist master, employs the flame of a butter lamp as an ‘excellent metaphor’, as he himself states, to elucidate the inner experience of the nature of the mind. He extends a metaphor drawn from the scriptures of the Tibetan Buddhist *Dzogchen* tradition (“knowledge”), and illustrates and expands it through his own experience, which he recalls and thereby verifies in his explanations (“experience”). To clarify his explanations, Garchen Rinpoche utilises an LED butter lamp and illustrations with flames that he developed himself and had printed together with a traditional supplication prayer for the realization of the subject matter, namely the non-dual self-arisen awareness (“materiality”). Furthermore, instructions for spiritual teachers and practitioners are derived. Here, the flame of the butter lamp not only serves as a metaphor for the ineffable nature of the mind, particularly its clarity and emptiness, but is also turned into an object of meditation that can be directly experienced visually, auditorily and kinesthetically (“action”). In addition to the visual dimension, the example thus demonstrates the connection between the metaphor of light and two other sensory spheres.



Illuminating the Sacred: Metaphor, Meaning, and Sign in Tibetan Bon Religious Literature

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In the earliest layers of Tibetan Bon religious literature, which predate the thirteenth century, a significant conceptual triad emerges as a means of conveying religious experience. This triad, which can be rendered as 'metaphor, meaning, and sign' (Tib. *dpe don rtags gsum*) serves both as a communicative structure and a cognitive tool.

In this study, I explore how the triad of 'metaphor, meaning, and sign' functions in Bon Dzogchen (Tib. rDzogs chen) literature, not merely as a scholastic framework but as a dynamic structure for expressing and understanding religious experience through an ancient cognitive model. This triadic concept facilitates the transfer of meaning from the everyday (source domain) to the transcendent (target domain), offering an intuitive approach to meaning-making that anticipates modern theories of metaphor.

The analysis will focus on foundational Bon texts, beginning with the twelfth-century *bsGrags pa gling grags* [Drenpa's Proclamation] and moving to the *sGron ma drug gi gdams pa* [The Doctrine of the Six Lights], a pivotal work within the teachings of the Oral Transmission of the Great Perfection in Zhang Zhung (Tib. *rDzogs pa chen po Zhang Zhung snyan rgyud*) along with the thirteenth-century commentary on this text by the Bon master Uri Sonam Gyaltzan (Tib. Uri bSod rnam rGyal mtshan). Recognised as one of the four principal texts of the Oral Transmission of the Great Perfection in Zhang Zhung, the *Doctrine of the Six Lights* offers profound insights into yogic practices where light is regarded as a central ontological and cosmological principle.

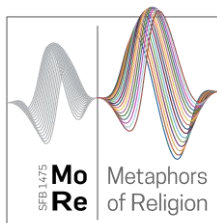
Beyond these Bon texts, I will investigate the presence of the triad of 'metaphor, meaning, and sign' in Dzogchen literature within the Buddhist Nyingma (Tib. rNying ma) tradition, including the *Kun byed rgyal po* [The All-Accomplishing King], the fundamental tantra of the Dzogchen mind series (Tib. *sems sde*), and later works.

By analysing how the triad is employed to guide disciples toward recognising their innate wisdom, this research situates the framework within both Bon and Nyingma representations of transcendence, emphasising an ancient metaphorological model that provides deeper insights into the dynamics of religious transcendence in Tibetan thought.

Towards a Refined Every-day Metaphorics of Light. On Cusanus' Sermons CXXVIII, CXXIX and CXXX

Knut Martin Stünkel, CERES, RUB

Everyday metaphors that play a role in religious meaning-making can be divided into three main types: general/abstract, abstract-concrete and concrete/ specified metaphors, which differ in terms of their meaning-making potential. The metaphors of light are also subject to this differentiation, which has an impact on the specific way in which the respective processes of meaning formation take place in the contexts in which they are used. In a cycle of three sermons from 1453, Nicolaus Cusanus developed his own Christological theory of knowledge based on the differentiated



metaphor of light, starting from Neoplatonic metaphors of light. The concrete/ specified metaphor of “light entering a small mountain town in the morning”, which appears in Sermon CXXX, is decisive for this. In my contribution, I would like to characterize the role of this concrete metaphor for the process of religious meaning-making in more detail.

