



Valentina Sirangelo

**From Myth to Fantasy
Role-Playing Game:
Aspects of the Child God in
The Elder Scrolls Lore**

ABSTRACT

In the present article, we propose an analysis of mythocritics about Arkay, a divine figure created for the religious-historical domain of *The Elder Scrolls*, a series of fantasy Computer Role-Playing Games. In particular, we aim to illustrate that it is possible to recognize, in this deity, the powerful action of the Child God archetype. In the first part we trace a brief profile of the Child God, concentrating on its main mythemes: the agrocyclic destiny, the centrality of death and the fatal relation with the Mother Goddess. In the second part we track these mythemes in Arkay, who holds the title of “God of the Cycle of Birth and Death”, oversees burials and funeral rites and has a maternal-mortuary connection with two goddesses, Mara and Namira. Through the *fil rouge* of the Child God archetype, our research proves the extraordinary coherence characterizing a portion of *The Elder Scrolls* Lore, whose creators, not differently from every artist of any age, always draw on the same archetypal material stored in the collective unconscious.

KEYWORDS

Child God; Vegetation; Role-Playing Game; The Elder Scrolls; Death; Mother Goddess.

VALENTINA SIRANGELO

Università della Calabria, Cosenza, Italia
valentina.sirangelo@live.com

**Role-Playing Games’ universality
and autonomy**

In Computer Games’ diachronic development and classification, Role-Playing Games (RPGs) deserve a place of high regard. This is not simply due to their presumed originality or longevity – qualities, indeed, also bestowable on other Video Games typologies – but to an exclusive merit which makes them remarkably original and long-lasting: the foundation of autonomous universes. The conception of a RPG subject *never* results in the development of a *single*, close playable plot, but in the creation *ex novo* of a whole *Kultur* – including the articulation of all its elements, from historiography to folklore, from human geography to religious anthropology – in which *several*, hardly quantifiable, sophisticated and open playable plots might come alive. The creative legitimization of freestanding worlds – which lies at the basis of a RPG – can be traced back to postmodern poetics. In fact, Postmodernism assumes as its founding principle an extreme experimentalism, promoting the creation of new and multiple realities: new, because they are begot by the poetic word, and multiple, because they are autonomous in respect to the no longer intact object “reality”, to



which they do not have any pertinence of reference¹. Yet the role-player has more autonomy than the “postmodern reader”, because he can “manipulate the game” through “personalization”, that is a more extreme operation than merely “constructing the meaning of a work”².

A RPG is a game “in which the player controls a character in a fictional world and develops him or her throughout the course of the play”³. The first RPGs were the so-called “Tabletop” or “Pen-and-Paper” ones⁴: more players – moving in a game universe created by the “Game Master”⁵ – give shape, through an “act of co-creation”⁶, to an interactive story⁷. The first and most well-known of them, *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*) – whose first edition dates back to 1974⁸ – represents still today “an important touchstone helpful for critical study of the role-playing phenomenon”⁹. The “high fantasy setting”¹⁰ which we find in the most part of RPGs, starting from *D&D*, definitely owes a lot to the monumental mythopoesis of J. R. R. Tolkien¹¹.

Computer Role-Playing Games or Role-Playing Video Games (CRPGs, or simply RPGs) – that flourished later – “borrowed heavily from *D&D*”¹², but had also other influences like that of Miniature War-games¹³. CRPGs differ from conventional RPGs for the following reasons: the disappearance of the Game Master, replaced by game engine¹⁴; the presence of a single-player, which has as a consequence that “interactive narratives are produced through a collaboration between the machine and the user”¹⁵ and no longer by an “interaction with other players”¹⁶; the fact that the authors focus on “creating environments or worlds to explore rather than trying to tell [...] stories”¹⁷ – and this “creation of worlds” includes the moulding of a new *Kultur*. The very first CRPG is *Akalabeth: World of Doom* (1979-1980), also known as

Ultima 0, which starts off the fortunate *Ultima* series¹⁸; another early days CRPG cult is the first *Wizardry* (1981)¹⁹. According to Barton’s periodization, the CRPG “Golden Age”²⁰ is placed between the latter half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s: it is marked by the advent of more and more enthralling and elaborated series, from *Might and Magic* to *Final Fantasy*, from *Pool of Radiance* to *Eye of the Beholder*. The “Platinum Age”, which covers the following decade, sees “the best CRPGs ever made”²¹, among which we simply mention the first episodes of *Diablo*, *Dungeon Siege*, *Fallout*, *Baldur’s Gate* and *Planescape Torment*, as well as the first three episodes of *The Elder Scrolls* (*TES*).

Produced by Bethesda Softworks and divided into the five episodes *Arena*, *Daggerfall*, *Morrowind*, *Oblivion* and *Skyrim* – published between 1994 and 2012 –, *TES* series belongs to those fantasy RPGs which won a planetary success. Among the most fascinating ingredients of its cauldron, it is worth noting “the incredible size of the world, the open-ended nature of gameplay”²², but above all its immense and elaborated Lore – i.e. its specific *Kultur* – whose monumentality contributes to turn it into a microcosmos comparable to a chapter of late antique or medieval civilization history: the religious – mythological, ritual and cultural – aspect embodies one of its fundamental pillars.

Our aim is to illustrate that, in the creation of a male deity for the *TES* pantheons – the god Arkay –, it is possible to recognize the action of the archetype called “Child God” or “Vegetation God”. This powerful archetype still lends itself to operate fruitfully on contemporary mythopoetic paraliterary production, of which a RPG Lore is an example. In fact, the organization of a RPG microcosmos is far from being the outcome of mere imagination: its authors – as mythopoetic founders of a new religious



system and *corpus* – always draw on the same archetypal material stored in the collective unconscious, not differently from every artist and “creator” of any age.

The Child God: agrarian substratum and masculine principle

In the first theoretical part of our study, we outline the archetypal category of the Child God. We focus on his genesis, which occurred during the Neolithic in an essentially agrarian context – it is for this reason that he is mainly known as Vegetation God – and on the constitutive unities of his Myth. These unities are: the cyclical destiny, articulated in the three phases of life, death and rebirth; the fatal relation with the archetypal category of the Mother Goddess – the Earth – by whom he is begot and to whom he shall return in the “death” phase; the centrality of the “death” phase as restoration of the primeval Unity between Vegetation (the Child God) and Earth (the Mother Goddess).

The genesis of the Child God as archetypal category – the absolute first male God in the history of religions – must be traced back to a remote yet crucial chapter of pre-history, i.e. the so-called “Neolithic Revolution”²³: it is recognized as “the single most important breakthrough in the material technology of our species”²⁴, for it consisted above all in the discovery of agriculture. About ten millennia before Christ, in Ancient Near East – the future cradle of civilization – the constant practice of agriculture radically transformed the sustenance of man: as a consequence of this, his “whole life rhythm”²⁵ and his cosmic perception deeply changed.

