





# ASIAN HORIZONS

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

FONDATA DA GIUSEPPE TUCCI

DIRETTA DA  
GHERARDO GNOLI †

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# ASIAN HORIZONS

GIUSEPPE TUCCI'S BUDDHIST, INDIAN,  
HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

Edited by A. A. DI CASTRO and D. TEMPLEMAN



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*This volume is dedicated to the memory of Gherardo Gnoli (1937–2012)*





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FRANCESCO SFERRA

THE “THOUGHT” OF GIUSEPPE TUCCI<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the historian is more interested in the sequence of events than in the mystery of human personality: the latter is crystallized in human undertakings and is thus held in no account as though eluding our grasp; and yet for those able to evoke it, it is more fascinating than a man's actions because it is their mainspring and a constant feature that is splendid and eternal. And this is why I find it particularly moving, for time is mere death while this is an immutable presence that our imagination may embody. Empires, kingdoms and regimes are transient phenomena like stones rolling down a mountain slope; but whoever was their architect must needs harbour within himself an impulse to be hated or admired which centuries later can be shared by us and is able to exalt or humiliate us, because between the human beings of yesterday and today there exists a solidarity which leads us to feel the burden or the glory of unity in so far as we are men equally responsible for all things.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Annalisa Capristo, Giovanni Casadio, Angelo Andrea Di Castro, Gherardo Gnoli, Raniero Gnoli, Iain Sinclair and David Templeman for having read this paper and for their precious suggestions. Hans Thomas Hakl, Giancarlo Lacerenza, Oscar Nalesini and Federico Squarcini have most kindly provided me with useful bibliographical references. Eugen Ciurtin and Peter Harvey have kindly helped me in obtaining papers I needed for this article. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from Italian into English are made by the present writer.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted with slight changes from Tucci 1971:32–33; the Italian version of this passage can be read on pp. 15–16 of the same booklet: “Forse lo storico è più interessato alla sequenza

Unfortunately I have never met Giuseppe Tucci. He died when he was about 90 years old in April 1984, while I was an undergraduate student at the University of Rome and had just started to approach Indian studies.

While reading his writings, in particular the numerous reports of his scientific expeditions and other minor works of popular character, I realised that in them, on several occasions, it pleased him to publish his reflections on life and man, his understanding of scientific research, the humanities in general and specifically Oriental studies. We could say these were, broadly speaking, his “thought”.

An analysis of this “thought” – which Tucci probably would have wanted, and which I tried to carry out with the help of interviews with some of his students (Raniero Gnoli, Gherardo Gnoli, Corrado Pensa) – might be useful in my opinion, especially to evaluate the meaning of Tucci’s activities as a scholar and as a man of culture. In fact, we need a global vision of the man in order to assess better his work and its function, which was seminal for a large part of twentieth century Oriental research in Italy and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> This analysis can also explain the reasons why he has preferred some areas of study and neglected others.

To some extent, this work has already been done. Let us consider, first of all, the booklet *Ricordo di Giuseppe Tucci* by Raniero Gnoli (1985) and the essays by Gherardo Gnoli, Corrado Pensa, Hans Thomas Hakl and, more recently, Enrica Garzilli quoted below in the bibliography. While continuing on some issues, I will also try to touch themes that they have not treated, sometimes paraphrasing Tucci’s words, often using quotations by Tucci himself, letting him speak instead of me in the exposition of his own thought.

dei fatti che al mistero della personalità umana: questa si cristallizza nelle sue opere, e pertanto viene tenuta in nessun conto, come inafferrabile; eppure a chi sappia evocarla essa è di quelle più fascinosa siccome ne è l’impulso, una fedeltà splendida ed eterna. E perciò particolarmente mi commuove, perché il tempo è morte e quella è immutabile presenza che soltanto la nostra immaginazione può far risuscitare. Gli imperi, i regni, i regimi sono cose caduche come sassi che rotolano lungo il pendio delle montagne, ma chiunque ne fu l’artefice chiudeva necessariamente in se medesimo un impeto esecrabile o prodigioso, capace di partecipare a distanza di secoli con noi, di esaltarci o di umiliarci, perché esiste fra le creature di oggi e di ieri una solidarietà che ci fa sentire il peso o la gloria di una unità, in quanto uomini, in tutto, ugualmente responsabili”.

<sup>3</sup> See also Uray 1985.

It should be first noted that although Tucci was interested in logic and philosophy – let us think of his studies on Indian materialism, of his essays on Chinese and Indian philosophy, of the writings on Dignāga and on the early logicians which he carried through from the beginning of his research career until at least the second half of the 1950s – and although he copiously published personal considerations on history and humanity, usually through forthright assessments, he never put forward a systematic thinking. Tucci was not a philosopher, and never tried to articulate his thought processes in a coherent way. And in Tucci's works, sometimes we actually find contradictions.

In a useful article published in 1995, Gustavo Benavides made it very clear that Tucci's writings, especially those of the 1930s and 1940s, contain inconsistencies that reflect in many ways the spirit of an era still marked by colonialism, which is expressed largely in the construction of a particular vision of the Orient, functioning – but in my opinion quite unconsciously on Tucci's part – towards the redefinition of an anti-modern and traditionalist West.<sup>4</sup> An example is the opposition between communicable knowledge and incommunicable experience, between mysticism and intellectualism, between the timelessness of the East and the West's submission to time, including the supposed tendency to mysticism of the East and the technological superiority of the West.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of a systematic thinking, it is perhaps easier and more productive to begin by examining the differences and similarities between Tucci and other intellectuals of his time, and between his way of interpreting culture and the cultural models which were dominant in the period, rather than seeking in his own writings a clear-cut self-coherence. At the same time we should see whether we can identify an evolution in his thinking, considering all five periods into which we can divide his life, especially the last, ranging from 1955 to 1984 if we accept the chronology proposed by Luciano Petech (1984).

His production after 1955, in fact, is very important because it is precisely in the years after the Second World War that Tucci outlines more clearly his concept of humanism and the idea of historical and cultural unity

<sup>4</sup> See also Benavides 2008.

<sup>5</sup> C.f., e.g. Tucci 1940:11–12.

between Europe and Asia, which does not appear in, or is even implicitly contradicted by his previous writings. In addition, it is precisely in the 1950s that, with great vitality, Tucci becomes dedicated to archaeology, undertaking the study of geographical areas that he had not previously visited – that is, Pakistan and Afghanistan. And there is an important and noble aspect of Tucci's personality which we should keep in mind, namely his ability, or perhaps rather his need, to constantly get back into play, so to speak, and to follow with enthusiasm and youthful curiosity new research paths using methods of investigation that were new for him.<sup>6</sup>

Man lives in a perpetual oscillation between the charm of the unknown and the tedium of what he knows: it seems that he loves to know in order to be faced with a new unsuspected mystery, to conquer certainty in order to doubt again, to face blinding light in order to be lost again in darkness.<sup>7</sup>

If we should find a definition we could say that Tucci was a historian, but this is misleading: One would think that he was interested only in antiquity. He himself leads us into this error sometimes when he claims to be interested only in the past, a past that – no doubt provocatively – he says he wants to rebuild with the help of “imagination”.<sup>8</sup> In this sense

<sup>6</sup> In many of his writings he clearly expresses his aversion to monotony and routine, in particular that imposed by urban life. C.f., e.g. the following short statement: “[M]onotonia: la cosa che più odio” (Tucci 1996b:44). In contrast to city life, which made him feel bound, Tucci loved defining himself as a “nomad”: “[S]ono essenzialmente un nomade” (1996a:182); “[N]omade per natura, non amo il cosiddetto vivere civile: mi ci adatto perché non posso farne a meno” (1996d:48). C.f. also Tucci 1996d:107–108 and Tucci 1977:7.

