

# Supernatural Beings

# Supernatural

- Websters: **L** *super* + *nautura* nature. **1: of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit or devil.** 2: a: departing from what is usual or normal, esp. to transcend the laws of nature. b: attributed to a ghost, spirit or devil.
- Wikipedia: In the case of one who has strong scientific and atheist beliefs, **the supernatural is anything unexplainable by natural law or phenomena.**

In secular societies, **religious miracles are typically perceived as supernatural claims, as well as spells and curses, divination, the afterlife and many others.**

Such beliefs have existed in many cultures throughout human history.

# Supernatural: Arguments

- Many supporters argue that it is **reasonable to assume that a non-natural entity or entities resolve the unexplained.**
- By its own definition, science is incapable of examining or testing for the existence of things that have no physical effects.
- Proponents of supernaturalism claim that their **belief system is more flexible, which allows more diversity** in terms of intuition and epistemology.

# Supernatural: Beings

## ➤ Free Online Dictionary:

- Supernatural beings believed to have powers to affect the course of human events
- Belief – any cognitive content held as true
- **deity, divinity, god, immortal** – any supernatural being worshipped as controlling some part of the world or some aspect of life or who is the personification of a force
- angel – spiritual being attendant upon monotheistic God or polytheistic gods

## ➤ Yahoo Answers: What are some supernatural beings?

- Best answers: dragons, fairies, mermaids, nymphs, harpies – half woman and half bird, shadow hunters, angels, pixies, dyads, gnomes, goblins, griffins – half eagle and half lion, Centaurs – half horse half human, leprechauns, zombies, vampires, sprites, unicorns, ghosts, werewolves, wizards, witches, ogres, oracles and trolls.

# Supernatural: Beings 2

- In all mythologies the principal actors in the drama of cosmic creation begin as spirit beings so fundamental or so awe-inspiring, or both, as to be describable only as generalities.
- Native North Americans refer to the All Spirit or Great Mystery (For example, Wakan Tanka, the great spirit of the Lakota Sioux).
- The Hindu creator divinity is Brahma, whose name means the Absolute.
- Amma, the original creator god of the African Dogon myth, is said to mean The One Who Holds.
- God is a word of disputed etymology, but probably derives from a term meaning the Worshipped One.











# Other Supreme Creators

- Previously mentioned is the **gigantic snake**.
- This **supernatural creature** is associated with water or the rainbow or both in creation myths as diverse of those of Australia, India, Southwest Asia, Mesopotamia, Africa, Scandinavia and the Americas.
- The snake symbolizes a primal chaos which is also the source of all energy and materiality.