During his very first experiments of cultivation²⁶, Neolithic man began to meditate intensely on the agrarian fertility cycle of the Earth. He perceived a web of arcane

analogies subsisting between plant and man, both characterized by the miracle of reproduction, which was granted respectively by the Earth (begetting fruits) and the Woman (begetting children). So he started considering Vegetation as a “creature” and therefore a “Child” of the Earth, which was born from the Earth and died in the Earth (in the sowing time) in order to be born again from it in a later season. So Earth represented the immutable and sempiternal “Feminine” principle, while Vegetation represented the “Masculine” principle subject to Time’s cyclical influence.

Paleolithic had been pervaded by the “vision of the unity of life, originally imagined as the mother goddess who gives birth to the forms of life that are herself”²⁷. During the Neolithic, the “hierophany of the earth” acquired a “properly telluric structure” in place of the previous “cosmic”²⁸ one, being beheld as a Mother Goddess “whose womb are the depths of the earth”²⁹. Vegetation, that sticks out of the Earth and cyclically returns to the Earth, gradually took shape at her shade as something “other” from her, being beheld as a new “God”, maintaining with the Goddess a relationship of filiation. The Child God’s destiny is therefore tripartite, under the sign of cyclic time: just like the seed, he is begot by Mother Earth during the beautiful season (birth), he is swallowed up by Mother Earth during the bad season (death) and he rises again from Mother Earth in the beautiful season (rebirth).

It is for this reason that the archetypal category of the Child God appeared during the Neolithic, i.e. during the first context of the history of religions in which, after having lost the primordial harmony with the “unity of life”, man beholds Time’s action and Cycle’s “drama”. Developing an agrarian – i.e. cyclic – sensibility, he began to attribute a primary importance to that fertile



and reproductive power which both the vegetal and the human world hold. Consequently, the Child God assumed in archetypology the epithet “Dying and Rising God”, who dies and rises from the womb of Mother Goddess (the Earth), or “Vegetation God”, whose fate is the “dramatic representation of the decay and revival of plant life”³⁰.

The Child or Vegetation God, whose fate is to die before recovering – i.e. to be subject to death as a Cycle phase –, reproduces at best the other “mortal one” *par excellence*, that is man. From Neolithic onwards, man hopes to experience a cyclic fate as well, in which rebirth follows death. As a witness of this trust, we can mention all those dense correlations between agrarian myths and soteriological hopes – whose goal is to know the *post mortem* rebirth – that has led to the institution of the so-called mystic ceremonies or rites in the Aegean-Asiatic area during the Second Millennium B.C.E. The Mysteries aimed to grant life after death – i.e. the wonder of the locally venerated agrarian god – to the initiates who had access to them³¹:

All *initiation ceremonies* which are liturgies of the temporal sacred drama and of Time controlled by the rhythm of repetition are isotopic with the dramatic cyclical myth of the Son. Initiation [...] is the transmutation of a destiny. [...] It is accomplished slowly and in stages and follows closely the agro-lunar schema [...]: sacrifice, death, burial, resurrection³².

The Child God’s death stage – mythical equivalent of the seed burial – is unavoidable, since the fate of Vegetation is to be sown in order to bloom again. This phase is only apparently dark, since the buried seed – the dead God on the mythical level – contains already the germs of spring recovery: in this way, death is never definitive,

but embodies the prelude to a new beginning, resulting thus nothing but a transitory – and, in the cyclical overview, even benefic – stage. The mortuary phase remains the most interesting one, since it is the only one in which, though temporarily, the primeval Unity Earth-Vegetation, God-Goddess, Masculine-Feminine materializes.

The death of the Child God – who, as masculine principle, “has identified itself with consciousness”³³ – represents, under a psychoanalytic perspective, the mythical transposition of the “incestuous back-turning of [...] libido”³⁴, the torturing “longing to return to mother depths for renewal”³⁵. In fact, man continuously tends to return to the unconscious, which “is experienced in relation to [...] consciousness as maternal and feminine”³⁶: “whoever sunders himself from the mother longs to get back to the mother”³⁷. Every mother’s womb and every woman’s vagina – both equivalents of the Earth Goddess’ uterus – are cavities and containers isotopic with the tomb: as a result, the death of the Child God – the masculine principle – becomes, *simultaneously*, a descending entombment and an ecstatic embrace, a funereal and erotic act:

The Great Mother takes the little child back into herself, and always over [...] incest there stand the insignia of death, signifying final dissolution in union with the Mother. Cave, earth, tomb, sarcophagus, and coffin are symbols of this ritual recombination³⁸.

During the post-neolithic ages – the Bronze Age and the Iron Age – the agro-cyclic Myth, though integrated (and in part obscured) by new archetypes, survived as endowed with its basilar structure, appearing in the form of a:

dramatic scenario [...] constituted by the execution and resurrection of a



mythical, usually divine character, who is both the son and lover of the goddess. [...] The drama [...] has as its main character the son³⁹.

In several Eurasian polytheistic pantheons it is relatively simple to define a group of male deities who, more or less – depending from how archaic their sources are –, maintain the archetypal traits deriving from the Child God of the “pure” Neolithic religion: these gods are indeed “a god of many names but of essentially one nature”⁴⁰ or, in other words, they are indeed a god who “survived well into historic times under such diverse names”⁴¹. Two fundamental traits prove these gods’ descent from the same ancestral Myth: a destiny of death, followed by a more or less explicit rebirth, and the fact that this destiny is always bound to the excessive power of a goddess, who shows to be superior to them and whereof they are paramours:

The Attis, Adonis, Tammuz and Osiris figures in the Near Eastern cultures are not merely born of a mother; [...] they are their mother’s lovers: they are loved, slain, buried and bewailed by her, and are then reborn through her. [...] The phallic youths [...] are the vegetation itself [...]. Gods of spring [...] must be put to death in order to be lamented by the Great Mother and reborn⁴².

The violent death and the consequent access to the Netherworld of these deities represents the *Descensus ad Inferos* mytheme, i.e. the Child God’s *katabasis* – the mythical transposition of the actual doom of the seed during the bad season. The key-point to get a full understanding of this mytheme is the equivalence between the Netherworld and the feminine principle: the *Under-world* is nothing but the Earth

Mother Goddess’ womb on the mythical level. So the *Descensus ad Inferos* coincides with another fundamental mytheme, that is *Hieros Gamos*, i.e. the Sacred Marriage with the Goddess in the form of that “incestuous back-turning of [...] libido” we cited above⁴³. This correspondence – identical with the more renowned *Eros-Thanatos* one – precisely finds its hidden basis in the vegetal archetypal ontology, according to which Vegetation (masculine principle) dies *at the moment in which* it penetrates and lovely unites with the Earth (feminine principle). Therefore, the two *Rites de Passage* of marriage and death indeed correspond: the two mythemes of God’s death as his Descent into the Netherworld and of God’s marriage with a significant Goddess with chthonic/telluric attributes are isotopic with one other.

