

Review of the book

„Angelology of History. Parallel and Periodic Phenomena in History“, by Emil Pálež

The idea that there exists some underlying metaphysical law in history, has been given up by historians of the 20th century, except some popular philosophies like that of Oswald Spengler, which could not be proved by rigid scientific methods. Although this idea was generally believed in the past, since antiquity until the 19th century, and the rhythm of historical events was observed by Arnold Toynbee and it was stressed by the swiss philosopher Karl Jaspers.

Pálež picked out one of the most ancient beliefs of the western religious philosophy: that there exist seven archangels (or gods) who alternate cyclically every 354 and every 72 years as the spirits of time. Each one of them rules for a certain period of time and inspires the spiritual atmosphere of the Earth. This belief was known to the medieval church (abbot Trithemius) and goes probably back as far as to the priests of Babylon, where a divine calendar was based on this and other rhythms.

Pálež's „Angelology of History“ summarizes the results of his long research on 660 richly illustrated pages. Its goal is to prove or disprove the hypothesis, that there exist seven principles (formerly personified as gods or archangels), which do return periodically in the course of world history, on empirical bases. This monograph is an attempt of a synthesis of all known in history and prehistory since the Stone Age until today. It tries to comprise the history of art, science, philosophy, social and political development, viewed from a bird-perspective throughout millenia.

Pálež concentrates especially on two kinds of phenomena:

1) *parallelisms or synchronicities*: when similar phenomena – e.g. art styles, new discoveries or ideas, religious cults, political structures or social movements – appear in two, three or more places in the world at the same time independently; a point of view also stressed by C. Jung.

2) *periodicities*: when similar historical phenomena return periodically in a regular time-pattern or rhythm.

That is why Pálež's work can be understood also as a kind of a handbook of parallel (synchronistic) and periodic (rhythmic) phenomena in history.

The central claim of the author is that a sevenfold rhythm really *does* exist in history. Moreover, that the dates and contents of the time-periods correspond to the mythologic characteristics of the seven archangels and to the dates given by the Babylonian tradition. This the author claims to hold first of all as an empirical fact. It is apparent that the cosmogony of the Babylonian priesthood was based on thorough observation of celestial bodies.

Next he proposes to interpret the possible causal background of this phenomenon. Since he believes that many synchronistic events can not be explained by mutual physical contact among the cultures only, he proposes to acknowledge that there exists an underlying cyclic law governing the collective subconscious psyche, which is responsible for the obvious psychic unity of mankind. Each of the seven archetypes (corresponding to the seven main gods of antiquity) is being activated regularly each 354 and also each 72 years, which can be observed on the shifts in the value systems of cultures all over the world.

In this sense Páleš's work resembles the „Cultural dynamics“ of the American sociologist Pitrim Sorokin, who ascertained a recurrent alteration of the so called ideational and sensitive systems of truth in the history of western civilization.

Páleš's Angelology is written for experts *and* for laymen at the same time. Besides its scientific dimension it contains a poetic and a religious dimension. All three are being deliberately unfolded by the author along with one another. Since the religious and aesthetic connotations, however interesting, are beyond the scope of purely objective scientific judgement, we shall concentrate here on the central claim of the book only. Important is, that the main hypothesis is put by the author in a way, that it can be verified or falsified by rational means, and that is why it *does* fall within the scope of science.

First of all we have to realize, that Páleš does not claim a discovery of a new empirical phenomenon only, but he claims also to be a forerunner of a new, modified or extended scientific *method*. We would not do justice to this work, when accusing the author that he broke some taboos of the contemporary scientific methodology or contradicted some heretofore scientific beliefs. He is well aware of that. We have to do here with a meta-scientific conflict of two different scientific paradigms (or epistèmes) in the sense of Kuhn.