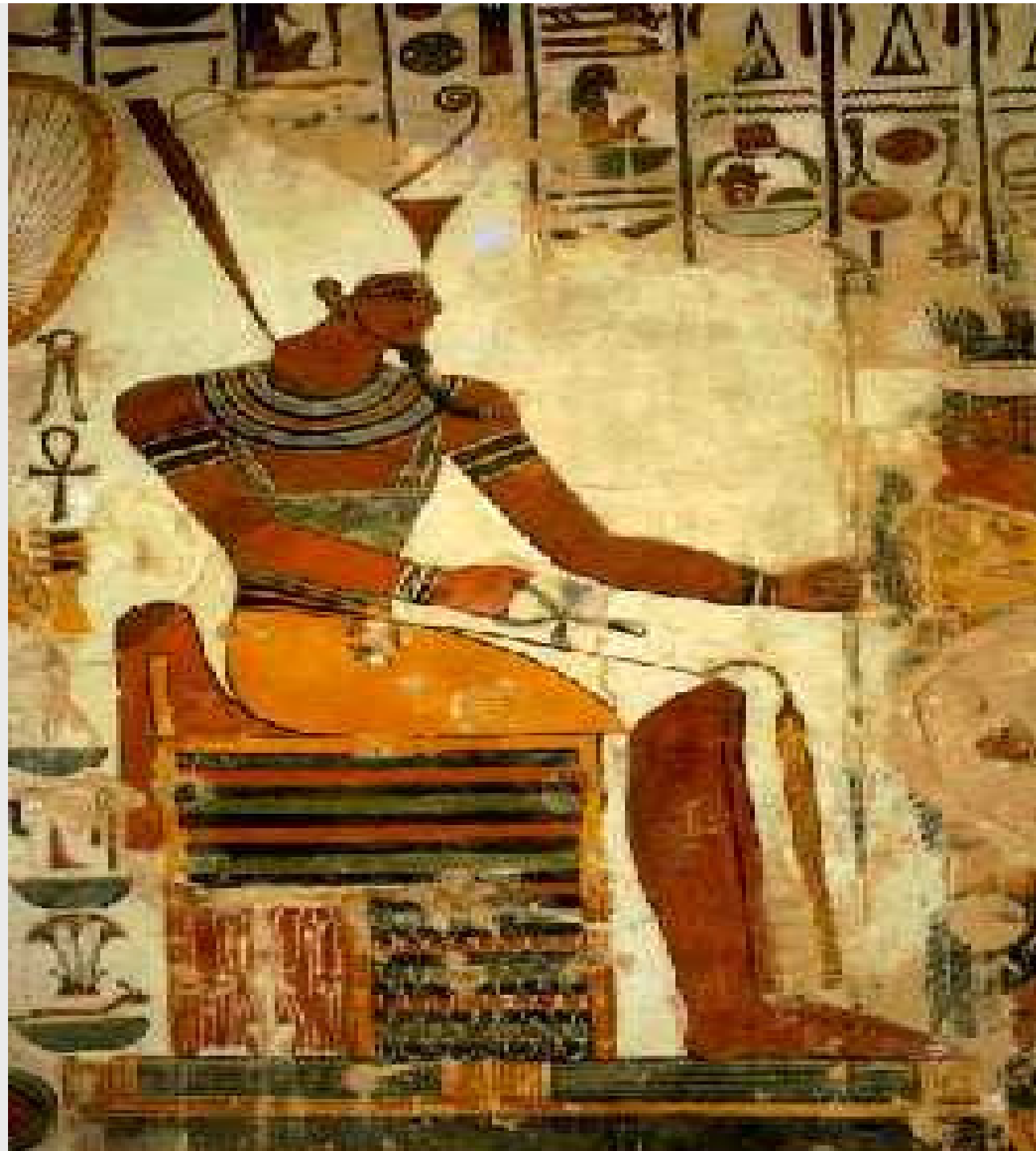
# Other Supreme Creators 2

- After the great snake, the next actor to appear on the mythological scene is often **another gigantic being**, though this time with recognizably **human characteristics**.
- Chinese creator god Pan Gu, previously discussed, is a good example.
- Other early members of the Chinese pantheon appear as partly **animal and partly human**—for example, the creator couple Fu Xi and Nu Gua may be portrayed with **combined human and serpentine bodies**.