The Child God archetype in *The Elder Scrolls: Arkay*

In the second part of our study, we concentrate our attention on a figure belonging to the religious-historical domain of *TES* Lore, that is the god Arkay, protector of the cycle of life and death. His connection with cyclic temporality, his primary role in the funerary dimension and his maternal-mortuary relationship with the Mother Goddess archetype are three traits in which we deem it is possible to track the three main, closely intertwined mythemes that distinguish the Child or Vegetation God.

Preliminarily, we underline that the principal sources of *TES* Lore do not necessarily dwell in the bulk of quests playable in the Video Game, that embody its *diegesis*: several aspects of its historical, social and religious-historical repertory are rather deduced by detailed dialogues with several non-player characters which the main



character meet; or, even more often, they are learned from fictitious volumes which can be consulted in many cultural and cultural sites of *TES* geography. The main character does not deal directly with Arkay in even one *TES* episode, but only with his ministers and with places sacred to him; the god itself remains confined in the series' Lore.

Arkay, God of the Cycle of Birth and Death

Arkay is one of the Nine Divines⁴⁴, i.e. the gods of the official cult in Tamriel⁴⁵; nevertheless he can also be found in other minor tamrielic pantheons⁴⁶. His main epithet, "God of the Cycle of Birth and Death"⁴⁷, immediately arouses our attention: as we have explained in our prehistoric *excursus*, whichever deity is related to a cycle holds, in the collective unconscious, a more or less perceivable agrarian substratum, since man grasps "the cyclical symbolic schema" through the support of "seasonal vegetation"⁴⁸. Our certainty is confirmed by the fact that Arkay «is sometimes associated with the seasons»⁴⁹.

Another epithet of Arkay is "Mortals' God"⁵⁰, since he "did not exist before the world was created"⁵¹ and before time began⁵²: this appellation, too, leads us to associate him with the Child or Vegetation God, who stands for the model *par excellence* of the "mortal" – that is to say, the individual subject to Time's action, to changeability and to death as a Cycle phase –, symbolizing at best the fortunes of man and embodying his dreams of resurrection and eternity.

On the level of religious anthropology, Arkay is the god who manages the funerary sphere; in fact, he is also "the god of burials and funeral rites"⁵³, not differently from several traditional agro-cyclic deities:

Valentina Sirangelo

It occurs very frequently that a telluric-vegetal fertility deity becomes also a funerary deity. [...] There are many zones of interference between fertility cults and funerary cults [...]. The agrarian destiny and the funerary destiny cross and melt, determining in the end only one modality of existence – the pre-germinative and larval one⁵⁴.

In fact, a Shrine of Arkay is located in each Hall of the Dead, an indoor funerary structure – in which the bodies of the dead rest – that can be found in many cities of Tamriel⁵⁵. Every Shrine of Arkay is able to impart to those who approach it a reinvigorating blessing that increases their health⁵⁶; the Amulet of Arkay, too – a very rare item possessed by his priests⁵⁷ –, has the power to fortify the health of those who wear it⁵⁸. So we deduce that Arkay is also a reviving/healing god: this prerogative characterizes some traditional Vegetation or "Dying and Rising" gods, since restoring life energies is isotopic to resurrecting⁵⁹.

Let us examine the ranks of devotees to Arkay among the mortals. In *Daggerfall*, his cultists form the Order of Arkay⁶⁰, protected by a military arm whose name, "Knights of the Circle", reminds us of the Cycle, Arkay's domain. The Order members celebrate Arkay as "fertility and blight, joy and sorrow", for he "brings [...] into this world" all creatures and, "when the time is true, ends their circle"⁶¹. Then they underline their elitarian character ("we do not offer strangers blessings") reminding us that "few are worthy to be initiated into the mysteries of Birth and Death"⁶²: on the one hand, it is true that the term "initiated" characterizes the formulary repertoire of almost all *Daggerfall* Temples; on the other hand, we believe it is not a case that the term which follows it, "mysteries", is exclusively employed by the Order of Arkay. This is a result of the action, on an unconscious level,



of the Child or Vegetation God archetype and of the “Mysteries’ genesis from not better precised fertility cults that formed as a consequence of the so-called Neolithic Revolution”⁶³. The syntagm “mysteries of Birth and Death” can’t help remind us of that “initatic mysteric model”⁶⁴ which marks out many archaic rites in Eastern-Mediterranean area: shaped on the model of “the fate of the deity involved in the mythic event” and of “the analogy of this fate with the agrarian cycle”⁶⁵, it would grant immortality to their adepts.

Moreover, the Order members are proud of their intellectual refinement, since they declare: “our libraries and sages are some of the finest in Tamriel”⁶⁶. This statement is coherent with Arkay’s dedication to knowledge⁶⁷ – as his apotheosis myth will shortly prove – but above all it is in line with his cult’s mysteric arrangement: in fact, those who accomplish the initiation to the Order of Arkay – an onerous *Rite de Passage* – accede to a knowledge that has as its subject the god’s “mysteries” relative to the Cycle of Birth and Death (and therefore relative to life after death), i.e. to a unique and superior knowledge. It is of no wonder that the only other member of the Nine Divines who foists a sort of “mysteric” – secret, occult – knowledge⁶⁸ is Mara who, as Mother Goddess – as we will explain –, is involved with Arkay in the archetypal agro-cyclic sphere. Finally, we point out that, in more than a *TES* episode, the priests of Arkay are frequently dressed in glowing green⁶⁹, the typical colour of the “renovation deities”⁷⁰ referable to the Child or Vegetation God archetype.

The two main Arkay’s iconographic sources consist of a statue and a stained glass wall⁷¹. In the former, the god carries a circle⁷² – symbol of the Cycle – in one hand, while he grabs a cane – a fertilizing symbol⁷³ – in the other one. In the latter, the god grabs only a cane in his hand, on whose

head lies a circle that girds his face: the combined image which results reminds us of a flower, vegetal child of the Earth and “symbol of the passive principle”⁷⁴ of which Arkay is a manifestation. Moreover, the stained glass wall is of a deep green and red: these two colours distinguish the Vegetation drama, which subtends also to the alchemical one. In fact, Vegetation gods “descend [...] into the Netherworld, where chthonic red regenerates them. That is why they are externally green and internally red and their domain extends over the two worlds”⁷⁵. In particular, the colour red, when endowed of a chthonic and nocturnal value, is the colour of “the womb in which death and life transmute into each other”⁷⁶.