<sup>7</sup> “L'uomo vive in un perenne oscillare tra il fascino dell'ignoto e il tedio di ciò che conosce: si direbbe che egli ami di sapere per trovarsi di fronte ad un nuovo insospettato mistero, di conquistare una certezza per poter ancora dubitare, di accecarsi di luce per ripetersi nelle tenebre” (Tucci 2005:22, c.f. also p. 122).

<sup>8</sup> “A me interessa soltanto il passato perché lo figuro a mio piacimento, bene o male non me ne importa nulla: toglietemi questo fantasticare ed io sono un uomo morto. Mi interessano quelle altre fantasie che chiamano religione o filosofia perché sono la rappresentazione drammatica delle speranze e delle angosce umane” (Tucci 1996b:29). “[P]er una propensione nativa sono portato ad interessarmi degli avvenimenti passati piuttosto che dei presenti e vivi, sicché io vedendoli dall'alto possa immaginarli a mio piacimento con la partecipazione della fantasia” (Tucci 1996a:11). “Ora che l'Oriente sta assorbendo il nostro veleno non c'è altro da fare che scendere nel passato” (Tucci 1996b:92). C.f. also Gnoli 1985:14.

he (1996b:44) says that “history, if you do not want it to be a chronicle, is always legend”. That is, if I properly understand what Tucci (1977:12) intends, history is something that has to be interpreted – etymologically “something to be read”. The task of the historian and man of culture, in fact, is not simply to collect data from the past, but to find in historical facts an eternal and human value.

In fact, Tucci’s interest in history was an interest in man.<sup>9</sup> The past, as described in narrative, is seen by him as the casket into which human personality is deposited – both individual and collective – no less than his outbursts and his littleness, his intelligence and his madness, and especially his fears and his hopes. Arguing with an essentially rationalistic vision of man, in 1978, in the preface of the second edition of *Tibet ignoto*, Tucci writes:

Man [...] is above all the immense tumult of the irrational by which sudden fantasies and imaginations arise, where he finds himself and embraces the infinite – not only embraces it, but takes it in exaltations and sublimations that raise us to meditations, joys or torments, which make us start grasping that All-Emptiness where there is peace.<sup>10</sup>

Tucci is interested in the intimate, profound dimension of man, which in his opinion should not be flattened by his intellectual component (on the latter point, as we shall see, he insists a lot, especially from the 1950s on). He wants to see how this dimension is expressed in culture, art, religion and philosophy.

For Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), and before him Hegel, and for Tucci too, art, religion and philosophy are, in fact, the highest spiritual

“Tucci was not alone in his deference to the power of myth/fantasy. Van der Leeuw, Leenhardt, Eliade, Ricoeur and others thought that myth should be re-appreciated for something other than its literality” (Iain Sinclair, personal communication).

<sup>9</sup> “[L]a storia non è più storia di questo o quel popolo, ma storia dell’uomo, riflessa in molti aspetti e narrata in racconti sempre ripetuti delle stesse speranze e delle stesse sconfitte” (Tucci 1996d:13).

<sup>10</sup> “[L]’uomo [...] è soprattutto l’immenso tumulto dell’irrazionale da cui salgono improvvise le fantasie e le immaginazioni, dove egli ritrova se stesso e abbraccia l’infinito, non solo lo abbraccia ma se ne impadronisce in esaltazioni e sublimazioni che ci sollevano a meditazioni, gaudi o tormenti i quali ci avviano ad afferrare quel Vuoto-Tutto in cui è pace” (Tucci 1996c:14).

forms, irreducible forms of the human spirit.<sup>11</sup> In this we see a profound difference from Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), the other great Italian figure at the turn of the century, who expressed his anti-positivist position in a different way. For Croce, religion has no real autonomy; it is strictly linked with human activity in history, and as has been pointed out by Sergio Landucci (1981) it is a mixture of poetic, philosophical and moral themes.<sup>12</sup> Even the history of religions, properly understood, ultimately has no meaning.

As for collective history, Tucci (1934a:13) is interested in capturing what he calls the intimate essence of populations, which is translated into concrete expressions in the symbols of civilisations. It is necessary, he (1934a:10) says, to understand deeply the soul of a people, “its historical individuality”. The assumption behind this is that although man is always the same under every sky and at every time,<sup>13</sup> there are specific ways, historically determined, of his being in the world, which express themselves in original ways and which are to some extent partially limited by social, climatic and geographical conditions.<sup>14</sup> That is why we need to study carefully all the evidence of culture, from ceramics to texts on logic, from inscriptions to tombs, and especially textual data and art, painting – among other things – which seem to have interested him particularly, perhaps because pictorial evidence was the first data which appeared to him during his research in the field. And we need to gather as much evidence as possible before human insensitivity and the tyranny of time erase the tracks, and then to study, interpret and identify its historical and cultural value.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately – it has been said in passing – he was never able to give rise to an epigrapher or a numismatist

<sup>11</sup> On this argument, see also Gh. Gnoli, forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> For some references to the theme of faith and religion in Croce’s thought, see Bonetti 2005:159–160, 184–185.

<sup>13</sup> “[I] fatti umani [...] sono dappertutto, nella loro diversità formale, sostanzialmente analoghi” (Tucci 1996b:16). C.f. also Tucci 1958a:348; 1977:13; 1996c: 75; 1996d:13; 2005:20, 80; forthcoming:157–158; Gnoli 1984:18–19; forthcoming:5.

<sup>14</sup> As Andrea Di Castro has kindly pointed out to me, here and in many others of Tucci’s ideas, we might find a parallel with the theories expressed by Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975) in the first volume of his *A Study of History (Introduction. The Genesis of Civilisations, Part One*, Oxford University Press, London 1934).

<sup>15</sup> C.f. Tucci 1996c:13, 103, 126–129, 132, 136.



of Indian and Tibetan civilisations, although, Raniero Gnoli informed me, he tried several times among his pupils.

Despite his proximity to Gentile, with whom he founded the IsMEO in 1933 and to whom he was always deeply tied, the debates on the philosophy of history and historicism in vogue at that time are alien to him. As we shall see, he takes a practical, experiential attitude. And the way he chooses to make history demonstrates his modernity.

We note, first of all, that even while the academic world was dominated by textualism and an elitist conception of knowledge, we often find in Tucci's writings criticism of philologism and particularism, although he himself was the author of numerous essays on specific topics and author of several critical editions.<sup>16</sup>

Till today the purely philological research system has dominated too much in our studies: extreme specialisation, technicalities, disregard of all contact with what was called the general public. The present speaker is certainly not a detractor of philological studies, in which he was formed and hardened. But the time has come to consider these studies not as an end in themselves but as a means of understanding a world that lives and grows and comes close to us full of much hatred and suspicion, which we have in the first place provoked and which we have now, if possible, to dispel.<sup>17</sup>

This passage dates back to the early 1930s and is significant because it is one of the first in which Tucci describes the function of study as a means of understanding and a tool for pacification of hatred. The reference here

<sup>16</sup> E.g. the *editio princeps* of the *Saptaśatikāprajñāpāramitā* (1923), the *Jātinirākṛti* of Jitāri (1930), the *Abhisamayālaṅkāraloka* of Haribhadra (1932), the *Ratnāvalī* of Nāgārjuna (1934, 1936), the *Prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārtha* of Dignāga (1947), the *First Bhāvanākrama* (1958) and the *Third Bhāvanākrama* (1971) by Kamalaśīla.