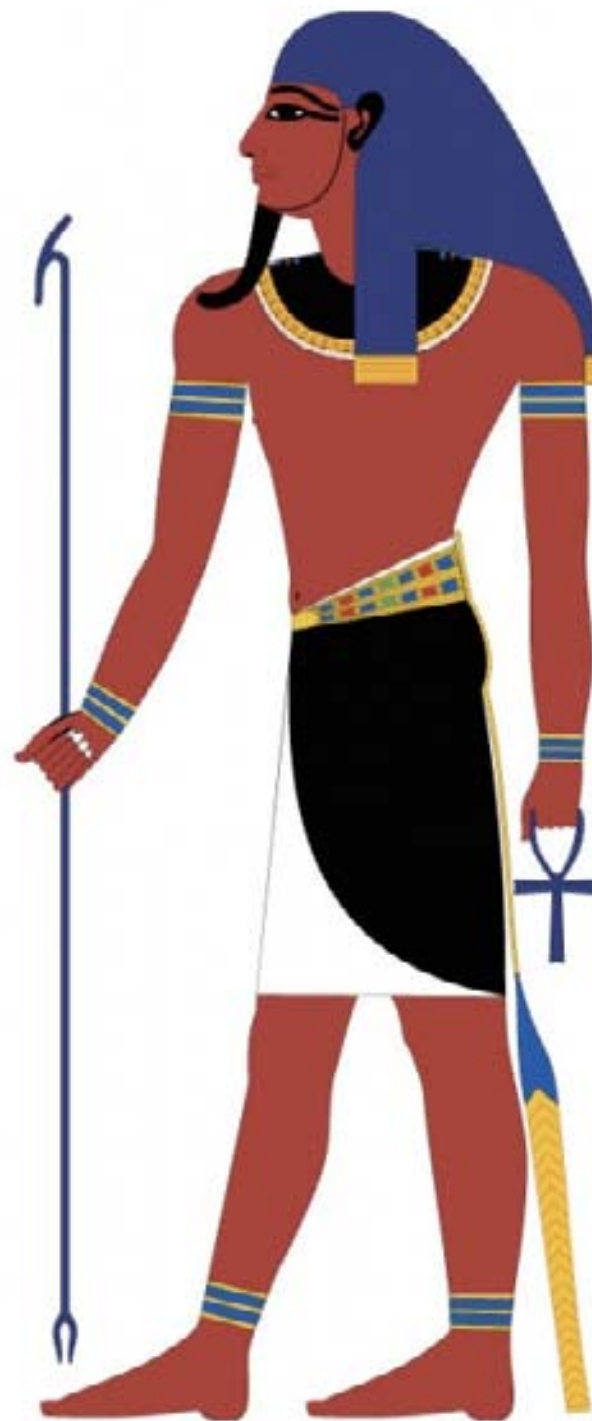


# Other Creators 3

- Another frequent theme in early creation mythology is the appearance of humanoid beings combining both male and female having created himself.
- One Greek (Orphic) account of creation describes a **bisexual first** being, Phanes. Phanes (I bring to light) was the mystic primeval deity of procreation and the generation of new life.
- In myths Phanes is often equated with Eros and Mithras and has been depicted as a deity emerging from a **cosmic egg entwined with a serpent**. He had a helmet and had broad, **golden wings**. He is believed to have hatched from the World Egg of Time and Necessity.
- His older wife Nyx created night time; he created day time. Some say Zeus devoured Phanes in order to assume his primal cosmic power and redistribute it among a new generation of gods—the Olympians which he sired.







# Other Creators 4

- In Norse creation myth the primal giant Ymir, who was both male and female, was transformed from the union of fire and ice at the beginning of time.
- The first living being formed in the primeval chaos known as Ginnungagap was a **giant** of monumental size, called Ymir.
- When he slept a jötunn son and a jötunn daughter grew from his armpits, and his two feet procreated and gave birth to a son, a monster with six heads.
- These three beings gave rise to the race of *hrímpursar* (rime thurs), who populated Niflheim, the world of mist, chill and ice. The giant Ymir subsequently was slain by Odin.



# Deity

- Websters: **L** *deus* god, Gk *dios* heavenly. 1 **a** : the rank or essential nature of a god : DIVINITY b: *cap*: GOD 1: SUPREME BEING 2 : a god or goddess (the *deities* of ancient Greece) 3 : one exalted or revered as supremely good or powerful.
- Wikipedia: A deity is a postulated preternatural or **supernatural immortal** being who may be thought of as holy, divine or sacred held in high regard, and respected by believers, often religiously referred to as a **god**.
- Notable deities include Tsui Goab (African tribal), Mangar-kunier-kunja (Australian aboriginal), Shiva (Hindu), Yuanshi Tianzun (China Taoism), Ra (Egypt), Zeus (Greek), Anu (Sumerian), Ahura Mazda (old Iranian Zoroastrian), Vesta (Roman goddess of the hearth), Odin (Norse), Yahweh (Hebrew Biblical), Quetzalcoatl (Aztec), Ika Omkara (India Sikhism), Exu (African Yorba) and others.





# Deities 2

- Wikipedia: Some deities are thought to be invisible or inaccessible to humans, dwelling mainly in **otherworldly, remote or secluded and holy places**, such as heaven, hell, the sky, the under-world, under the sea, in the high mountains or deep forests, or in a supernatural plane or celestial sphere.
- Deities are depicted in a variety of forms, but are also frequently expressed by having **human or animal form**.
- They are **usually immortal**, and are commonly assumed to have personalities and to possess consciousness, intellects, desires and emotions similar to those of humans.
- Such natural phenomena as **lightning, floods, storms, other “acts of God” and miracles are attributed to them**, and they may be thought to be authorities or controllers of various aspects of human life (such as birth or the afterlife).

# Deities 3

- The boundary between the human and the divine in most cultures is by no means absolute. Demigods are the offspring from a union of a human with a deity, and **most royal houses in antiquity claimed divine ancestors.**
- Beginning with Djedefra (26<sup>th</sup> century BCE), the **Egyptian pharaohs** called themselves “Son of Ra” as well as “Bull (son) of his Mother,” among their many titles. (My note: **The shaman of Neolithic times has gained status**)
- Some human rulers, such as the pharaohs of the New Kingdom, the Japanese Tennos and some Roman Emperors have been **worshiped by their subjects as deities while still alive.**
- The **earliest ruler known to have claimed divinity** is Naram-Suen of Akkad (22<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), perhaps based on his extending the Akkadian Empire to its zenith. “Suen or Sin” refers to god).