Arkay’s apotheosis and his relation with the Mother Goddess Mara

Only the vastest source we possess about Arkay – the volume *Arkay the God*⁷⁷ – can confirm our hypothesis that the action of the Child or Vegetation God archetype is to be recognized in his conception by *TES* creators, leaving behind whoever might object that correlating a god to cycle, seasons and mortality could simply be the outcome of free imagination. The myth presented in this volume – Arkay’s apotheosis or divinization⁷⁸ – reveals his exclusive relation with the benevolent goddess Mara⁷⁹. It might sound clashing that the authors have chosen just Mara, “Fertility Goddess, [...] Mother-Goddess and Goddess of Love”⁸⁰ as the female protagonist for this myth of death (and of rebirth in divine form): in our opinion, this choice has been dictated by the unconscious, since Mara is the projection of the telluric Great Mother Goddess archetype, bestoweress of life and death.

According to this myth, Arkay was once “an ordinary shopkeeper” who nourished



a great “passion for knowledge”. “An avid collector of books”, one day he ran into a mysterious tome whose aim was “to tell the secrets of life, death, and the purpose of existence”: lost in its reading, “he ignored everything else” that was happening around him, including “the plague which was ravaging the town”. Just at the moment in which “he felt that the book was opening visions of new worlds, the plague brought him low”: tremendously weakened, “he slowly sank towards death”. It was then that “he prayed to Mara the mother-goddess to allow him enough time to complete his studies of the book”. Apparently there is no reason why Arkay, at the instant of his death, should beg Mara and *not* another goddess – and in *TES* there would have been more than one goddess suitable for this wicked role – to spare his life for yet a while. We must recognize that “Mother Mara” – as she is named by Arkay⁸¹ – is first of all a bestoweress of death; the proof of this nefarious power she holds issues from the words with which she starts off in response to Arkay’s plea: “Why should I make an exception for you, Ark’ay?”. Archetypology teaches us that every Mother Goddess possesses “a positive life-giving and a negative death-dealing aspect”⁸², since she begets the Child God and then embraces him again back into her womb, making him die. In this case, Mara is chosen as the responsible for the plague that hits Arkay causing his death, because she embodies the archetypal Mother Goddess who – besides life – bestows death to the Child God, engulfing him again back into her uterine abyss. We can therefore recognize the archetypal relation between the Mother Goddess (Earth) and the Child God (Vegetation) in the couple Mara-Arkay: Mara, responsible for the cyclic-seasonal Arkay’s impending death, is a hypostasis of the Earth which, during the bad season, sucks Vegetation into her chthonic womb.

Arkay’s gradual estrangement from the concrete world, which culminates in his disease, is isotopic with Child God’s *Descensus ad Inferos*, corresponding to his *Regressus ad Uterum* into the Goddess’ telluric body. It is of no wonder that Arkay falls seriously ill at the moment «that the book was opening visions of new worlds», and it is in that instant that he addresses his plea to “Mother Mara”, whom he feels approaching. The goddess Mara intervenes asking Arkay what he has grasped concerning “the reason for death and birth”: if she does so, it means that it is *she* who holds the secrets – i.e., the “mysteries” – of death, whose domain belongs to her. In response, Arkay exposes a theory of which the only undeniable principle – the “elements of truth” Mara hints at – is that there exists a balance, bound to the Cycle, in observance of which life and death must necessarily alternate with each other⁸³.

At the end of the myth, Arkay apparently finds himself at an arduous juncture: “either to accept [...] death [...] or to become a god”; actually, this seems more an obliged path than a choice. He asserts: “If my studies are not completely wrong, my only choice is to accept the burden”. In this way, he induces us to interpret that his death – as a Cycle phase – is by now unescapable: his *Descensus ad Inferos* has indeed already begun when he has completely lost himself – in total commitment to a “mysteric” knowledge – in the reading of a volume showing «the secrets of life, death, and the purpose of existence», which could be hence defined a text sacred to Mara. This reading – on the model of “the mythic event which implied a passage towards the *other world* and pervaded the territory of death”⁸⁴ – represents the katabatic access to another dimension, reconciling the Child God (Arkay) with the uterine realm of the Mother Goddess (Mara). Therefore, by virtue of cyclic laws, this death must necessarily be



followed by a rebirth, which is granted to him by the Mother Goddess herself (again, Mara).

Arkay rises, after “what seemed to him as an eternity”, turning into the “God of Birth and Death”. His task – which consists in “making sure that deaths and births stay in proper balance in the physical world” – looks burdensome: as Mara forewarns him, it will be an “Eternal labor”. So Arkay – who, as his cultists assert, stands for “Blessed Neutrality” – becomes a sort of judge and governor of the dead, a title which does not sound new, since such a role is taken on by some traditional Vegetation gods after their death, as for instance Egyptian Osiris, “ruler of the dead” whose “life in the Netherworld is highly active”⁸⁵.

Arkay dies in Mara and rises from Mara: he is therefore a hypostasis of the Child or Vegetation God who, by dying, returns to the uterus of the Earth Mother Goddess, who is the only one that has the power to bestow him, apart from death, rebirth or rather immortality. In this version, rebirth and immortality actualize as a divinization by acquiring a supreme and arcane knowledge about the Birth-Death Cycle, of which Arkay becomes overseer. We conclude that the goddess Mara incorporates the double aspect of the archetypal Earth Mother Goddess, from whom “all life is born” and to whom all “returns [...] at death”⁸⁶. In this case, her lovely aspect is preponderant over the terrible one: the predominance of her “positive life-giving [...] aspect”⁸⁷ is coherent with her characterization as benefic Goddess of Love. So, in this apotheosis myth, Mara configures herself as the Mother Goddess who, after having sucked Arkay into her “underworld [...] earth womb [...] perilous land of the dead through which the deceased must pass”⁸⁸, makes him reach, apparently immediately (although it “seemed [...] an eternity” to him), “a new and higher existence”⁸⁹, i.e. deified rebirth.

We point out, as an architectural projection of the archetypal image of Arkay (Vegetation) buried in Mara’s womb (Earth), the structure – produced under the dictation of the unconscious, too – of the Temple of Mara located in the city of Riften in *Skyrim*: curiously, beneath the Temple consecrated to the Goddess of Love and Fertility where marriages are celebrated⁹⁰, there is the Riften Hall of the Dead consecrated to Arkay⁹¹. Riften is the only city in which the Hall of the Dead is not an autonomous structure, for it is set in a chthonic position – downstairs – as if buried in the “uterus” of the major Temple sacred to the Mother Goddess and Goddess of Love.

The terrible Namira, Goddess of Darkness

Arkay teaches: “Honor the earth, its creatures [...]. Guard and tend the bounties of the mortal world, and do not profane the spirits of the dead”⁹². Hence all those who cause the upsetting of the balance of which Arkay is guarantor are hostile to him: all those who practice Necromancy are sworn enemies of Arkay and of his ministers⁹³, and all the undead insult Arkay through their own existence⁹⁴.

