Palauan archipelago in the western Pacific (part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands). After attaining puberty, young girls are sent by their mothers to serve as concubines in the men’s club house of another village for three months to a year. In payment for their services, the men send money to the girls’ families. This system of temporary prostitution generates an important network of economic exchanges between villages. The institution is also viewed as a form of magical protection for the village in which the women take temporary residence. This is conveyed by placing on the gable of the men’s house a statue of a nude female prominently displaying her genitalia. The myth explaining the origin of such a figure states that the woman was a concubine in the men’s house and therefore from another village. The men from her natal village are classified as her brothers, and for them to gaze on her nakedness would be a grave sin. The men’s club house on which such an image is displayed is therefore protected from raids by the men from the villages of its resident female visitors.

A comparative study of institutions involving cultic sexual activity by males and females, on either a permanent or semipermanent basis, has not been undertaken. The subject is not free from a negative bias, in all likelihood rooted in the ancient association between apotropaic and cultic sexual activity.

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The best summary statement to date on the topic of sacred prostitution is an article by Walter Kornfeld in volume 8 of the *Supplement* to the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, entitled “Prostitution sacrée” (Paris, 1972); the article covers only the ancient eastern Mediterranean/West Asian area. In a book edited by Carl Olson entitled *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present* (New York, 1983), there are some excellent articles relevant to this topic; in particular, Judith Ochsborn’s “Ishtar and Her Cult” (pp. 16-28) deals specifically with sacred prostitution; Renée Salzman’s “Magna Mater: Great Mother of the Roman Empire” (pp. 60-67) has excellent information on Cybele’s Roman cult and her eunuch priests; and Steve Davies’s “The Canaanite-Hebrew Goddess” is a good introduction to the topic of goddess worship by the ancient Israelites. On the Greek rituals of the Adonis carried out by the courtesans of Aphrodite’s temple, Marcel Detienne has written an innovative and fascinating work entitled *The Gardens of Adonis* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1977).


**HIEROPHANY** (from Greek hiero-, “sacred,” and phainein, “to show”) is a term designating the manifestation of the sacred. The term involves no further specification. Herein lies its advantage: it refers to any manifestation of the sacred in whatever object throughout history. Whether the sacred appear in a stone, a tree, or an incarnate human being, a hierophany denotes the same act: a reality of an entirely different order than those of this world becomes manifest in an object that is part of the natural or profane sphere.

The sacred manifests itself as a power or force that is quite different from the forces of nature. A sacred tree, for instance, is not worshiped for being a tree. Neither is a sacred stone adored, in and of itself, for its natural properties as a stone. These objects become the focus of religious veneration because they are hierophanies, revealing something that is no longer botanical or geological, but “wholly other.”

**Forms of Hierophany.** The forms of hierophanies vary from one culture to another. The matter is complicated for, throughout the course of history, cultures have recognized hierophanies everywhere in psychological, economic, spiritual, and social life. There is hardly any object, action, psychological function, species of being, or even entertainment that has not become a hierophany at some time. Whatever humans come in contact with can be transformed into a hierophany. Musical instruments, architectural forms, beasts of burden, and vehicles of transportation have all been sacred objects. In the right circumstances, any material object whatever can become a hierophany.

The appearance of the sacred in a hierophany, however, does not eliminate its profane existence. In every religious context some objects in the class of things that convey the sacred (e.g., stone, trees, human beings) always remain profane. No single culture contains within its history all the possible hierophanies. In other words, a hierophany always implies a singling-out. Not all stones are held to be sacred in a culture; only some are venerated, or one, because their properties make them fitting vehicles of the sacred. A hierophany separates the thing that manifests the sacred from everything else around it, from all that remains profane.

The sacred appears in cosmic form as well as in the imaginative life of human beings. Cosmic hierophanies
cover the spectrum of cosmic structures. Supreme gods of the sky, such as Num, the sky divinity of the Samoyeds, or Anu, the Babylonian šar šâme ("sky king"), reflect or share the sacredness attributed to the sky. So do the sovereign gods of the sky who display their power through storm, thunder, and lightning, such as the Greek god Zeus, his Roman counterpart Jupiter, and Yahweh, the Hebrew supreme being.

