Call for articles for a special issue of the journal *Civilisations* (2017)

Alcohol use in rituals and ethnographers.
The religious uses of alcohol

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Abstract:
This special issue will deal with two aspects of ritualistic alcohol use. The articles will not focus on certain areas and will not only address the religious framework of alcohol use, intoxication, and symbolism, but also the methodological approach and the place of the ethnographer on the fieldwork. The first aspect deals with the drinks and with the “drinking” in their symbolic and social functions as observed by various researchers with field experience. The second aspect deals with both the study of postures and the gathering of data in a reflexive approach on ritualistic alcohol use.

Key-words:
Alcohol, ritual, representation, ethnography, methodology

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Following issues of Terrain (1989) and Socio-anthropologie (2004) dedicated to the “drinking”, this special issue will deal with two aspects of ritualistic alcohol use. The articles will not focus on certain areas and will not only address the religious framework of alcohol use, intoxication, and symbolism, but also the methodological approach and the place of the ethnographer on the fieldwork.

The first aspect deals with the drinks and with the “drinking” in their symbolic and social functions as observed by various researchers with field experience. It mobilizes methodological tools used in ethnography. Alcohol is here considered as a “sociability” that distances itself from the field of pathology (Douglas; Fabre-Vassas; Fainzang). Thus, alcohol used as an offering is placed, sprayed and/or consumed in variable amounts; it is a requirement to the ritualistic efficacy of the rituals and to the commensality. Concerning the “drinking”, it represents a codified use, a mean to protect the ritualistic practices and the use of alcohol, but also a form of sociability. In this issue, the uses of alcohol are to be understood as religious and festive, as ceremonial and ritualistic, with the drinking being used during sacred and/or profane times of the religious context. The use of alcohol analyzed by the authors can refer to that of the religious officiants (shamans, healers-soothsayers, possessed, etc.), but also of certain specific populations (groups of men, women, young people, etc.), or even of the observers of the ongoing ritual (participants, public, ethnographers, etc.). The ritualistic and symbolic functions of libations and alcohol use, as well as their social uses, have to be studied for each ethnography. The will to consider alcohol in a ritualistic space and time is what gives it its meaning (Fabre-Vassas, 1989). As did Mary Douglas (1987) and Claudine Fabre-Vassas (1989), we raise the question of the symbolic efficacy of alcohol use, whose use during rituals is not considered as pathological.
The second aspect deals with both the study of postures and the gathering of data in a reflexive approach on ritualistic alcohol use. Indeed, the observer (participant or not) can identify and measure the use of alcohol, and the intoxication that can result from it, without the participants noticing. We therefore question the definitions of alcohol intoxication regarding, for instance, variable social codes in relation to the “drinking”. How to apprehend this issue in a context of ethnological detachment? How does the ethnographer deal with the invitation to take part in the drinking? De facto, the issues raised here to an anthropological reflection on the drinking.

Proposals for contributions based on fieldwork research are all welcome (in English or in French). They should be no longer than 400 words, and should be addressed to Delphine Burguet (burguet.delphine@gmail.com), Olivia Legrip-Randriambelo (olivia.legrip@hotmail.fr) and to the office of the journal Civilisations (civilisations@ulb.ac.be) before February 1st, 2016. Authors will be contacted in March and informed whether their proposal was accepted or not. If it has been accepted, they will have to provide their contribution in June, for peer-reviewing.

Civilisations is a peer-reviewed journal of anthropology. Published continuously since 1951, it features articles in French and English in the various fields of anthropology, without regional or time limitations. Revived in 2002 with a new editorial board and a new subtitle (Revue internationale d'anthropologie et de sciences humaines), Civilisations particularly encourage the submission of articles where anthropological approaches meet other social sciences, to better tackle processes of society making.

References