But Arkay’s most harassing enemy is a female deity. She is the goddess⁹⁵ Namira, whose main epithets are “Great Darkness”⁹⁶ and “Lady of Decay”⁹⁷: “ruler of sundry dark and shadowy spirits”, she is “associated with spiders, insects, slugs, and other repulsive creatures which inspire mortals with an instinctive revulsion”; coherently with it, “diseases [...] were her domain”⁹⁸. Through these attributes, we may track in Namira the archetypal “Great Mother as Terrible Goddess of the earth [...] in which things rot [...] devourer of the dead bodies”⁹⁹. It is of no wonder that another epithet



of Namira is “Devourer of the Dead”¹⁰⁰: she embodies death in its consuming, eroding, putrefying aspect.

Namira is the central deity of a disturbing quest – playable in *Skyrim* – bearing the title of *The Taste of Death*¹⁰¹. The main character comes to know that the Markarth Hall of the Dead has been closed to the public, since some of the corpses resting there have been eaten by Eola, a cannibal and “an emissary of Namira”¹⁰². After having asked him to clear for her the Reachcliff Cave, sacred to the goddess, Eola offers the main character the opportunity to be initiated into the cannibalistic Coven of Namira. In order to become its adept, he shall do nothing but lead there by deceit Brother Verulus, Priest of Arkay, – whom the worshipers of Namira intend to feed on –, slay him and have the very first bite. If the main character completes this quest successfully¹⁰³, Namira’s voice resounds in the cave; “pleased by” the “consumption” of the “flesh of the dead”¹⁰⁴, she rewards him by giving him her Ring, which allows those who wear it to feast on the dead¹⁰⁵.

We set about proving that the deep hatred which Namira nourishes for Arkay – at the bottom of which her Coven’s members exclusively feed on the dead who receive arkayn funeral honours or on immolated Arkay’s priests – is based on a specific, archetypal agrarian framework. By availing ourselves again of the relation between the Child or Vegetation God and the Earth Mother Goddess, we believe it is possible to recognize in this quest the rejoining of God and Goddess from the “devouring” perspective of the Feminine.

The cannibals’ Coven identify and celebrate in Namira the archetypal Mother Goddess in her Terrible aspect, that “as avid womb [...] kills the phallus”¹⁰⁶, i.e. the dark, devouring Earth which engulfs Vegetation – the dying God Child’s body – during the

bad season. As we have already emphasized while dealing with Mara, if the archetypal Earth Mother Goddess “who generates life and all living things on earth is the same who takes them back into herself”¹⁰⁷, then she “is not one, she is dual”¹⁰⁸, since “she has two aspects”¹⁰⁹, one lovely and the other deadly. Whereas Mara represented especially the Mother as “dispenser of life [...] who daily fulfills the promise of redemption and resurrection of new life and new birth”¹¹⁰, Namira represents explicitly and exclusively, her counterpart, the “Terrible Mother [...] the hungry earth, which devours its own children and fattens on their corpses”¹¹¹. When the Child or Vegetation God makes his “return to the deadly Mother”¹¹², he experiences, from the opposite perspective, “a nightmare whose schema is the descent” in the form of “nefarious swallowing, mastication”¹¹³ by “the deadly devouring maw of the underworld, the devouring womb of the grave and of death”¹¹⁴.

Namira’s repugnant followers emulate their Lady as “Devourer of the Dead”¹¹⁵, projection of the archetypal “anthropophaga”¹¹⁶ Terrible Mother, who feasts on “corpses [...] the food she likes best”¹¹⁷. Their victims – the buried and Arkay’s ministers – incarnate the same Arkay: a proof of this is Namira’s exclamation at the closing of the quest, pleased of “the consumption of the blood [...] of Arkay’s own”¹¹⁸ by the main character. We believe it is not a case – although not only Namira’s quest takes place in a chthonic site – that the main character’s initiation to cannibalism occurs just at Reachcliff, a cave, “archetype of maternal uterus”¹¹⁹. To sum up, we believe that *The Taste of Death*, a quest aimed to gash the god Arkay, dramatizes the death of the Child God (Vegetation) as his fate of being swallowed by the ravenous Mother Goddess (Earth) during the bad season.



The *lapsus linguae* of Hil the Tall as revealing figure

We would like to close our analysis by dealing with a mysterious mistake committed by *TES* authors in an *Oblivion* dialogue. In particular, we are referring to the first words which Hil the Tall, “a priest at Cheydinhal’s Chapel of Arkay”¹²⁰ addresses the main character. He starts off exclaiming: “Praise Arkay, and all her little woodland creatures!”¹²¹, using the feminine possessive adjective “her”. Pursuant to all other sources (dialogic, bibliographic, iconographic, quest-related) we possess about Arkay, there is not even remotely an uncertainty about his male gender¹²². So what makes Hil refer to Arkay as feminine? There are two possible explanations¹²³.

The former – based on the by now well-founded relation identifiable between Mara and Arkay – is that Hil, with the adjective “her”, is indeed referring to Mara as Earth Mother Goddess: so he would state that we must first of all praise “Arkay” (Vegetation) as Mara’s Child, and secondly we must praise all “her” (Mara’s) other “woodland” (vegetal) creatures. This interpretation would seem in tune with the *incipit* of Arkay’s command in the volume *The Ten Commands of the Nine Divines*: “Honor the earth, its creatures...”¹²⁴, i.e. Mara and all her children, whereof Arkay itself is the model.

The latter is that Hil – and, behind him, *TES* authors – has been subject to a veritable *lapsus linguae*, whereof the complex archetypal structures lying in the recesses of collective unconscious are always responsible. In fact, the Child or Vegetation God “partakes two natures: masculine and feminine”¹²⁵, inasmuch masculine principle *differentiating itself* from the Feminine yet *not yet wholly* independent from it:

The feminine element in the androgynous son-lover [...] originates on a deeper level where the Great Mother is still dominant and masculinity is not yet firmly established, [...] masculinity has not so far achieved any independence at all¹²⁶.

According to this hypothesis, Hil would be actually referring to the god Arkay, although he is using a feminine possessive adjective; it is evident that the “woodland creatures” might belong to Arkay, because the entire vegetal life is nothing but a manifestation of the Vegetation God.

We have chosen to identify a fertile archetype, which has left visible traces in the mythological literature afferent to proto-historic Eurasian polytheisms, in a divine subject conceived *ad hoc* for a RPG cultural microcosmos. This analysis has revealed itself to be more arduous, yet more satisfying in respect to other paths we could have taken in the field of videoludic mythology, such as for instance a study concerning the presence of gods and myths literally “borrowed” – with their own traditional names and features – by Video Games¹²⁷. In the case we have selected – as in other RPGs – myths and gods have been instead created *ex novo*, through the reorganization and the recombination of the same archetypal material.

Bibliography

Baring, Anne et Cashford, Jules, *The Myth of the Goddess. Evolution of an Image*, Londres, Penguin, 1993.

Barton, Matt, *Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, Wellesley, Peters, 2008.