# Deities 4

- Pascal Boyer, French anthropologist, argues that while there is a wide array of supernatural concepts found around the world, in general, supernatural beings tend to behave much like people. **The construction of gods and spirits like persons (anthropomorphism) is one of the oldest characteristics of religion.**
- He advocates the idea that **human instincts** provide us with the basis for an intuitive theory of mind that guides our social relations, morality and predilections toward religious beliefs. Boyer and others propose that these innate mental systems **make human beings predisposed to certain cultural elements such as belief in supernatural beings.**
- Boyer is the author of *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (2002) Basic Books. [ISBN 0-465-00696-5](#).

# Slavic Deities

- Just to illustrate the **complexity of mythology for a given culture** or area of the world we might think about Slavic deities, few if any that you would know.
- Wikipedia lists over **12 major** Slavic gods or deities including the sun god; god of vegetation; harvest god; god of thunder and lightning; god of love and fertility; god of fire; a three-headed god; god of earth, waters and the underworld; god of beauty; and three guardian goddesses of morning, evening and midnight stars.
- Many of these have additional roles.



# Slavic Deities 2

- The list of 43 **lessor Slavic deities** includes gods of rain, spirit of the west wind, hunt, death, winter sun, moon, fire, nightmares, grain, home and hearth, female activities, echo and gossip, underground, drink, weather, woods, hospitality, marriage, woodland, fates, destiny and glory, meadows and fields, sorcery, seed and healing.

# Slavic Deities 2

- Thirty Slavic **spirits and demons** include bad weather, **eater of small children in house which stands on chicken feet**, bathhouse, evil spirits various, protective spirits, household, mines, one-eyed embodiment of misfortune, heat stroke, wild animals, whirlwind creature, waterways, **misfortune to drunkards**, flying imp and various others with positive or negative supernatural abilities.
- Rounding out the list are **nine creatures**, including six-legged monster with gnarled horns; winged animal that enables understanding animal language; glowing bird which brings blessings or doom; **demonic creature with human body, horse legs, dog's head with iron teeth and single eye on forehead**; a dragon-like creature; creature with head and chest of a woman and the body of a bird.



# Pantheons

- Webster's: **3** the gods of a people; *esp.* the officially recognized gods.
- Willis in *World Mythology* highlights the well-known major Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Japanese and less well-known Celtic, Mayan, Inca and Maori pantheons.
- Pantheons. Wikipedia provides links to 20 pantheons with roughly 750 deities including some semi-deities, spirits, creatures and a few heroes.
- The summary includes overlaps between deities in more than one region, but likely excludes deities in many other regions or countries so that the world total likely is toward 1,000. If one had complete knowledge of Neolithic and later agricultural cultures and of lesser deities the numbers might be much larger.
- So if you are not familiar with a deity being discussed in a given illustration of mythology or religion, you are likely not alone.



















# Birth of Gods

- **Theogony** is the account of the **birth of gods**. Hesiod's *Theogony*, provides an accounting of the emergence of the Greek gods. It is a comprehensive account and is universally accepted.
- Most other accounts are scraps and pieces drawing upon oral mythologies. Willis relates that three Japanese invisible gods in the “High Plains of Heaven” came together with two lesser deities to form the five primordial “Separate Heavenly Deities.”
- Then came seven more generations of “heavenly” gods and goddesses, culminating with the Japanese primal couple: Izanagi (the August male) and his sister and wife, Izanami (the August female).





# Japanese Deities

- Commanded by the deities to “complete and solidify this drifting land”, Izanagi and Izanami stood on the Floating Bridge of Heaven (perhaps a rainbow) and stirred the brine below with a jeweled spear. Drops from the spear formed an island, the first solid land.
- Shortly after, they descended onto the new island, erected a “heavenly” pillar and built a palace. The two invented a marriage and had sexual intercourse.

# Japanese Deities 2

- After several symbolic stories that legitimized sexual inequality and warned against a deformed first child (or set of twins), they gave birth in abundance producing a series of islands (Japanese archipelago) and then a series of gods and goddesses.
- In time and after other important symbolic events, Amaterasu (August Person who Makes the Heavens) and Tsuki-yomi (The August Raging Male or Moon God) were born.
- With apologies for omitting far too much and my cultural ignorance of the *Kojiki*, the Japanese pantheon of gods emerged and the legendary first emperor of Japan, Jimmu-tenno, was considered a direct descendent of the gods.