<sup>17</sup> “Ha troppo dominato fino ad oggi nei nostri studi il sistema della ricerca puramente filologica: specializzazione estrema, tecnicismi, dispregio di ogni contatto con quello che si chiamava il grosso pubblico. Chi parla non è certo un denigratore degli studi filologici, nei quali si è formato ed agguerrito. Ma è venuto il tempo di considerare questi studi non più come fine a se stessi ma come mezzo di comprensione di tutto un mondo che vive e si sviluppa e viene anche incontro a noi carico di molti odî e sospetti, che noi abbiamo per primi fomentati e dobbiamo ora, se possibile, dissipare” (Tucci 1934a:10). On the same theme, see also Tucci 2005:196.

was probably to colonialism. The purpose of research, he (1958a:348–349) will later write, is to promote mutual understanding between cultures, and culture is not only dedicated to the understanding of the facts, but it serves primarily to create harmony, since “only cultural contacts can install understanding and tolerance, which reinforce human solidarity” (Tucci 1961a:116). On this point, as we shall see, he would later insist. In another passage from this same essay (1934a), he calls for a profound renewal of academic study:

I think that university education, with regard to the East, should be modernised, that is unencumbered by the concerns that we had inherited from the scientific panels of the past century: in a word, become more and more vehicle of intimate understanding of the fundamental aspects of the culture studied. Besides the ancient we must address the new, and we must address the ancient inasmuch as it is a means to understand and justify the present.<sup>18</sup>

We note the strong emphasis, largely new in 1934, on the ancillary function of academic study, which needs to understand the past and to grasp the fundamental aspects of a culture for a real evaluation of the present. Likely, here Tucci was addressing the Humboldt-style conception of humanism as the study of classical thought. Studying the past is vital, but it is for the present; it must point to the present, stripped from what in 1958 he will define a “romantic view of things”, that is, of the past and culture.<sup>19</sup>

Another turning point and modern feature, we might say, of the method of Tucci is the importance of field work.

<sup>18</sup> “[I]o penso che anche l’insegnamento universitario, per quanto riguarda l’Oriente, debba essere rammodernato, svincolato cioè da quelle preoccupazioni che noi abbiamo avuto in eredità dai quadri scientifici del secolo trascorso: in una parola, fatto sempre più veicolo di comprensione intima degli aspetti fondamentali della cultura studiata. Oltre all’antico occorre occuparsi del nuovo, e dell’antico in quanto serve a comprendere e giustificare il presente” (Tucci 1934a:11).

<sup>19</sup> “[T]he danger must be avoided of insisting too much on the past [...]. Each people should, no doubt, be proud of its own past, but this past sometimes hinders, as it were, the knowledge of the present and prevents us from fully understanding it [...]. Otherwise, we maintain what we may call a romantic view of things and fail to understand and to appreciate the actual reality and its urge” (Tucci 1958a:349).

In Italy I do not know how many chairs of Sanskrit we have, [...] inspired by the Indo-European infatuation that attracted so many people in the past century. However, there are no global teachings on India and on the modern Indian languages, [...] which [...] reproduce with the vivacity and freshness of all the popular literatures the labor of the never-exhausted Indian soul, its struggles and its achievements and the multiple, infinite variety of its spiritual life. I would gladly sacrifice the major part of the traditional classical literature in Sanskrit [...] for the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* or the songs by Tulsīdās or by Tukārām. [...] These chairs of Indian vernaculars are for me something urgent. In the same way it is absolutely urgent that we establish stable readers of those Oriental languages of which I was talking above, and that we give scholarships that allow young, willing and able people trained in our universities to live decently for a few years in the countries of which they studied before, between us, the language and culture. It is far more valuable to spend a few months in the East, to have a direct experience of people and things, than to spend entire years at a desk reading texts and compulsively browsing dictionaries.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of on-site experience became clear to him as early as 1926 in Varanasi. Recalling that experience, in an as yet unpublished book entitled *Eros and Thanatos* found in the IsIAO archives, Tucci says he went to India led by feelings very common at the time, the

<sup>20</sup> “In Italia abbiamo non so quante cattedre di sanscrito, [...] ispirate a quella infatuazione indo-europea che fece furore nel secolo passato. Mancano invece insegnamenti globali sull’India e sui vernacoli dell’India moderna, [...] che [...] riproducono con la vivacità e la freschezza di tutte le letterature popolari il travaglio mai esausto dell’anima indiana, le sue lotte e le sue conquiste e la molteplice, infinita varietà della sua vita spirituale. Io sacrificerei volentieri gran parte della letteratura classica tradizionale in sanscrito [...] per il *Caitanyacaritamṛta* o i canti di Tulsidas o di Tukaram. [...] Queste cattedre di vernacoli indiani sono per me una cosa urgente; come è assolutamente urgente che si istituiscano quei lettori stabili delle lingue orientali di cui ho fatto più sopra parola, e si assegnino borse di studio che permettano a giovani volenterosi e capaci formati nelle nostre università di vivere decorosamente per qualche anno nei paesi di cui hanno studiato prima, fra noi, la lingua e la cultura. Vale assai più qualche mese passato in Oriente, una esperienza diretta di genti e di cose, che anni interi spesi a tavolino a compulsare testi e sfogliare dizionari” (Tucci 1934a:11–12).

fruit of a still palpable romanticism. [...] [W]e were bewitched by the words of Schopenhauer and Deussen, from the teachings of Vivekananda, Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh. India was a wonderful place where a philosophical reflection of a certain value could still stem out of mysticism; a destination of attractive dreams and a unique place in the world able to provide, at the height of its philosophical speculation, consolation to the suffering endured by men during the earthly life.<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after he adds:

It took me days to begin to understand something of this world full of contradictions, which was so revealing to my visitor's eyes. But I quickly realised that if I really wanted to understand Varanasi, I had to think about what was hidden behind it [...]. And unlike what I had done in Europe, books were no longer enough for me: I needed direct contact with people.<sup>22</sup>

That is why, starting even from 1926, Tucci began to organise the scientific expeditions for which he has become justly famous. Direct contact not only with people, but also with places, is fundamental according to him: The direct relationship with the places where a culture has developed is essential to its knowledge.<sup>23</sup> To us today, almost 90 years later, the disavowal of a purely bookish culture may seem obvious, but it was not so at the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>21</sup> “Ero andato in India spinto da sentimenti molto comuni all’epoca, frutto di un romanticismo ancora palpabile: per noi tutti, stregati dalle parole di Schopenhauer e di Deussen, dagli insegnamenti di Vivekananda, da Tagore e da Aurobindo Ghosh, l’India era un luogo meraviglioso dove dal misticismo poteva ancora nascere una riflessione filosofica di un certo valore; meta feconda di sogni allettanti e unico luogo al mondo ad offrire, grazie all’elevatezza della sua speculazione filosofica, una consolazione alle sofferenze patite dagli uomini nel corso della vita terrena” (Tucci, forthcoming:11).