- Brown Nephew, Michelle A., *Enter the Viking: Thirteen Earthshattering Encounters*, Roseville, Atlas Games, 2002.
- Cauvin, Jacques, *Naissance des divinités, naissance de l'agriculture. La Révolution des symboles au Néolithique*, Paris, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1997.
- Chevalier, Jean et Gheerbrant, Alain, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, Laffont, 1969, 4 Vol.
- Durand, Gilbert, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris, Dunod, 1992.
- Ebeling, Erich, "Damu", in Ebeling, Erich et Meissner, Bruno (dir.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1997, Vol. II, p. 115-116.
- Ebeling, Erich et Meissner, Bruno (dir.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1997, 16 Vol.
- Eisler, Riane, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1987.
- Eliade, Mircea, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, Payot, 1949.
- Frazer, James G., *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, Ware, Wordsworth Edition, 1993.
- Gimbutas, Marija, "Pre-Indo-European Goddesses in Baltic Mythology", in *The Mankind Quarterly*, no. 26, 1985, p. 19-25.
- Gordon Childe, Vere, *Man Makes Himself*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 2003.
- Gygax, Gary et Arneson, Dave, *Dungeons and Dragons (3-Volume Set)*, New York, TSR, 1974, 3 Vol.
- Harding, M. Esther, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*, Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1971.
- Harrigan, Pat et Wardrip-Fruin, Noah (dir.), *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, Cambridge-Londres, MIT, 2007.
- Hauser, Arnold, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, Munich, Beck, 1990.
- Heliö, Satu, "Role-Playing: A Narrative Experience and a Mindset", in Montola, Markus et Stenros, Jaakko (dir.), *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, Vantaa, Ropecon, 2004, p. 65-74.
- Hodgson, David S. J. et Stratton, Steve, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. Prima Official Game Guide*, Roseville, Prima Games, 2011.
- Jacobsen, Thorkild, "Towards the Image of Tammuz", in *History of Religions*, no. 1, 1962, p. 189-213.
- Jung, Carl G., *Symbole der Wandlung. Analyse des Vorspiels zu einer Schizophrenie*, Olte-Fribourg, Walter-Verlag, 1973.
- King, Brad et Borland, John, *Dungeons and Dreamers: The Rise of Computer Game Culture from Geek to Chic*, Emeryville, McGraw-Hill/ Osborne, 2003.
- Liotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Mettinger, Tryggve N. D., *The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001.
- Mona, Erik, "From the Basement to the Basic Set: The Early Years of *Dungeons and Dragons*", in Harrigan, Pat et Wardrip-Fruin, Noah (dir.), *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, Cambridge-Londres, MIT, 2007, p. 25-30.
- Montola, Markus et Stenros, Jaakko (dir.), *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, Vantaa, Ropecon, 2004.
- Murray, Janet, "From Game-Story to Cyberdrama", in Wardrip-Fruin, Noah et Harrigan, Pat (dir.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Cambridge-Londres, MIT, 2006, p. 2-11.
- Neumann, Erich, *The Great Mother: An*



Analysis of the Archetype, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974.

———, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995.

Olafson, Peter, *The Morrowind Prophecies. Official Guide to The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, Rockville, Bethesda Softworks, 2002.

———, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Official Game Guide*, Roseville, Prima Games, 2006.

Pisan, Yusuf (dir.), *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*, Sydney, Creativity and Cognition Studios Press, 2005.

Punday, Daniel, "Creative Accounting: Role-Playing Games, Possible World-Theory, and the Agency of Imagination", in *Poetics Today*, no. 26, 2005, p. 113-139.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, "From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative", in *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, no. 1, 2009, p. 43-59.

Scarpi, Paolo, *Le Religioni dei misteri*, Milan, Fondazione Valla, Mondadori, 2003, 2 Voll.

Tresca, Michael J., *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2011.

Tychsen, Anders, et alii, "The Game Master", in Pisan, Yusuf (dir.), *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*, Sydney, Creativity and Cognition Studios Press, 2005, p. 215-222.

Vesa, Ileana, "The Future of Narrative Between Folk-Tales and Video Games", in *Caietele Echinox*, no. 20, 2011, p. 247-261.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah et Harrigan, Pat (dir.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Cambridge-London, MIT, 2006.

Wartow, Ronald, *The Daggerfall Chronicles*, Rockville, Bethesda Softworks, 1996.

Sitography

www.elderscrolls.wikia.com/wiki/Namira.

www.imperial-library.info/content/aedra-and-daedra.

www.imperial-library.info/content/arkay-enemy.

www.imperial-library.info/content/arkay-god.

www.imperial-library.info/content/beggar-prince.

www.imperial-library.info/content/black-arts-trial.

www.imperial-library.info/content/monomyth.

www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines.

www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-arkay.

www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-julianos.

www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-kynareth.

www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-mara.

www.imperial-library.info/content/oblivion.

www.imperial-library.info/content/opusculus-lamae-bal-ta-mezzamortie.

www.imperial-library.info/content/pocket-guide-empire-third-edition-arena-supermundus-tapestry-heaven.

www.imperial-library.info/content/ten-commands-nine-divines.

www.imperial-library.info/content/varieties-faith-empire.

www.imperial-library.info/content/words-clan-mother-ahnissi-her-favored-daughter.

www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Hil_the_Tall.

www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Priest_of_Arkay.

www.uesp.net/wiki/Online:The_Illusion_of_Death.

www.uesp.net/wiki/Skyrim:The_Taste_of_Death.



Notes

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 77: “Modernity [...] cannot exist [...] without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities”.

² Ileana Vesa, “The Future of Narrative Between Folk-Tales and Video Games”, in *Caietele Echinox*, no. 20, 2011, p. 252.

³ Michael J. Tresca, *The Evolution of Fantasy Role-Playing Games*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2011, p. 205.

⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 59 ff.

⁵ The Game Master (formerly known as “Dungeon Master”) is “a narrator and referee who keeps the story going and ensures that the rules are properly followed” (Matt Barton, *Dungeons and Desktops: The History of Computer Role-Playing Games*, Wellesley, Peters, 2008, p. 19). See Tresca, *The Evolution*, p. 74-75; Anders Tychsen et alii, “The Game Master”, in Yusuf Pisan (dir.), *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*, Sydney, Creativity and Cognition Studios Press, 2005, p. 215-222.

⁶ Tresca, *The Evolution*, p. 8.

⁷ Satu Heliö, “Role-Playing: A Narrative Experience and a Mindset”, in Markus Montola et Jaakko Stenros (dir.), *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, Vantaa, Ropecon, 2004, p. 69: “Role-playing game is a specific type of game with strong narrative aspirations, which implicate telling stories and creating narrative experiences out of games [...] verbalizing, and thus narrativising the experience [...] feeling a story emerging during the game”. For the complex relation between narrative and Video

Games, see Janet Murray, “From Game-Story to Cyberdrama”, in Noah Wardrip-Fruin et Pat Harrigan (dir.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Cambridge-Londres, MIT, 2006, p. 2-11; Daniel Punday, “Creative Accounting: Role-Playing Games, Possible World-Theory, and the Agency of Imagination”, in *Poetics Today*, no. 26, 2005, p. 113-139.