The sacredness of the earth is an important source of hierophany. Worship of Pachamama, mother goddess of the earth, is an ancient and widespread phenomenon in the South American Andes. Local soil is a sacred presence in countless cultures around the globe. The earth is often an important character in myths about the earliest times of creation. Such is the role of Papa ("earth") in Maori creation accounts and of Gaia in the Greek myths presented by Hesiod. Frequently the earth, as a hierophany of sacred being, appears as the creative partner of a heavenly being. Such a divine couple, deified sky and earth, figured prominently in the mythologies of Oceania, Micronesia, Africa, and the Americas.

The sun became a powerful manifestation of the sacred in central Mexico (among the Mixtec), in the Peruvian Andes (among the Inca), in ancient Egypt, and elsewhere. Furthermore, important cultural heroes who figure largely in the mythic history of various societies (e.g., among the Maasai of Africa, the Turko-Mongols, and Indo-Europeans) often have essential ties to the sun's powers.

In many cultures, the fertility of animals and plants is presided over by the sacredness of the moon. Above all others, the hierophanies of the moon convey the sacredness of life’s rhythms: rainy seasons, ocean tides, sowing times, the menstrual cycle. Among Pygmy groups of central Africa, for instance, the moon, called Pe, is the fecund source of new life. Women celebrate her sacredness with drinking and dancing feasts held at the time of the new moon. Through the metamorphosis it undergoes each month, the moon displays its powers of immortality and its ability to regenerate a form of life that even includes the experience of death. Women and snakes become epiphanies of the moon’s sacred power through their periodic loss of life in the form of blood and skin. Menstruation sometimes is perceived not only as a shedding of blood but as a shedding of the "skin" that lines the uterus each month or of the "skin" that envelops the body of a new child if conception occurs that month. Snakes are sometimes thought to shed not only skin but also "blood": snake venom is viewed as a species of blood that is "shed" (that is, transmitted from fang to victim) when a snake bites its prey or when venom is consumed in festival brew.

Human physiology itself can become a manifestation of the sacred. Divine kings and the mystical bodies of shamans, transformed by their contact with sacred realities, can themselves become transparent vehicles of sacred powers. Even the breath, soul, blood, pulse, semen, and body warmth of ordinary human beings can be seen as signs of the presence of supernatural forces. In certain yogic traditions, for example, a woman embodies prakriti, the eternal source and limitless creative power of nature. The ritual nakedness of this yogini makes possible the revelation of a cosmic mystery.

Ordinary items such as roots, herbs, and foods may also manifest the sacred in one tradition or another, as may manufactured items, such as swords, ropes, and puppets. Techniques and skills themselves, the processes of manufacture, and sacred powers, ironworking, spinning, and weaving are frequently sacred activities, carried on by consecrated persons in holy places and periods.

The cosmogonic myths of tribal peoples, the Brahmanic tradition of South Asia, the mystical writings of Nichiren and Teresa of Ávila, the enthronement ceremonies of the king in ancient Babylon, the agricultural festivals of Japan, the ritual costumes of dancing shamans in Siberia, the symbolic fixtures of the Borobudur stupa, and initiation rites in various traditions are all hierophanies. They express some modality of the sacred and some moment in its history. Each one of these hierophanies reveals an aspect of the sacred as well as a historical attitude that humans have taken toward the sacred.

Structure and Dialectic of the Sacred. At the most general level of analysis, there exists a structure common to all hierophanies. Whenever the sacred is manifest, it limits itself. Its appearance forms part of a dialectic that occults other possibilities. By appearing in the concrete form of a rock, plant, or incarnate being, the sacred ceases to be absolute, for the object in which it appears remains a part of the worldly environment. In some respects, each hierophany expresses an incomprehensible paradox arising from the great mystery upon which every hierophany is centered: the very fact that the sacred is made manifest at all.