<sup>22</sup> “Ho avuto bisogno di giorni per cominciare a capire qualcosa di questo mondo pieno di contraddizioni, che così si rivelava ai miei occhi di visitatore. Ma avevo subito capito che, se avessi voluto veramente comprendere Varanasi, dovevo riflettere su ciò che era celato dietro di essa [...]. E a differenza di quanto avevo fatto in Europa, non mi bastavano più i libri, ma mi occorreva il contatto diretto con la gente” (Tucci, forthcoming:13). C.f. also Tucci 1931:506.

<sup>23</sup> “Se vuoi conoscere un paese non basta lo studio al tavolino: il lavoro deve essere sollecitato da una contatto diretto, non soltanto con gli abitanti, che possono essere diversi di cultura e d’animo da quelli di un tempo, ma soprattutto con i luoghi; questi bisogna contemplarli con gli occhi di chi ci visse o ne trasse ispirazione” (Tucci 1996b:54).

His source of inspiration were the expeditions of Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943)<sup>24</sup> and Sven Anders Hedin (1865–1952), but – as we have seen – with one important difference: He does not aim to merely recover ancient treasures, but to re-live, through immersion in the daily life of the people, the culture of a people.<sup>25</sup> The moment he receives Tantric initiations in 1935,<sup>26</sup> he embodies what in his time was the ideal of the anthropological, post-Malinowskian approach to the history of religions, which required, in fact, the direct experience of the phenomenon that one wanted to describe, the “participant observation” with a given group of people and their culture.<sup>27</sup> “Of no religion – he writes – one should talk while remaining outside.”<sup>28</sup>

It is no coincidence that in the post-Second World War period he hosted at the expense of IsMEO or of the Italian Government members of the living South Asian and Tibetan traditions. Among the *paṇḍits* there were Purnaratna Vajracharya, Tuppil Venkatacharya and V.W. Paranjpe, and among the lamas we have Namkhai Norbu (rDzogs chen) and Jampel Sangye (dGe lugs pa).<sup>29</sup>

And of course, Tucci gathered a lot of materials from the countries he visited. What is striking is the abundance of evidence collected, even though he remained in some places only a few hours. Evidently he had a clear idea of what to look for. Of course, since sometimes he visited the same places and areas more than once, it is likely that he refined his quest and his targets, but no doubt this must have been facilitated also by his outstanding ability

<sup>24</sup> C.f. Tucci 1973.

<sup>25</sup> “Sven Hedin in un’opera monumentale [= *Southern Tibet*, Stockholm 1896] ha dimostrato come lentamente sia progredita la conoscenza di un paese che fino a pochi decenni fa era ancora per i più una terra di mistero [...], ma né lui né altri si sono occupati delle opere dell’uomo che sole invece hanno attirato la mia attenzione” (Tucci 1996c:12).

<sup>26</sup> “[N]el corso dei miei viaggi oltre che aver l’occhio attento ai documenti del passato ho voluto rivivere io stesso fin dove mi è stato possibile le loro stesse esperienze. [...] [N]el corso della spedizione del 1935 volli sperimentare io stesso le liturgie sottili che sommuovono tutto l’io, liberano aspettative stupefatte e pavide e ricevetti dall’abate di Saskya l’iniziazione” (1996c:14–15). C.f. also Tucci 1996a:27–28.

<sup>27</sup> For a description of the historical and theoretical background of the main approaches to the history of religions, see Filoramo and Prandi 1987:31–64, and Casadio 2005.

<sup>28</sup> “Di nessuna religione si dovrebbe parlare restandone al di fuori” (Tucci 2005:157).

<sup>29</sup> Eventually Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and Geshe Jampel Sangye moved to live in Italy on a permanent base. They taught Tibetan language, respectively at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples and at IsMEO, Rome, contributing in this way to the dissemination of the Tibetan culture in Italy and Europe.

of communication and the incredible ease he had in learning languages. In speaking with me of this innate gift, Corrado Pensa defined Tucci as “a miracle of nature”.<sup>30</sup>

This capability first of all enabled him to read manuscripts and printed texts from Sanskrit and Tibetan with extraordinary rapidity, so that he could form in brief an idea of the key concepts, what was more important and where, therefore, it would have been worthwhile to focus the search. We have confirmation of this from the dates set out in pencil at the bottom of Sanskrit manuscripts annotated by him, taken to Italy and now preserved at the IsIAO library. Between one date and the other there are, at times, only one or two days.

Even more important is that in speaking the local languages and with people from all walks of life – state officials, religious dignitaries and ordinary people – he could, as he himself said on several occasions, overcome the distrust of people and open many doors.<sup>31</sup>

It is again in contrast to the textualist and elitist conception of knowledge we may explain the interest of Tucci in the dissemination of research. It is not excluded, of course, that even the desire for self-promotion, perhaps with a view to obtaining new funding, may be involved in this operation. Nevertheless, we cannot help but notice that in his travelogues he manifested a strong interest in describing the cultures being studied in a synthetic perspective, to speak about the great themes of what he believes is or has been vital in a culture, what characterises a particular human experience and what in it has a universal character, and therefore what is important to make more widely accessible and known.

While talking about Tucci’s interest in man, we should not forget that it is always associated with a strong sense of the sacred,<sup>32</sup> especially related to the contemplation of the sublime manifestations of nature:<sup>33</sup> light, first of all,<sup>34</sup> empty spaces, and then pain, which he tries in some way to exorcise,

<sup>30</sup> Regarding this, it is worth noting that Tucci started to study Sanskrit and Hebrew when he was only 12 years old (Tucci 1996b:17).

<sup>31</sup> C.f., e.g. Tucci 1929:354; 1931:507–08; forthcoming:129.

<sup>32</sup> On this theme, see Pensa 1985.

<sup>33</sup> “[N]ei silenziosi incontri della natura io avverto irresistibile una presenza che mi umilia e mi esalta” (Tucci 1977:71).

<sup>34</sup> C.f., e.g. “Mi interessa soprattutto questo splendore di cielo e di sole” (Tucci 1996b:29).

reminding the reader, and moreover himself, that the individual is like a wave that forms in the sea and is eventually reabsorbed.<sup>35</sup> The sense of the sacred is also perceivable in the admiration he has for what he calls true ascetics, in the description of devotional practices that he observed with respect and in the admiration of pilgrims,<sup>36</sup> and in the disappointment that he has when he sees “even in Asia” the devastating signs of what he calls spiritual decadence.<sup>37</sup> The divine presence is, according to Tucci, more perceptible by man in some places – special places where devotion was widely practised and from which the sacredness does not disappear.<sup>38</sup>

Like Gandhi, for whom in 1953 he wrote a short article full of admiration and in 1976 a long, heartfelt commemoration, Tucci did not have confidence in the development of technology,<sup>39</sup> in what he calls the “blind worship of progress and intellect”.<sup>40</sup> He believes that “technical progress does not imply moral progress” (1953:148). But the real problem lies elsewhere – namely that intellect, reason, in itself insensitive and cold,<sup>41</sup> tends to create barriers. And it is the intellect that worries him more. In fact, after asking himself how to apply in practice Gandhian principles, he writes:

[W]e must not live secluded from our fellow-beings. We should develop, instead, our personal contacts with all kinds of men and all kinds of nations, in a spirit of sympathy and understanding [...] nothing divides men more than theories and abstraction.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, intellect can work exactly the opposite of the way it should. Although Tucci in 1953 declared that the only thing that impressed him was intelligence in men (1996d:42), in the same year, as we have seen, but shortly before, he is absolutely opposed to its glorification,<sup>43</sup> explaining

<sup>35</sup> C.f. Tucci 1996d:57–58, 155.