# Death of Gods

- The death of supernatural gods was not a major part of mythology.
- **Osiris** was an Egyptian deity, one of the Nine Gods of Heliopolis, usually identified as the **god of afterlife, the underworld and the dead**, but also god of agriculture who taught humanity the secrets of farming and civilization. The twin child of Nut, the sky goddess, Osiris was destined to rule Egypt.
- Osiris was not only a merciful judge of the dead in the afterlife, but also the underworld agency that granted all life, including sprouting vegetation and the fertile flooding of the Nile River.

# Death of Osiris

- The death of the good god Osiris was one of the central events of Egyptian myth.
- His murder and dismemberment is mentioned, as is a more routine death by drowning.
- Another version is that his brother Seth turned into a small mosquito and bit him fatally on his foot.
- Isis, his sister and consort, searched for his body, used her magic powers to prevent his decay and summoned the jackal god Anubis who embalmed and bandaged the body of Osiris, making him the first mummy.

# Death of Osiris

- The Kings of Egypt were associated with Osiris in death—as Osiris rose from the dead **they would in union inherit eternal life through a process believed to be magic.**
- By the New Kingdom (Egyptian Empire 16<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE) all people, not just the pharaohs, were believed to be associated with Osiris at death if they incurred the costs of assimilation rituals.
- Osiris was widely worshiped as Lord of the Dead until the suppression of the Egyptian religion during the Christian era.







The soul of Osiris  
on the Erica tree



# Mother Goddess

- Willis indicates the cult of mother goddess has left clear traces in **Celtic mythology**. War goddesses appear under a variety of names; other goddesses gave birth to heroes.
- Scathach (the Shadowy One) is a goddess identifiable in early Ulster Irish folktales with training legendary hero Cu Chulainn in the martial arts of combat, teaching him feats of arms and giving him his deadly notched spear, the Gae Bulg.
- The legendary warrior woman also grants him the “friendship of her thighs” when the training is almost complete.

# Mother Goddess 2

- The horse goddess Epona was venerated throughout the Celtic world, from Britain to the Danube. She had the unique honor among Gaulish divinities of being given a festival by the Romans, in particular, the Gaulish cavalry in the Roman army were her devotees.
- Epona has associations with water, fertility and death—aspects which seem to connect her with the Mother Goddess.
- All these attributes come together in the concept of **sovereignty**. The king of **myth is “married” to his kingdom in a ceremony**, at which a libation is offered to him by his bride, Sovereignty.
- The Sovereignty of Ireland may appear as an ugly hag, symbol of a desolate and bloody kingdom. However, when kissed by the rightful claimant to kingship, she becomes a beautiful girl who reveals herself as a goddess.
- Celtic mythology is more recent and later Medieval period compared to much of what we are looking at.



# Divine Specialization

- The world moved toward emphasis on agriculture and settlements away from nomadic hunting and gathering, tribes and peoples began to change.
- The beings who embody spiritual forces tend to lose their monstrous qualities, and, while still retaining supernatural powers and status, fall into the familiar categories of animal and human, male and female.

# Divine Specialization 2

- Willis notes that in Greek mythology, after the first cosmic upheavals and the defeat of the Titans, the Olympian gods and goddesses lead lives not far removed from those of human beings.
- Like aristocratic humans in civilized societies, they take on such specialized functions as patrons of the arts and crafts, and of love and war.
- This attribution of social functions to the gods becomes even more emphatic in Roman mythology, which to a large extent is a rationalized version of the Greek.

# Divine Specialization 3

- In Norse myth, the period after the death of the androgynous giant Ymir saw the appearance of gods of war, music and crafts and goddesses of fertility.
- In Mayan religion, the supreme creator deity Itzamna was the patron of writing and scholarship; Ix Chel or Lady Rainbow was the divine patroness of medicine, weaving and childbirth.
- Divinities with such functions can be found in a broad range of cultures.



# Divine Specialization 4

- In some cultures, divine specialization was a matter of locality rather than a role. Spirits peculiar to special places played an important part in the life of the community.
- In ancient Japan every region, village and house had its resident spirit, with powers that had to be respected. In addition, unusual natural features such as large or oddly shaped rocks, old trees and springs were also associated with spirits.
- This is true over much of Africa, Oceania and Australia, and in pre-Buddhist Tibet and Mongolia.
- A vast number of gods and, more especially, goddesses, are connected with fertility, ranging from generalized earth mothers to complex figures such as Tlaloc and his female parallels in Mesoamerica.