This characteristic structure of manifestation and limitation is common to all hierophanies. The dialectic of appearance and occultation of the sacred becomes a key to understanding religious experience. Once all hierophanies are understood as equivalent in this fundamental respect, two helpful starting points can be found for the study of religious experience. In the first place, all appearances of the sacred, whether sublime or simple, can be seen in terms of the same dialectic of the sacred. In the second place, the entire religious life of humankind is placed on a common footing. Rich and
diverse as it is, the religious history of human life evidences no essential discontinuity. The same paradox underlies every hierophany: in making itself manifest, the sacred limits itself.

**Theophany and Kratophany.** Although *hierophany* is an inclusive term, one can distinguish different types of hierophany. They depend on the form in which the sacred appears, and the meaning with which the sacred imbues the form. In some instances, a hierophany reveals the presence of a divinity. That is, the hierophany is a theophany, the appearance of a god. Theophanies differ widely from one another in form and meaning, depending upon the nature of the divine form appearing in them. A glance at the gods in the pantheon of South Asian mythology or in Aztec mythology shows that divinities can differ markedly in revealing various divine forms of the sacred, even within the same culture. Needless to say, theophanies from different cultures (e.g., Baal, the storm god of the ancient Semites; Vira-cocha, the creator god of the Inca; and Amaterasu, the Japanese deity of the sun and ancestress of the imperial line) manifest quite different modalities of the sacred.

In the form of divine persons, theophanies reveal the distinct religious values of organic life, cosmic order, or the elemental forces of blood and fertility, as well as of purer and more sublime aspects.

A second type of hierophany may be termed a kratophany, a manifestation of power. Kratophanies preserve the sacred in all its ambivalence, both attracting and repelling with its brute power. The unusual, the new, and the strange frequently function as kratophanies. These things, persons, or places can be dangerous and defiling as well as sacred. Corpses, criminals, and the sick often function as kratophanies. Human beings in powerful or ambivalent circumstances (such as women in menstruation, soldiers, criminals, and the sick) are hedged around with taboos and restrictions. People approach sacred objects with etiquette and manners designed to ward off defilement, sickness, and pollution. The precautions that surround saints, sacrificers, and healers stem from fear of confronting the sacred. Kratophanies emphasize the extent to which the manifestation of the sacred intrudes on the order of things. Kratophanies also bring out the contradictory attitude displayed by human beings in regard to all that is sacred. On the one hand, contact with hierophanies secures, renews, and strengthens one's own reality. On the other hand, total immersion in the sacred (or an improper encounter with it) annihilates one's profane existence, an essential dimension of life.

In any case, a hierophany (whether in the form of a theophany or kratophany) reveals the power, the force, and the holiness of the sacred. Even the forces of nature are revered for their power to sanctify life; that is, to make fertility holy. The forces of nature that appear in divine forms or in certain objects make reproductive life partake of the unbounded power and plenty of the sacred.

**Impact on Space and Time.** Hierophanies directly affect the situation of human existence, the condition by which humans understand their own nature and grasp their destiny. For example, hierophanies alter the fundamental structures of space and time. Every hierophany transforms the place in which it appears, so that a profane place becomes a sacred precinct. For Aboriginal peoples of Australia, for example, the landscape of their native lands is alive. Its smallest details are charged with the meanings revealed in myth. Because the sacred first appeared in those places (to guarantee a food supply and to teach humans how to feed themselves), they become an inexhaustible source of power and sacrality. Humans can return to these places in each generation, to commune with the power that has revealed itself there. In fact, the Aboriginal peoples express a religious need to remain in direct contact with those sites that are hierophanic. One may say that the hierophany, connected with the transformed place of its appearance, is capable of repeating itself. The conviction is widespread that hierophanies recur in a place where the sacred has once appeared. This explains why human habitations and cities are constructed near sanctuaries. Ceremonies of consecration, ground-breaking, or foundation-laying for temples, shrines, sacred cities, capitals, and even bridges and houses, frequently repeat or echo acts of fundamental hierophanies, such as the creation of the world. At times they even provoke a sign indicating the location of a hierophany (e.g., the release of an animal and the sacrifice of it on the spot where it is later found; or geomancy). These rituals of foundation and construction ensure that the site will perpetuate the presence of a hierophany that first appeared within the bounds of a similarly structured location and event. The precincts for festival and ceremony are frequently consecrated for the occasion in this way. Thus, for example, the Yuin, the Wiradjuri, and the Kamilaroi, Aboriginal groups of Australia, prepare a sacred ground for their initiation ceremonies. The ground represents the camp of Baiame, the supreme being.