<sup>36</sup> C.f. Tucci 1996a:84, 124–125, 166; Tucci 1996c:20, 72, 80.

<sup>37</sup> This disappointment is particularly visible in Tucci 1996a. C.f. also Tucci 1940:201–202; 1996c:94, 136, 138.

<sup>38</sup> C.f. Tucci 1996b:84, 102; 1996c:76, 79.

<sup>39</sup> C.f. also Gnoli 1984:20.

<sup>40</sup> Tucci 1953:148. In a short note of 1952, Tucci sees in the West the danger of the “idolatry of intellectualism”. C.f. also 1996a:113.

<sup>41</sup> Tucci 1996c:14–15.

<sup>42</sup> Tucci 1953:148.

<sup>43</sup> C.f. Tucci 1953:148 and also 1996a:27–28.

that a man who is only brain is like a knife blade which hurts the one who carries it.<sup>44</sup> “[B]rain is a fire which when excessive no longer warms but burns” (Tucci 1952:2). Commenting briefly on the events of the Second World War, he says that a culture which is only brain fails to curb the barbarism that can be done by man (1996b:97–98). It is perhaps this aspect, namely the opposition to technologism and rationalist positivism, which explains Tucci’s friendship with some of the figures belonging to the so-called Italian esotericism, that is, Julius Evola (1898–1974) and Massimo Scaligero (1906–1980),<sup>45</sup> who on the epistemological plane were supporters of an anti-rationalist, elitist and intuitionist conception of knowledge, while advocating an anti-modernist and anti-democratic vision on the political plane. It is here more an emotional than intellectual proximity, since in Tucci’s writings we do not find anything that could be taken back to the ideas of Evola and Scaligero, especially not Evola, who in his racism and in his conception of Buddhism was markedly divergent from Tucci.<sup>46</sup>

As far as we know from his writings and from the testimony of his pupils, Tucci was not racist or anti-Semitic;<sup>47</sup> on the contrary, he was against racial prejudice<sup>48</sup> and had Jewish friends, among them Sabatino

<sup>44</sup> C.f. Tucci 1961a:114 and also 1961b:15.

<sup>45</sup> See also Hakl 2006:246–248.

<sup>46</sup> On the different approach between Tucci and Evola regarding Buddhism, see Ñānājīvako 1989a:32 and Hakl 2006:247–248. Despite the title, Ñānājīvako 1989b and 1990 only deal with Evola’s reception of Buddhism.

<sup>47</sup> Tucci’s name appears in the list of the 329 intellectuals who would have expressed their support for the principles of Italian racism after the publication of the *Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti*, first published in *Giornale d’Italia* on 15 July 1938. This list was published a few years ago by Franco Cuomo (2005:202–207), who, does not specify under what criterion or effective source he has compiled what he presents in Appendix II as “the first ‘formal’ census of Italian racists” (Cuomo 2005:202). Annalisa Capristo pointed out to me that although we cannot exclude the possibility that there has been some individual public declaration of support, at the time no list of supporters of the *Manifesto* was published. This “census” is an incredible falsehood that has been kept alive in Wikipedia since Cuomo’s book was published ([http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leggi\\_razziali\\_fasciste](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leggi_razziali_fasciste); c.f. also <http://www.internetsv.info/Manifesto.html>). Both websites have been last accessed on February 19 2012). A list of those that *could have* supported the *Manifesto* was already published in 1995 during an exhibition on the “racial laws” hosted by a group of small publishers in the castle of Pavia Belgioioso. On this occasion the writings of some authors, including Agostino Gemelli, Giorgio Bocca, *et al.* were exposed. The news was circulated in the national press (C.f. Battistini 1995).

<sup>48</sup> C.f. Tucci 1940:8.



Moscato (1922–1997), whom he asked in 1978 to succeed to the presidency of the IsMEO.<sup>49</sup> It seems that in 1937, while talking with Karl Löwith, Tucci described as barbaric the racial politics in Germany.<sup>50</sup>

It is undeniable, however, that later Tucci acted in compliance with Fascist government policy, even with respect to issues that he did not share. In the summer of 1938, for example, not unlike the great majority of Italian scholars, he did not oppose the filling of a form for a racist census issued by the Ministry of National Education. It was probably already clear at the time that this census was the first step for the removal of Jews from all cultural institutions as well as universities and other public offices.<sup>51</sup> Tucci also agreed to be part of a commission established by the Accademia d'Italia between August and September 1938 to study “the manifestations and reflections of Judaism in the life of Italy through the centuries since the time of ancient Rome till today.” The results of the commission were presented on November 20 in Rome, at Campidoglio, in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III. As Annalisa Capristo has kindly pointed out to me, the documentation that is preserved in the archives of the Academy does not determine the degree of Tucci’s “ideological” involvement in this initiative. What is certain is that he accepted this appointment at a time of high propagandistic mobilisation of Italian intellectuals in favor of anti-Jewish persecution.<sup>52</sup> It is almost certain that his participation in the commission was a pure facade, but it is also a fact that other people contacted declined the proposal, specifying – as in the case of Gioacchino Volpe – “not to feel the Jewish problem”, which the commission had the task of “studying”.<sup>53</sup>

It is in line with his search for the essential elements of human experience, which are an expression of ideal tensions of universal significance, and partly also in line with his need to get back on game as I mentioned earlier, that we can explain the transition from one field of research to another.

Of the many materials he collected, Tucci extensively studied only a part. Certain themes and findings that he planned to investigate and which he has not studied due to lack of time or of will have been explored and

<sup>49</sup> On this episode, see the moving words of Moscato in Gnoli and Moscato 1995:7–8.

<sup>50</sup> C.f. Hakl 2006:242.

<sup>51</sup> C.f. Capristo 2002:33n.

<sup>52</sup> C.f. Di Porto 2009.

<sup>53</sup> C.f. Capristo 1997:97.

analysed by his students; let us think primarily of the work of Raniero Gnoli on Nepalese inscriptions,<sup>54</sup> on Dharmakīrti's *Svayrtti* and on the Mūlasarvāstivādins' Monastic Code, the detailed historical research on medieval Nepal and Tibet by Luciano Petech, and the excavations of Umberto Scerrato and Maurizio Taddei in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup>

In the 1980s, work began on the cataloging of photographic materials and manuscripts, Sanskrit and Tibetan, collected by Tucci. The photographs of monuments and archaeological excavations, which are property of the IsIAO and are kept at the Museo Nazionale di Arte Orientale "Giuseppe Tucci" in Rome, have been studied and partially listed by Oscar Nalesini and Deborah Klimburg-Salter (1991). The catalogue of the Tibetan collection has been published in two volumes by Elena De Rossi Filibeck (1994, 2003). As regards the Sanskrit manuscripts and photographs of Sanskrit manuscripts, a project called *Manuscripta Buddhica* has been started. The first volume of this project came out in 2008 as the first issue of a sub-series of the *Serie Orientale Roma*; it also contains a detailed list of the collection. Oscar Nalesini published in it a very accurate reconstruction of the scientific expeditions held by Tucci in Asia since the early 1920s to 1956. In all cases, these works are, so to speak, only the first step. A huge amount of work is still to be done on the study of the individual works and historical and artistic records.<sup>56</sup>

Tucci was not obsessed by the ideal of perfectionism. Usually he did not like to dwell on details.<sup>57</sup> Some of his philological work has to be redone, such as the edition of the *First Bhāvanākrama* by Kamalaśīla (eighth century CE),<sup>58</sup> but I think we can forgive his inaccuracy in this field, because he was a pioneer and because his mistakes can be easily

<sup>54</sup> This work is being continued now by Riccardo Garbini and Florinda De Simini.