# Tlaloc and Fertility

- Dominating the Aztec pantheon by sheer numbers were the many gods of moisture, agriculture and fertility.
- In valley regions of erratic rains, seeing crops wither before they sprouted was all too common, leading to threats of famine.
- Chief among the fertility gods was Tlaloc, an ancient rain deity, who was worshipped throughout Mesoamerica.
- As lord of the rains, Tlaloc presided over a host of related fertility deities, and it was to these that most sacrificial rites were dedicated.

# Tlaloc and Fertility

- Like a thread binding together the complex web of Aztec beliefs, the symbolic equation of blood, water, human sacrifice and fertility was all-pervasive.
- Maize stalks and ears, brought in from fields and venerated in households as gods, were also used as ritual adornments for warriors, along with quetzal plumes.
- Also associated with fertility are a group of little corn gods, collectively known as the “Four Hundred Rabbits” (Centzon Totochtin).
- Among them are Ometochtli (god of a fermented drink called octli) and the god of drunkenness, Tepoztecatl.

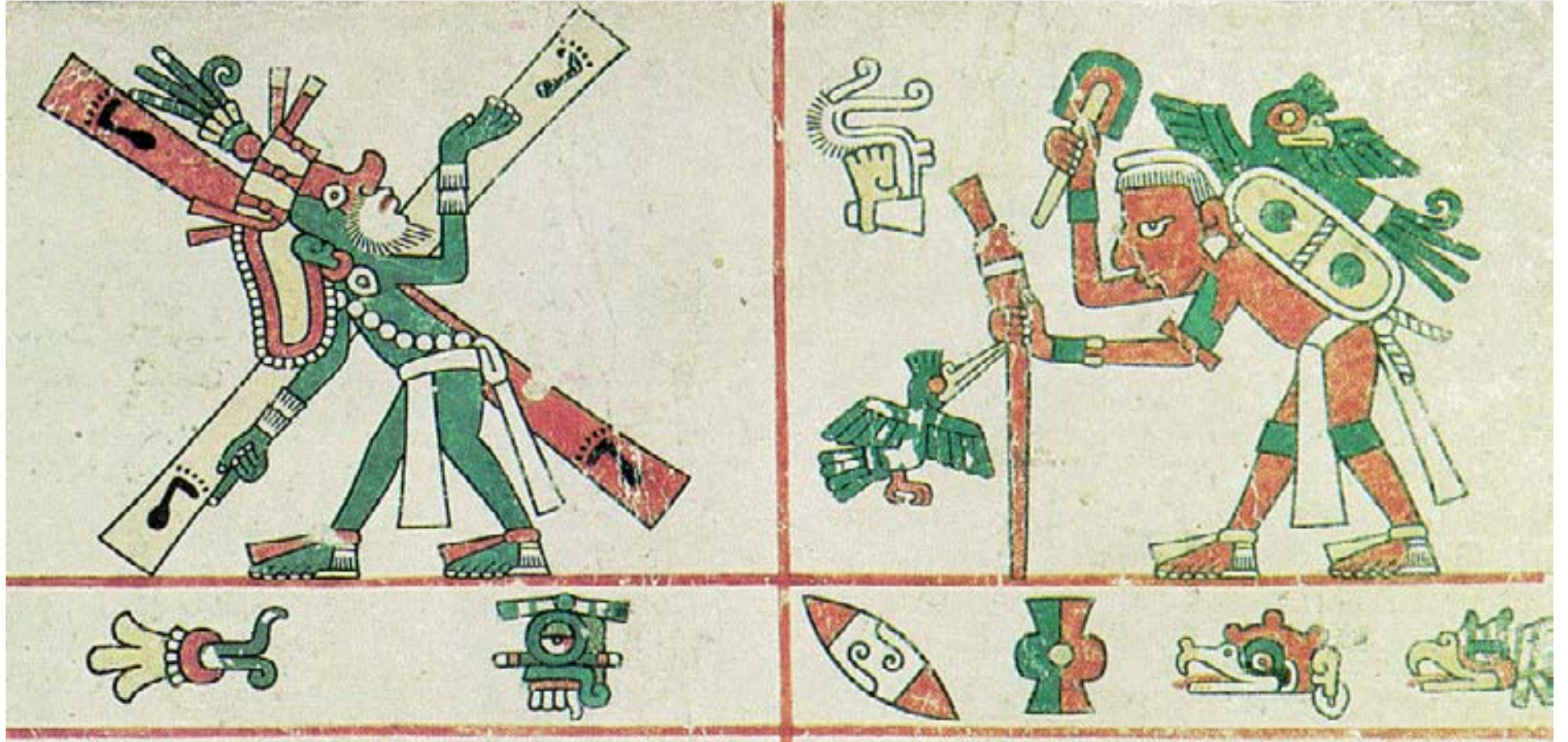