⁸ See Gary Gygax et Dave Arneson, *Dungeons and Dragons (3-Volume Set)*, New York, TSR, 1974, 3 Vol.

⁹ Erik Mona, “From the Basement to the Basic Set: The Early Years of *Dungeons and Dragons*”, in Pat Harrigan et Noah Wardrip-Fruin (dir.), *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, Cambridge-Londres, MIT, 2007, p. 25.

¹⁰ Barton, *Dungeons*, p. 5.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 17 ff.; Tresca, *The Evolution*, p. 23 ff.

¹² Tresca, *The Evolution*, p. 134.

¹³ However, the Miniature Wargame *Chainmail* (1971) – created by Gygax himself – had already established the conventions and standards for *D&D*. See Barton, *Dungeons*, p. 15-17.

¹⁴ See Tychsen et alii, “The Game Master”, p. 219.

¹⁵ Marie-Laure Ryan, “From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative”, in *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, no. 1, 2009, p. 43. In this way, it abandons the roots of RPG as “an inherently social [...] phenomenon” (Barton, *Dungeons*, p. 427). The more recent Massively Multiplayer RPGs Games represent instead a return to this convention. See *ibid.*, p. 431 ff.

¹⁶ Tresca, *The Evolution*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Brad King et John Borland, *Dungeons and Dreamers: The Rise of Computer Game Culture from Geek to Chic*, Emeryville, McGraw-Hill/ Osborne, 2003, p. 187.



- ¹⁸ See Barton, *Dungeons*, p. 59 ff.
- ¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 70 ff.
- ²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 87 ff.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- ²² Barton, *Dungeons*, p. 299.
- ²³ See Vere Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 2003, p. 66 ff.
- ²⁴ Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1987, p. 10.
- ²⁵ Arnold Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, Munich, Beck, 1990, p. 10.
- ²⁶ Jacques Cauvin, *Naissance des divinités, naissance de l'agriculture. La Révolution des symboles au Néolithique*, Paris, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1997, p. 54
- ²⁷ Anne Baring et Jules Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess. Evolution of an Image*, London, Penguin, 1993, p. 40.
- ²⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, Payot, 1949, p. 211.
- ²⁹ Baring et Cashford, *The Myth*, p. 48.
- ³⁰ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, Ware, Wordsworth Edition, 1993, p. 337.
- ³¹ See Paolo Scarpì, *Le Religioni dei misteri*, Milan, Fondazione Valla, Mondadori, 2003, 2 Vol.
- ³² Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris, Dunod, 1992, p. 351.
- ³³ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 147.
- ³⁴ M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*, Boston, Shambhala Publications, 1971, p. 192.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 148.
- ³⁷ Carl G. Jung, *Symbole der Wandlung. Analyse des Vorspiels zu einer Schizophrenie*, Olte-Fribourg, Walter-Verlag, 1973, p. 302.
- ³⁸ Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 17.
- ³⁹ Durand, *Les Structures*, p. 343-344.
- ⁴⁰ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 325.
- ⁴¹ Eisler, *The Chalice*, p. 23.
- ⁴² Neumann, *The Origins*, p. 47-50.
- ⁴³ See *infra*, note 34.
- ⁴⁴ See Peter Olafson, *The Morrowind Prophecies. Official Guide to The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, Rockville, Bethesda Softworks, 2002, p. 229; www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines. The Nine Divines belong in turn to the Aedra, a class of supernatural beings in *TES* Lore. The other class of supernatural beings is that of the Daedra. See *infra*, note 95; www.imperial-library.info/content/aedra-and-daedra.
- ⁴⁵ Tamriel is one of planet (or "plane") Nirn's continents and it is the place in which the *TES* events take place. See www.imperial-library.info/content/pocket-guide-empire-third-edition-arena-supermundus-tapestry-heaven.
- ⁴⁶ As we can read in the volume *Varieties of Faith in the Empire*, Arkay is also venerated in the Bosmer, Breton, Imperial and Redguard or Yokuda races' pantheons. In the latter, he is known under the name of Tu'whacca and, as well as in the canonical cult, he is assigned tasks related to mortuary sphere: as "god of souls", he has "to help Redguards find their way into the afterlife" (www.imperial-library.info/content/varieties-faith-empire).
- ⁴⁷ www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-arkay. In the *explicit* of a fragmentary volume, *The Illusion of Death*, the Cycle of Birth and Death is defined in turn – through a *metaphora in absentia* – "Arkayn Cycle" (www.uesp.net/wiki/Online:The_Illusion_of_Death).
- ⁴⁸ Durand, *Les Structures*, p. 339.



⁴⁹ www.imperial-library.info/content/varieties-faith-empire.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² As we can read in the volume *The Monomyth*, after the beginning of Time Arkay and other gods crystallized “as beings with a past and a future” (www.imperial-library.info/content/monomyth).

⁵³ www.imperial-library.info/content/varieties-faith-empire.

⁵⁴ Eliade, *Traité*, p. 297-299.

⁵⁵ More precisely, a Hall of the Dead can be found in six cities located in the Nordic region of Skyrim, setting of the fifth and, for now, last episode of *TES* series. These cities are: Markarth, Riften, Solitude, Windhelm and Whiterun. See David S. J. Hodgson et Steve Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim. Prima Official Game Guide*, Roseville, Prima Games, 2011, p. 420, p. 504, p. 531, p. 551, p. 575, p. 598.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁹ For instance, Asclepius, the name of Phoenician Eshmun in Greek tradition, “instructed [...] in the art of nursing diseases, made so much progress that became able to revive the dead” (Jean Chevalier et Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, Laffont, 1969, Vol. IV, p. 90). Concerning another Phoenician, Baal – between whom and Eshmun “some scholars have drawn a [...] line of continuity” – is has been argued that his “position as healer/saviour” is “a result of his *descensus* to the Netherworld” and of having “experienced the vicissitudes of death” (Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: Dying and Rising Gods in the Ancient Near East*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001, p. 74-76, p. 164). Finally,

Damu, a Sumerian deity who represents one of the “four different aspects” of the Vegetation God Dumuzi/ Tammuz, is depicted as a healer who “binds the torn ligaments” (Thorkild Jacobsen, “Towards the Image of Tammuz”, in *History of Religions*, no. 1, 1962, p. 190; Erich Ebeling, “Damu”, in Erich Ebeling et Bruno Meissner (dir.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1997, Vol. II, p. 115).

⁶⁰ See Ronald Wartow, *The Daggerfall Chronicles*, Rockville, Bethesda Softworks, 1996, p. 11, p. 90.

⁶¹ www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-arkay.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Scarpi, *Le Religioni*, Vol. I, p. XXXVI.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. XLI.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. XXI.

⁶⁶ www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-arkay.