<sup>55</sup> For an early list of the main contributions made in particular in Indian studies by Tucci's pupils, see Pensa 1964:47–48.

<sup>56</sup> To give just one example, I limit myself to mentioning here that one of the next issues of the *Manuscripta Buddhica* sub-series will be a volume on the Nepalese chronicles, the complex but important collection of texts called *Vaṃśāvalī*s, which have been collected in number by Tucci and which will be edited by an international team of scholars, including Alexander von Rospatt and Iain Sinclair.

<sup>57</sup> C.f. also Gnoli 1985:35–36.

<sup>58</sup> A new edition and translation of the *First Bhāvanākrama* is being prepared for the *Manuscripta Buddhica* Series by F. Sferra and I. Sinclair.

corrected. Tucci was animated by a kind of restlessness which however never led him to dispersion; he sought, rather, to a search for a unitary texture. Being a man of synthesis, he was particularly interested in contacts, in convergences, in what is essential within a culture.

Let me give an example. The archives kept in Rome show us that in the 1920s and 1930s he always took care to photograph or copy important works, texts that are of prime importance for Buddhism and Śaivism: the *Pramāṇavārttika*, for instance, one of the most important works on Buddhist logic. He also collected Sanskrit manuscripts of this and other philosophical works when the study of Indian logic was just beginning, in particular with the works of Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan (1870–1920), Stanisław Schayer (1899–1941) and Fyodor Ippolitovich Shcherbatskoy (1866–1942). We have also a copy of the *Niśvāsattattvasaṃhitā*, a very important early Śaiva Tantric text, which is still unpublished.<sup>59</sup>

Those who wish to study the catalog of Sanskrit and Tibetan works would realise that most of the texts collected by Tucci are Tantric works. And I do not think this is a simple case. Tucci sees in Tantrism, especially in Tantric Buddhism and in Kaśmīr Śaivism, the mature expression of Asiatic humanism. Tantrism allows him to give a unitary interpretation of the major part of Indian religion: It is the arrival point on which all the main insights of the ancient Indian religious culture converge.<sup>60</sup>

Although he occasionally makes reference to passages from the Pāli Canon, it seems that he feels Theravāda Buddhism to be more isolated and confined. Even if in his *L'India nell'opera di Giuseppe Tucci* Raniero Gnoli informs us that in the evening, in the countryside, Tucci read the texts of the Pāli Canon,<sup>61</sup> there is no doubt that from the academic point of view he did not display a deep interest in the so-called “ancient” Buddhism, as well as that of the Hindu dualistic traditions. He did not

<sup>59</sup> A Franco-German project (“Early Tantra: Discovering the Interrelationships and Common Ritual Syntax of the Śaiva, Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava and Saura traditions”) co-directed by Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson and co-financed by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft started in 2008 for the publication of this and other early tantric texts (among which the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, the *Trisamayārājatantra* and the *Brahmayāmalatantra*).

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g. Tucci 1949:211–212.

<sup>61</sup> C.f. Gnoli 1995:23. C.f. also Gnoli 1998:288.

do anything to promote the study of Pāli in Italy or enlarge its library collections.<sup>62</sup> Incidentally, the more weighty acquisitions of book collections on Theravāda Buddhism in Naples (Regio Istituto Orientale, now Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”), where he taught for two years in the early 1930s, and in Rome (IsIAO; Università di Roma “La Sapienza”), where he taught for the remaining 38 years, have all been made in the last 15 years. Before then, both in Naples and in Rome there were only copies of the main *Nikāyas* of the Pāli Canon. And this is quite paradoxical, when we consider that it is these two centres that have been, and to some extent still are, the heart of Buddhological studies in Italy.

Tantric systems, which describe and guide the transformation of the individual and his or her passions into the divinity, fit perfectly with Tucci’s search for a synthetic vision. Kaśmīr Śaivism and Vajrayāna Buddhism, which in *Teoria e pratica del maṇḍala*<sup>63</sup> are treated as very similar in their essential structure, appear to Tucci as a point of arrival for Indo-Tibetan culture, in some respects close to the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), with which he became closer in the 1940s.<sup>64</sup>

Regarding this, let us think about his friendship with Mircea Eliade (1907–1986)<sup>65</sup> and Henri-Charles Puech (1902–1986), and his attendance at the meetings of Eranos in Ascona (Switzerland), the center founded in 1933 by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881–1962), who was a fervent Jungian. Tucci gave a lecture there that was then published in the *Eranos Jahrbücher* (1954). We can also remember his friendship with the Egyptologist Boris de Rachewiltz (1926–1997), brother of the famous Mongolist Igor, son-in-law of Ezra Pound and member of the Parapsychology Association, and his contacts with the Jungian, Jewish psychotherapist Ernst Bernhard (1896–1965), who mentioned Tucci in his *Mitobiografia* as the one who would

<sup>62</sup> C.f. also Nānājīvako 1989a:32.

<sup>63</sup> Tucci 1961b, 1974.

<sup>64</sup> References to the concepts of collective subconscious and human archetypes can be found in Tucci’s writings. C.f., e.g. Tucci 1961b:51; 1996b:90; 1996a:27, 113. The religious experience of liberation is often described as a psychological drama by Tucci. C.f. Tucci 1946:145; 1949:211; 1996a:65. C.f. also Tucci 1939:35 and Pensa 1985:23.

<sup>65</sup> For some notes on the relationship between Tucci and Eliade and their common viewpoints, see Gnoli, forthcoming. Unfortunately I was not able to consult the correspondence between Tucci and Eliade, which, as Giovanni Casadio has kindly pointed out to me, has been partly published in Romania in 2008.

have saved him from deportation to a Nazi concentration camp in Poland,<sup>66</sup> an event that occurred at the beginning of 1941.

Tucci's interest in Jungian psychology and in particular the idea of the existence of a collective unconscious, archetypes common to all human beings, which he sees reflected in Tantric liturgies and in Tantric artistic performances, beginning with the maṇḍalic representations, which he calls "psychocosmograms", is certainly noteworthy, especially when viewed in a broader perspective that goes beyond the limits of Italian culture.<sup>67</sup>

Neither Jungian psychology nor the study of Tantrism were fashionable at the time. As regards Indology or Buddhist studies, in England studies on Pāli texts prevailed (primarily with the work of Thomas William Rhys Davids [1843–1922] and William Stede [1882–1958]),<sup>68</sup> whereas in Germany we had the prevalence of Vedic studies (with scholars such as Wilhelm Geiger [1856–1943] and Hermann Oldenberg [1854–1920]).<sup>69</sup> German philology dominated in all areas: historical, literary, philosophical and so on. Today, especially in English speaking countries, we instead see the opposite situation, with a tendency towards a purely sociological and anthropological approach.