# Demons and Spirits

- Malevolent beings. Projection of humanity's deepest fears.
- The range of forms is enormous: semi-human and non-human creatures, dragons and monsters, giants and giantesses, demons and dwarves and specialized demons for example the invisible *oni* of Japan who attend the gods of the underworld.
- In Western myth spiritual beings are usually either positive or negative, but in other cultures there is a greater preponderance of ambivalent or neutral beings.
- In Islam, for example, the *djinni* (genies) can be either benevolent or malevolent: they were created out of fire 2,000 years before the creation of Adam, the first man.





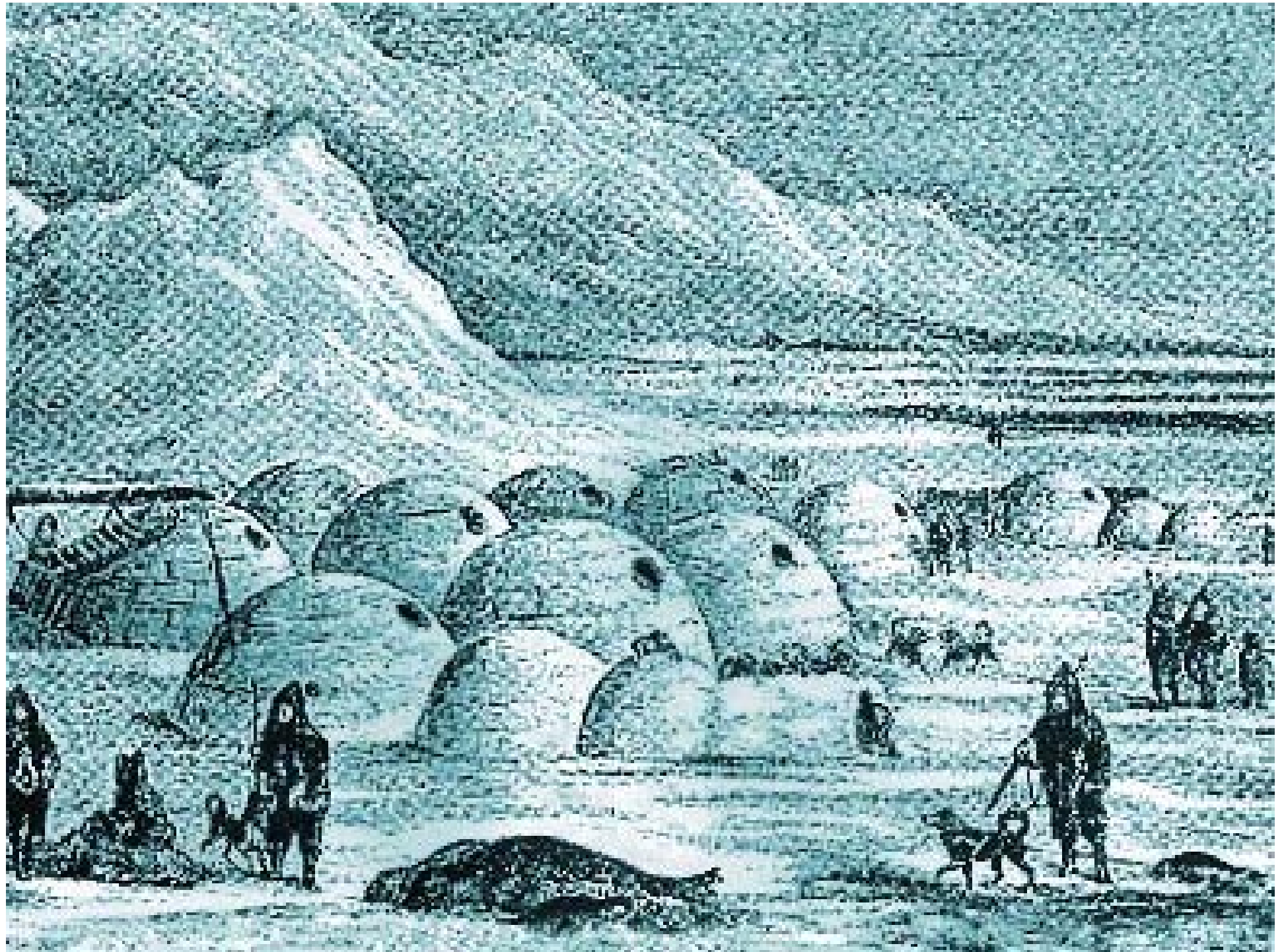




# Inuit Spirits of Sea and Sky

- Spiritual powers, of lesser or greater import, dominate Inuit life. The most famous is the Sea Spirit of the Canadian Inuit.
- Known as Sedna (also Nuliajuk), the Sea Spirit exercises suzerainty (overlordship) over all the animals, which provide food for humans.
- In her residence at the bottom of the sea, from where she sends out the animals for hunting, she takes on the form of a woman. Even shamans fear her.