Towards an Absolute Metaphor ‘Light’ in Antique/Late Antique Iranian Religion?

Götz König, Freie Universität Berlin, Institute for Iranian Studies

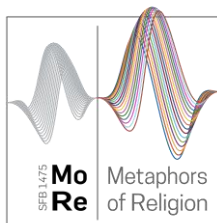
In Hegel’s reconstruction of the movement and history of the *Geist* in the German idealism, Iran (Zoroastrianism) was situated on the border between the East (China, India) and Greece: While Iran is characterised on the one hand, in contrast to India, by a consolidation of concepts, it is characterised on the other hand by the fact that it ‘still’ has to represent these concepts in a sensual way, i.e. (probably) as metaphors. The good/true and the evil/false are represented by “light” and “darkness”. If we confront this definition with Blumenberg’s theory of the “absolute metaphor”, then Blumenberg’s theory would be historically broken: only for the *Geist* in Iran, but not in general, would “light” be an “absolute metaphor”. But to what extent are both Hegel’s and Blumenberg’s analyses correct for particular historical materials (in our case: for the Zoroastrian materials)? For the meta-analysis of Hegel’s analysis shows that it starts from a material that is too specific, while Blumenberg’s determinations are too general for it. At least for Zoroastrian Iran it can be generally stated: a) that in Iranian antiquity there is a certain reluctance towards the use of the metaphor “light (sust.)/light (adj.)”; b) that the use of the metaphor “light (sust.)/light (adj.)” in the Younger Avesta is limited to the transitional area from the material to the immaterial; c) that only in late antiquity does the metaphor of “(sust.) light” (< “(adj.) light”) become the carrier of a transition between the immaterial and the material. It seems possible that this late antique expansion of the metaphor of light coincides with the development of a new pair of concepts, that of being/non-being (which formed the historical starting point for Blumenberg’s theory).

The Great Wisdom Mind is like the Light of the Sky: Light Metaphors in the Early Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen Tradition

Carmen Meinert, RUB, CERES

The tradition of Dzogchen (Tib. rDzogs chen) or the Great Completeness developed as the unique feature of the Nyingma (Tib. rNying ma) or Old School of Buddhism in Tibet since ca. the 9th century. Throughout the centuries it develops an elaborate and very sophisticated array of light metaphors. However, in the earliest texts, which will be discussed in this paper, light metaphors are still used scarcely, are in its nascent phase.

The Dzogchen tradition is first described as an independent textual category and vehicle towards awakening in the 9th/10th century doxographical work *bSam gtan mig sgron* [Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation] by Nupchen Sangyé Yéshé (ca. 844 to mid-10th c., Tib. gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes). Here, early Dzogchen is depicted as a path of immediacy and effortlessness towards awakening, demarcating itself from more gradual Tantric Buddhist approaches involving e.g.



elaborate, effortful visualisation practices. It focusses on the view (Tib. *lta ba*) of the direct recognition and experience of the non-dual nature of mind (Tib. *sems nyid*), rather than on meditation (Tib. *sgom*) or conduct (Tib. *spyod*), a widespread tripartite system describing spiritual transformation (view-meditation-conduct). Nupchen is deeply indebted to the earliest formulations of Dzogchen thought known as the mind orientation (Tib. *sems phyogs*) and the mind series (Tib. *sems sde*) and extensively quotes from the lore of eighteen mind series texts (Tib. *sems sde bco brgyad*).

It is in this context that we find metaphors like: the wisdom mind is like the light of the sky (Tib. *nam mkha'i 'od*). Just as metaphors are not simply mappings between two concepts, but act as schemas which allow to further extend the metaphor, this paper will investigate where and how light metaphors start to emerge in early Dzogchen thought and in relation to other metaphors. I will explore the beginnings of a tradition that will eventually lay a great emphasis on light imagery.

The Recovering of Light. Metaphors of Rescuing the Light Soul in Manichaeism

Andrea Piras, Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di Beni Culturali

Given the all-pervading attestation of a light symbolism in a religion centered on Light/Darkness antagonism, I think this sectoral point of view could explain the process of gathering/filtering/distillation/ascension of the light in the cosmic and microcosmic dimension of this religion.