Tucci was one of the first to take the lead and make fundamental contributions to the study of Tantrism. I think of some parts of the seven volumes of *Indo-Tibetica* and of *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, and above all of *Rati-līlā*. For the first time, thanks to Tucci and a few other Indian scholars (we can recall for instance Benoytosh Bhattacharyya [1897–1964] and Prabhuhai Bhikhabhai Patel [1906–1942]) Tantrism became fully a

<sup>66</sup> "Ho cercato invano di aiutare i miei genitori [...], ma dal mio nascondiglio a Roma e nel campo di internamento non potei fare nulla. [...] Mio padre fu deportato in Polonia ed è morto nelle camere a gas; mia madre si è uccisa miseramente a Parigi. Che io stesso non sia stato prelevato dal campo d'internamento e deportato in Polonia, ma che potessi uscire dal campo e tornare nella mia abitazione e viverci nascosto, lo devo al celebre indologo italiano Tucci, che aveva saputo di me attraverso pazienti e ottenne la mia liberazione" (Bernhard 2007:8). Bernhard was imprisoned (as "internato civile") in Calabria at the Ferramonti Camp from June 1940 to April 1941 (see also Hakl 2006:248). Further references to Tucci can be found in the correspondence between Dora Friedländer and Bernhard (see Marinangeli 2011: xvi, xxxiv–xxxvi).

<sup>67</sup> More in general on the impact of Jungian thought on the Oriental studies, see Clarke 1994 and Coward 1985.

<sup>68</sup> Even in Italy Buddhist studies have so far mainly been on Pāli texts. C.f. Nānājīvako 1989a:27 and Saccone 2010:242–243.

<sup>69</sup> The latter wrote extensively also on Buddhism.

topic of scientific interest. Tucci not only collected manuscripts, but also attempted an interpretation of its symbols, iconography and rituals. In the twentieth century his work was continued by at least two of his students; I refer to Raniero Gnoli, who studied mainly Kaśmīr Śaivism and more recently the Buddhist Kālacakra tradition, and David Snellgrove, who published the *editio princeps* of the Buddhist *Hevajratantra*.

There is one last point which we should deal with briefly. It regards the interest of Tucci in the role of Italy in cultivating knowledge of the East. It is an interest that develops after 1930 and culminated in 1949 with the publication of *Italia e Oriente*, a book full of information and very thorough in the method of historical research, which has been harmed by the fact that it has never been translated into other languages. With other brief papers, more popular and less detailed, he kept returning to this matter until 1974.<sup>70</sup> So this is a theme that runs through the whole mature phase of his activities as a scholar.

In these writings we see a growing awareness of the importance of humanistic study, capable of making people brothers. By the way, this function which Tucci (as well as A. J. Toynbee) recognises in the humanities is also, according to him, the purpose to which all religions should aim;<sup>71</sup> each religion, in fact, allows for the attaining of God in its own way.<sup>72</sup>

It is as if, at some point, having abandoned the nationalistic aspirations and rhetoric of some writings of the war period – I think here especially of the writings in the journal *Yamato* that appeared between 1941 and 1943, and which cost him a post at University in 1944<sup>73</sup> – Tucci realised the universal value of the efforts made by Italians in the knowledge of Asia, a significant action because – he says – it was free from colonial and political interests. In the introduction of *Italia e Oriente* he writes:

In this world the forces that divide are more active and persistent than those that unite: it is easier for man to deny than to affirm, to live happily with his ideas than to listen to those of others. It is thus appropriate

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g. Nos. 221, 228, 232, 273, 305, 329, 343 in the bibliography published by L. Petech and F. Scialpi in Gnoli 1985:57–79. On this argument, see also Scialpi 2007a, 2007b, 2007c.

<sup>71</sup> C.f. Tucci 1953:149; 2005:57.

<sup>72</sup> C.f. Tucci 1936:18–19; 1996c:80; 2005:58–59, 159.

<sup>73</sup> C.f. Gnoli 1985:24.

to remember those people and events that, through the centuries, have collaborated to bring together two of the greatest civilisations that are in the world: Europe and Asia, one adjacent to the other and both connected so that the events of one have a bearing on the history of the other [...]. I will talk about men, of course, Italian, and events led by Italy, not because I think that history is the work of one people, and that everything that happens in the world is due to the intelligence or courage of only one chosen people, but rather because after the great colonial enterprises and the overwhelming expansion of Europe in many parts of the world, especially in Asia, the part played by Italy seems to have been completely forgotten, both in revealing the mysteries of the East and in disseminating Western thought and art in those lands. [...] It should all the more be done because these are not adventurous and rapacious conquests, but a generous and enlightened exchange of culture, encouraged by a keen sense of human understanding.<sup>74</sup>

This is, in my view, an important step. Here we see that – conveyed in part by the pride of belonging to a country of great humanistic tradition, Italy – an idea begins to mature in Tucci, an idea that will become clear to him only later – in 1958, to be precise – that of Eurasia. In the passage above he merely says that Europe and Asia, “two of the greatest civilisations”, have influenced each other, in the sense that any change in one has reverberated in the other. Later Tucci comes to speak about the common history of the Eurasian continent:

<sup>74</sup> “In questo mondo le forze che dividono sono più attive e tenaci di quelle che uniscono: l’uomo è più facile a negare che ad affermare, a vivere soddisfatto delle sue idee che a prestare ascolto a quelle degli altri. Conviene dunque ricordare quelle persone e quegli avvenimenti che, traverso i secoli, hanno cooperato ad avvicinare due delle più grandi civiltà che siano al mondo: Europa ed Asia, l’una confinante con l’altra e tutte e due così legate che le vicende dell’una hanno influito sulla storia dell’altra [...]. Parlerò di uomini, s’intende italiani e di avvenimenti guidati dall’Italia, non già perché io pensi che la storia sia l’opera di un solo popolo e che tutto quello che accade nel mondo sia dovuto all’ardimento o all’ingegno di una sola gente eletta; ma piuttosto perché dopo le grandi imprese coloniali e la prepotente espansione dell’Europa in tanta parte del mondo, e soprattutto in Asia, sembra che sia stata del tutto dimenticata la parte avuta dall’Italia, sia nello svelare i misteri dell’Oriente, sia nel diffondere in quelle terre il pensiero e l’arte dell’Occidente. [...] Tanto più conviene farlo perché non si tratta di conquiste avventurose e rapaci, ma di un generoso ed illuminato scambio di cultura, confortato da un vivo senso di umana comprensione” (Tucci 2005:13–14). C.f. also Tucci 1996d:13.