Hierophanies also transform time. A hierophany marks a breakthrough from profane to magico-religious time. Just as spaces sacralized by a hierophany may be reconstructed through acts of consecration, so the acts of hierophany are repeated in the sacred calendar of each year. Rituals that repeat the moment of a hierophany re-create the conditions of the world in which the sacred originally appeared, and at that moment
when the sacred manifests itself again in the same way, extraordinary power overwhelms the profane succession of time. New Year ceremonies are among the most striking examples of the periodic re-creation of the world in a state as fresh, powerful, and promising as it was in the beginning. Any fragment of time (e.g., the phases of the moon, the transitions of the human life cycle, the solstices, the rainy seasons, the breeding cycles of animals, the growth cycles of plants) may at any moment become hierophanic. If it witnesses the occurrence of a kratophany or theophany, the moment itself becomes transfigured or consecrated. It will be remembered and repeated. The rhythms of nature are evaluated for their power as hierophanies; that is, for signs of the power to renew and recommence cosmic life. Furthermore, hierophanic moments of time are not limited to cosmic rhythms of nature or biology. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, human history is transfigured into a theophany. The manifestation of God in time guarantees the religious value of Christian images and symbols such as the cross, the holy mountain of Calvary, and the cosmic tree.

Implications for the Study of Symbolic Life. The transfiguration of so many objects into symbols of something else, some sacred reality, has repercussions for understanding the nature of symbols. [See Symbolism.] The study of hierophanies penetrates the meaning of the symbolic life and uncovers the function of symbolism in general. Humans have an innate sense of the symbolic, and all their activities imply symbolism. In particular, religious acts have a symbolic character. From the instant it becomes religious, every act or object is imbued with a significance that is symbolic, referring to supernatural values and realities.

Symbols relate to the sacred in several ways. Sometimes symbolic forms become sacred because they embody directly the spirit or power of transcendent beings (e.g., stones that are the souls of the dead, or represent a god). In these cases the hierophany is effected by a symbolism directly associated with the actual form (i.e., a form apprehended by religious experience, rather than empirical or rational experience) of stone, water, plant, or sky.

At other times the meaning of a religious form may derive from symbolism that is less clear. Religious objects become hierophanies in a less direct way, through the medium of symbolic existence itself. They acquire a religious quality because of the symbolism that imbues them with religious meaning. That is, they become sacred because of their location within a symbolic system. Their sacrality depends upon a consciousness able to make theoretical connections between symbolic expressions. In such cases, the hierophany is effected by the transformation of concrete forms into a nexus of cosmological principles and powers.

For example, the symbolism that has surrounded the pearl throughout history works to transform it into a "cosmological center" that draws together key religious meanings associated with the moon, women, fertility, and birth. [See Pearl.] The symbolism of the pearl is quite ancient. Pearls appear in prehistoric graves and have a long history of use in magic and medicine. Careful inspection of myths of pearls in many cultures reveals that water imbues pearls with its germinative force. Pearls were included in ritual offerings to river gods. Some pearls have magical power because they were born of the moon. The pearl is like a fetus, and for this reason women wear pearls to come in contact with the fertile powers of hidden creative processes within shells, in amniotic waters, and in the moon. Pearls have also been used in the cure of illnesses associated with the moon. Placed in tombs, pearls renewed the life of the dead by putting them in contact with the powerful regenerative rhythms of the moon, water, and femininity. Covered in pearls, the dead are plunged once more into the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth—the career of living forms intimately bound to the moon. In sum, the pearl becomes a hierophany when humans become aware of the cosmological pattern of water, moon, women, and change.