Páleš's philosophical background and source of inspiration is Platonic idealism, instead of materialistic atomism. In such case it is not possible to take either of the paradigms as judge for the other one. What can be done to assess the relative value of a different paradigm, is to watch in what extent does it agree with facts, how great is its explanative power, inner consistency and practical usefulness. Or to look whether the new approach is able to explain systematically some kind of phenomena, which the other one is not. With this precaution let us have a look at the contents of Angelology itself.

What concerns factography, not much can be objected. Mainly because the author does not intend at all to argue with archaeologists and historians about whether some historical events did or did not happen or about their chronology. Here the author relies on experts and tries purposefully to build up his philosophy of history only on that kind of elementary facts, which are roughly accepted by the majority of scientific community.

The original contribution of the author consists in the new way, how he explains the *meaning* and the *causes* of events, that are already well known. His explanation contains also the notion of non-physical synchronistic causation, demonstrated systematically on the kind of parallel and periodic phenomena mentioned above.

It is true, that there is known a whole set of parallel historical events. One of the best known is the axial epoch of Karl Jaspers. In recent times, the French historical school headed by Fernand Braudel has paid systematic attention to parallel development in different areas of the world. Páleš attempted to show that synchronicities are not a seldom and negligible but a systematic phenomenon and that there can be found dozens if not hundreds of them in history.

These phenomena tended to be omitted and treated as accidental curiosity. They were usually not explained, because the materialistic paradigm of science does not allow to handle them in any rational way. Historians mainly used to explain them *per partes*, i. e. in each area of the world by local causes. Páleš points out that this leaves the question of their synchronicity unanswered. From that follows, as the author says, that the usual explanations of historians are incomplete, and there must be yet another factor at work, which impacts the world-psyche as a whole and operates regularly in certain rhythms. Although non-physical and invisible, its presence can be seen indirectly from its effects.

This claim caused already a certain controversy among Slovak scientists. The main objection has been, whether Páleš did not commit a subjective pre-selection of historical data, choosing the ones,

which fit his schema, and omitting others. There are, however, but some parts of Páleš's work, which seem to be indisputable.

This is especially the extensive study of revolution indexes in the history of Europe carried out by Sorokin and a similar study for the revolutions in the history of China by Lee. The work of Sorokin has been proposed by Dr. Krupa, the head of the Cabinet of Orientalistics of the Slovak academy of sciences, as a control-study. It confirmed in many facets the hypotheses of Páleš.

Another part of Páleš's work has been analysed independently by computer analysis by Prof. Mikulecký, a prominent Slovak expert on chronobiology. This concerned the 500-years rhythm in the history of Greek, Indian and Chinese medicine; Greek, Roman and Chinese historiography; Arabic, Persian, Chinese and Japanese poetry. Data have been taken over from the leading American anthropologist Kroeber.

Angelology as a whole is an impressive attempt for synthesis of sciences, humanities, arts and religion. It looks for their topmost underlying principles, synthesizing partial results of various special sciences. In this sense it can be at best characterized as the continuation of Vladimir Soloviov's sophiology. It concerns not only humanities like archaeology, history, psychology, philosophy, but also sciences like biology, chemistry, astronomy and looks for their common ground with the most ancient myths and spiritual traditions of humankind.

It is beyond the capacity of a single expert to judge the whole of the work. After all, synchronistic phenomena are being accepted as a matter of fact in quantum physics since Einstein. It is not excluded, that they could exist also in history. In recent decades research in chronobiology confirmed that one of the most important time-patterns in living systems are rhythms based on the number seven.

Definitive acceptance or refusal of Páleš's hypothesis is the question of future. Supposing, that more and more experts shall in fact be able to confirm it or at least some parts of it, we could speak really about an important discovery. Discussion about the book could be very stimulating for alternative ways of thinking in science. Since Slovak is a language not understood well by many, translations into foreign languages should be recommended; as far as I know, no comparable work has been written in the world.

*Prof. Dr. Jan Bouzek, DrSc.
Institute of Classical Archaeology,
Charles University, Prague*