[I]n Europe as well as in Asia we always find the self-same creature, with the same contradictions and hopes, equally consumed by time and yearning after eternity; but above all because Europe and Asia have since the dawn of history been closely joined and intercommunicating through migrations, invasions, conquests, trade, pilgrimages and interchanges of the arts and ideas, so that not one single event of any significance has ever occurred in one part without its having reacted on the other, thus establishing the just claim to a common history, a history, that is, of the Euro-Asian continent. At any rate, to revert to our argument, men of culture who, if they be really so, have always been messengers of spiritual understanding, have never believed in any such differences between East and West.<sup>75</sup>

He therefore comes to speak of common history, of mutual influences, but not of spiritual unity: This idea never appears in his writings. Only a few months before his death, in an article published in *La Stampa* of Turin on October 20 1983, Tucci will come to see the need, in the future, to get to the “cosmic religion”, the religion of Eurasia, prefiguring a sort of spiritual unity between the two continents.

I never speak of Europe and Asia, but Eurasia. There is no event which occurs in China or India that does not affect us, or vice versa, and so it has always been. Christianity has brought about changes in Buddhism, Buddhism has influenced Christianity, their Pantheons are more or less perceptibly modified [...]. Because, you see, religion is universal, not religions. We must arrive at the cosmic religion, our Eurasian religion.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Tucci 1958a:344. Similar words can be read also in Tucci 1958b:5–6.

<sup>76</sup> “Io non parlo mai di Europa e di Asia, ma di Eurasia. Non c'è avvenimento che si verifichi in Cina o in India che non influenzi noi, o viceversa, e così è sempre stato. Il Cristianesimo ha portato delle modifiche nel Buddhismo, il Buddhismo ha influenzato il Cristianesimo, i rispettivi Pantheon si sono più o meno percettibilmente modificati [...]. Perché, vede, la religione è universale, le religioni no. Bisogna arrivare alla religione cosmica, la nostra religione eurasiatica” (cit. in Grossato 2006:273). Previously Tucci often insisted on having to maintain a difference between Asian and Western spirituality and that there was no opportunity for a Westerner to practice the religions of Asia. C.f. Tucci 1934a:19–20.



As we have said, none of Tucci's ideas form a system. Again he fails to place the concept of Eurasia in a theoretical framework. He never refers to the Russian Euroasianists of the late nineteenth century, let alone the ideas of Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), even though he met and invited him to Rome in 1937 and 1941.<sup>77</sup> And the silence of Tucci on this point cannot be meaningless. It would seem rather that this idea had been developing in him slowly, several years after the end of the Second World War, along with a more informed idea of humanism.

In both the West and in East, and in the latter in Buddhism, especially, and in the teaching of some great men of contemporary India (Aurobindo, Gandhi, Nehru, Ramakrishna, Tagore), man is at the center of every experience,<sup>78</sup> since the study of man and his history is a vehicle for tolerance and understanding.

It seems to me that it is not so much the idea of Eurasia itself that is significant – especially since in the Introduction to *Nepal: alla scoperta del regno dei Malla* he (1977:13) even speaks of an Euro-African-Asian solidarity – but rather the fact that through this idea Tucci tried to make more credible his conception of humanism, grounding it historically, a humanism that he believed to be always existent, rooted in history, although only implicitly in some periods. A kind of historical evidence, so to speak, that we should rediscover just for the sake of present-day humanity.<sup>79</sup> In this sense his Eurasianism differs radically from what is touted today in some circles that are close to the “radical right” or “new right”, who sometimes also quote and interpret Tucci in the light of Karl Haushofer's thought,<sup>80</sup> which is strongly oriented in a political sense. The instrumental use of Tucci's thought in a geopolitical key (by the way, the terms “geopolitics”, “geopolitical” etc. never appear in his writings in connection with the idea of Eurasia, and only rarely appear in all his

<sup>77</sup> Alessandro Grossato claims that Tucci and Haushofer were friends (C.f. Grossato 2006:276), but does not provide any evidence for this. His paper “L'Euroasismo di Giuseppe Tucci e dell'Is.M.E.O.” is full of inaccuracies and undocumented claims.

<sup>78</sup> Tucci deals with this argument quite often in his writings. C.f., e.g. Tucci 1934a:17; 1940:61–65; 1946:9, 196–197; 1961a:112.

<sup>79</sup> The concept of Eurasia has been criticised in part by Maurizio Tosi during the celebrations for the centenary of Tucci's birth held in Rome in 1994. Unfortunately his contribution has not been published in the conference proceedings.

<sup>80</sup> C.f. for instance Graziani 2004 and Grossato 2006.

work)<sup>81</sup> is even more unfair if you think that in those very years in which he spoke of Eurasia, he openly declared his genuine disinterest in politics at the same time.<sup>82</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that under Fascism Tucci joined the regime with apparent conviction, nor is this surprising, especially when we consider his anti-modernism and the historical period in which he lived.<sup>83</sup> Of course, the reference to “Fascist science” which we read, for example, in the concluding paragraph of his report on the expedition in Western Tibet in 1933, which was published in 1934, suggests rather a form of flattery or political opportunism from which he was unfortunately not immune.<sup>84</sup> In fascism, he appreciates what he calls a sense of greater adherence to reality.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted, however, that Tucci’s political opinions never influenced his personal relations – for example, he was always a friend of Edward Conze (1903–1979), who was a Communist activist throughout his life. From the evidence I have gathered talking with his pupils and colleagues, as well as residents of San Polo dei Cavalieri, a small town near Rome where he spent the last years of his life, it would seem that Tucci had always been more interested in persons than in their ideologies.

Giuseppe Tucci’s high-level reflection on academic researches – which are primarily human studies – seems to me a very important legacy of his teachings that should never be forgotten. In light of this conception, which emerges in essence in his first works and took shape only in the last

<sup>81</sup> “There are a few mentions, for instance, in Tucci’s *Le Civiltà dell’Oriente: storia, letteratura, religioni, filosofia, scienze e arte*, Volume 1 (1970 ed.):174, 176, 185. (‘La situazione geopolitica dopo Ippo (301): l’avanzata dell’«Asia superiore» fino al Mediterraneo, l’unificazione del vicino Oriente nella grande compagine seleucidica ...’)” (Iain Sinclair, personal communication).

<sup>82</sup> C.f., e.g. Tucci 1996a:11; 1996b:29.

<sup>83</sup> For further information, see Benavides 1995 and Hakl 2006.

<sup>84</sup> “Ma il merito non è mio: io non sono che un modesto esecutore di una impresa ispirata e voluta dal Duce; un gregario che serve il Paese nella scienza, scienza però rinnovata e fascista, fatta di ardimentoso entusiasmo” (Tucci 1934b:121) (I owe this reference to Oscar Nalesini).

<sup>85</sup> “C’è ancora intorno al mondo asiatico un’atmosfera letteraria vaga, imprecisa, inconcludente: visioni diafane dell’Oriente di cui si beatificano tutti coloro la cui realtà dà fastidio, perché non la sanno affrontare e si illudono di trovare la patria delle loro debolezze e delle loro chimere in paesi lontani [...]. Mentalità purtroppo che ancora dura, ma cui spero che quel senso di maggiore aderenza alla realtà introdotto dal Fascismo, darà un nuovo orientamento” (Tucci 1934a:9).

phase of his scientific and popular writings, we should also re-evaluate the specific contributions by Tucci in the field of Tibetology and Indology and even his inevitable errors.

Perhaps, in remembering Tucci, no doubt an extraordinary man, we could conclude by quoting two lines that Tucci himself wrote in commemoration of a friend, Fulvio Maroi: “He was moved and exalted by humanity and in that living chaos he sought divine presence, forgotten or self-oblivious, but still capable of redemption” (1955:11).

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