# Inuit Spirits of Sea and Sky 2

- Another major spirit is the Spirit of the Air, known in many parts as Sila (weather, intelligence).
- This spirit controls rain, snow, wind and sea from a domain far above the earth.
- Although inherently benevolent, yet humans perceive spirits as threatening, especially the Sea Spirit, because they are highly sensitive to human misdemeanors, responding to them by sending foul weather, failure in hunting and sickness.
- To fend off such visitations, people incant magical words, don masks and amulets and mobilize their shamans.



# Inuit Moon Spirit and Animism

- One of the major spirits of the Inuit is the Moon Spirit (Tarqeq), whose concerns are with fertility, moral propriety, and in the case of the Alaskan Inuit, the control of animals.
- The moon spirit is male, a mighty hunter, whose abode is the land of the sky. A typical mask depicting the spirit has a white border around the face symbolizing air, hoops around the mask denoting the levels of the cosmos and feathers that signify stars.



# Inuit Moon Spirit and Animism 2

- The Souls of Animals: The Inuit believe that prey is not “taken” by a hunter, but permits itself to be killed.
- When the animal dies, the hunter performs a brief ceremony to ensure that the soul is returned to the non-earthly world to rejoin the society of animals—in readiness for being sent out again as hunter’s quarry.
- Over much of Alaska, Inuit hold important festivals to acknowledge and influence the animals’ appearance on earth. For example, the Bladder Festival is a five-day winter event at whose climax the inflated bladders caught by the communities hunters during the year are pushed through hole in the ice, thus returning the animals souls to the spirit world.



# Demons and Monsters

- A common theme in mythology throughout Southwest Asia is the encounter with some magic power, often a representative of the dark forces of evil or barbarity which stand in opposition to civil society.
- These forces usually take human or near-human form and can be either male, such as the half-human Moyang Melur, or female Bota Ili.
- The ferocious Balinese female child-eating folk demon Ranga figures as the leader of a band of evil witches whose immortal antagonist is the spirit king and leader of forces of good, Barong.
- She is commonly depicted as old and nearly naked, with unkempt hair, pendulous breasts, and clawlike fingernails and toenails. The combat of these two magical powers, in which Ranga is customarily defeated, is re-enacted on Bali by masked dancers.



# Durga

- Durga is the Hindu “inaccessible” or the “invincible,” “one who can redeem in situations of utmost distress.”
- Durga is the form of a Devi, the supremely radiant goddess, depicted as having ten arms, riding a lion or a tiger, carrying weapons and a lotus flower, maintaining a meditative smile and practicing mudras, or symbolic hand gestures.
- Durga manifests fearlessness and patience, and never loses her sense of humor, even during spiritual battles of epic proportion.





# Bota Ili and Wata Rian: A Story

- The Kedang of eastern Indonesia relate how the wild woman Bota Ili was turned to civilized ways. She lived at the top of a mountain.
- Her body was covered with hair and she had extremely long fingernails and toenails. She ate reptiles and to cook them she would strike her backside on a rock to make a fire.
- A man called Wata Rian lived on the beach. One day he noticed smoke on the mountain. Early one morning he set out with fish to eat and palm wine to drink. He reached the summit, found a hearth and waited. Bota returned with a heavy catch of snakes and lizards.

# Bota Ili and Wata Rian 2

- After she had rested she struck her backside on a rock to make fire, but without success. Then she spotted Wata Rian. She cried out in anger, “You stopped my fire from lighting—come down here so I can bite you to bits!”
- Wata Rian replied, “Don’t make trouble or my dog will bite you!” Bota Ili relented, Wata came down, the fire was lit and they cooked their food. He poured Bota Ili a lot of palm wine and eventually she fell down drunk.
- He shaved her all over as she slept and saw that she was a woman. Later after Bota Ili learned to wear clothes, she and Wata Rian lived together and were married.