⁶⁷ The member of the Nine Divines explicitly bound to the knowledge sphere, whose “temples are called Schools”, is Julianos, “God of Widsom and Logic” (www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-julianos).

⁶⁸ www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-mara: “Our priests and priestesses study the greatness of Mara [...] and have learned much. So there is much to share with our initiates who are judged to be true to Mara’s calling”. As regards Julianos, there is instead no reference to the secrecy of the knowledge he holds, which is merely “learning, logic, philosophy” (www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-julianos).

⁶⁹ This is not always true, but at least in *Oblivion* it seems to be a trait which distinguishes the priests of Arkay. See, for example, www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion: Priest_of_Arkay.



⁷⁰ Chevalier et Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire*, Vol. IV, p. 376.

⁷¹ They both appear in Oblivion. See Peter Olafson, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Official Game Guide*, Roseville, Prima Games, 2006, p. 343, p. 359.

⁷² The circle can also be found in his Temple's emblems (in *Daggerfall*) and in his Shrine's shape (in *Skyrim*). See Wartow, *The Daggerfall Chronicles*, p. 11; Hodgson et Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V*, p. 36.

⁷³ Chevalier et Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire*, Vol. I, p. 184.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 328.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 376.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 127.

⁷⁷ This volume is available in *Daggerfall*. See www.imperial-library.info/content/arkay-god. All quotations from this volume are taken from this source.

⁷⁸ In *TES religious corpus*, the volume *Arkay the God* exposes a first evemeristic theory about Arkay, according to which he would have once been an extraordinary individual. A second theory, according to which he would have always been a god, can be found in the volume *The Monomyth*: here we read the name of Arkay among those of the gods who took form when Time began. See *infra*, note 52.

⁷⁹ Mara is another one of the Nine Divines. See www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-mara. Her name reminds us that of a female Baltic deity (Māra), which reproduces the typical traits of the archetypal Mother Goddess. See Marija Gimbutas, "Pre-Indo-European Goddesses in Baltic Mythology", in *The Mankind Quarterly*, no. 26, 1985, p. 21.

⁸⁰ www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-mara.

⁸¹ The goddess Mara should also be Arkay's actual mother: it can be deduced from the

volume *Varieties of Faith in the Empire*, according to which Arkay is god Akatosh's son, to whom Mara, "depending on the religion, [...] is either married [...] or the concubine" (www.imperial-library.info/content/varieties-faith-empire).

Therefore, there would be a good reason why Arkay addresses her as "mother" more than once: both for reverence and for bloodline.

⁸² Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 146.

⁸³ www.imperial-library.info/content/arkay-god: "There are far more souls in the Universe than there is room for in the physical world. [...] Without death there would be no room for birth".

⁸⁴ Scarpi, *Le Religioni*, Vol. I, p. XIV.

⁸⁵ Mettinger, *The Riddle*, p. 182.

⁸⁶ Eisler, *The Chalice*, p. 20.

⁸⁷ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 146.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ As Goddess of Love, Mara oversees matrimonial unions, as witnessed by *The Bonds of Matrimony*, a *Skyrim* quest. See Hodgson et Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V*, p. 336-338. Automatically, Mara oversees family too, as witnessed by her command in the volume *The Ten Commands of the Nine Divines*, available in *Oblivion*. www.imperial-library.info/content/ten-commands-nine-divines: "Live soberly and peacefully. Honor your parents, and preserve the peace and security of home and family».

⁹¹ See Hodgson et Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V*, p. 598.

⁹² www.imperial-library.info/content/ten-commands-nine-divines.

⁹³ See Olafson, *The Elder Scrolls IV*, p. 41; www.imperial-library.info/content/black-arts-trial; www.imperial-library.info/content/arkay-enemy.

⁹⁴ See Olafson, *The Elder Scrolls IV*, p. 42;



www.imperial-library.info/content/opusculus-lamae-bal-ta-mezzamortie.

⁹⁵ As all Daedric gods, she is indeed called “Lord” or “Prince”, though her gender is undoubtedly female – while other Daedra Lords have no fixed gender. See www.imperial-library.info/content/oblivion.

⁹⁶ www.imperial-library.info/content/words-clan-mother-ahnissi-her-favored-daughter.

⁹⁷ Hodgson et Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V*, p. 293.

⁹⁸ www.imperial-library.info/content/beggar-prince.

⁹⁹ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 162.

¹⁰⁰ www.elderscrolls.wikia.com/wiki/Namira.

¹⁰¹ See Hodgson et Stratton, *The Elder Scrolls V*, p. 312-313.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁰³ In different moments of this quest, the player can decide to take Arkay’s side, killing Eola and rescuing Verulus, who rewards him with his own Amulet or an amount of money (*ibid.*, p. 312-313).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ Harding, *Woman’s Mysteries*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Neumann, *The Origins*, p. 40.

¹¹¹ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 149.

¹¹² Neumann, *The Origins*, p. 44.

¹¹³ Durand, *Les Structures*, p. 132.

¹¹⁴ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 149.

¹¹⁵ See *infra*, note 100.

¹¹⁶ Jung, *Symbole der Wandlung*, p. 318.

¹¹⁷ Neumann, *The Origins*, p. 54.

¹¹⁸ www.uesp.net/wiki/Skyrim:The_Taste_of_Death.

¹¹⁹ Chevalier et Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire*, Vol. I, p. 285.

¹²⁰ Olafson, *The Elder Scrolls IV*, p. 225.

¹²¹ www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Hil_the_Tall.

¹²² We cannot assert the same thing, for instance, about some ambiguous Daedric Princes. See *infra*, note 95.

¹²³ We set aside the hypothesis according to which Hil “is likely referring to [...] Kynareth, since Arkay is not only male, but is also the god of funerals, not woodland creatures” (www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Hil_the_Tall). In our opinion, this is a weak and simplistic theory. In fact, Kynareth – another one of the Nine Divines – is “Goddess of Air [...], of the heavens, the winds, the elements, and the unseen spirits of the air” (www.imperial-library.info/content/nine-divines-kynareth): therefore, she is endowed with celestial-ethereal attributes and lacking in telluric-agrarian (woodland) ones. But above all, our *excursus* proves that “funerals” (Arkay’s domain) and “woodland creatures” are archetypally contiguous to each other: by virtue of the agrarian cycle, “it occurs very frequently that a telluric-vegetal fertility deity becomes also a funerary deity” (see *infra*, note 54).

¹²⁴ See *infra*, note 92.

¹²⁵ Durand, *Les Structures*, p. 344.

¹²⁶ Neumann, *The Origins*, p. 157.

¹²⁷ A highly representative example is the third-person action Video Game *Rune* (later, it also inspired a RPG), in whose plot gods and events taken from Norse mythology appear. See, for example, Michelle A. Brown Nephew, *Enter the Viking: Thirteen Earth-shattering Encounters*, Roseville, Atlas Games, 2002.