This kind of sacred symbolism has its origins in theory; specifically, a theory of symbols. What gives the sacred object in question (e.g., a pearl) its rich and full religious meaning is the framework of symbolism surrounding it. This is triggered by an awareness of the wider symbolic universe. This conclusion has importance for understanding the role of human reflection in the origin of certain hierophanies. An object becomes sacred, becomes the locus of a hierophany, when humankind becomes aware of the cosmological pattern of principles (e.g., water, moon, change, the cycle of death and birth) centered in it. The theoretical links make possible the experience of the full range of sacrality. The form draws its full meaning from the symbolism that surrounds it and of which it is a part. In fact, symbols extend the range of hierophanies. Objects not directly the locus of a hierophany may become sacred because of their envelopment in a web or pattern of symbolism.

Two related statements should now be made separately. The first consideration is that hierophanies can become symbols. In this respect, symbols are important because they can sustain or even substitute for hierophanies. However, symbols play an even more star-
tling and creative role in religious life; they carry on the process of hierophanization. In fact, the symbol itself is sometimes a hierophany; that is, it reveals a sacred reality which no other manifestation can uncover. A hierophany in its own right, symbolism affords an unbroken solidarity between humankind (homo symbolicus) and the sacred. Extending the dialectic of hierophanies, symbolism transforms objects into something other than what they appear to be in the natural sphere. Through symbolism any worldly item may become a sign of transcendent reality and an embodiment of the sacredness of an entire symbolic system. Indeed, we may say that symbolism itself reflects the human need to extend infinitely the process of hierophanization. Looking upon the remarkable number of forms that have manifested the sacred throughout the broad history of religions, one concludes that symbolic life tends to identify the universe as a whole with hierophany and thereby opens human existence to a significant world.

[See also the entries Revelation and Sacred and the Profane, The.]

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**Hieros Gamos** is the Greek word for "sacred marriage," "sacred wedding feast," or "sacred sexual intercourse," a technical term of a mythical or ritual union between a god and a goddess, more generally a divinity and a human being, and most especially a king and a goddess. The term has its widest use in the study of kingship in the city cultures of the ancient Near East. [See Kingship, article on Kingship in the Ancient Mediterranean World.] The fundamental symbolism however is that of the union of man and woman, a set of opposites as general and as readily available as the opposites east and west, north and south, sky and earth. The latter, sky and earth, are often presented as endowed with sexual characteristics and are therefore inseparable from our subject.

It is useful to state in this introductory orientation that a lingering Victorian prudishness in twentieth-century scholarship has embarrassed and at the same time fascinated by sexual symbolism, has occasionally singled out *hieros gamos* configurations for undue attention. It has done so with euphemisms, elisions, and unwarranted explanations, oblivious to the fact that in most civilizations other than those of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe and America, sexual references are not matters of this sort of secretiveness. (Typically, in learned transitional sexual passages with descriptions of pudenda, intercourse, harlots, courtesans, and so on, were translated into Latin until at least the middle of the twentieth century.) It is essential nevertheless to understand sacred marriage symbolism in advanced cultures in the first place as a variation on much older, very general symbolic expressions. The rather mechanistic and blanket explanation of sacred marriage rites as a stimulus or motive for bringing about fertility in peoples, animals, and fields, in the wake of scholarship by Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880) and James G. Frazer (1854-1941), cannot do full justice to the poetry, probability, dramatic quality, and complexity of our documents.

Ancient Rome. The French prehistorian André Leroi-Gourhan (b. 1914) was led to the conclusion that certain signs and figures in the art of Paleolithic Upper cultures that stretched from Spain and France into Siberia form a coherent whole in their expressions, in both signs and representations. Among these expressions is the polarity of female and male symbols, for instance, the lion (female) and the horse (male). The American prehistorian Marija Gimbutas has collected a large number of art objects discovered in eastern Europe, dated from c. 7000 to 3500 BCE, hence before the rise of the earliest civilizations in the Near East, and in that large collection the vast majority of objects is conspicuous