

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: The Great God Awto

Date of first publication: 1940

Author: Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961)

Date first posted: June 21 2012

Date last updated: June 21 2012

Faded Page eBook #20120633

This eBook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Mary Meehan & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE GREAT GOD AWTO

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Class-room lecture given by the Most Honorable Erru Saggus, Professor of Hamurriquanean Archaeology at the World-University of Toshtush, on the 365th day of the year 5998.

Professor Saggus Turns Back
the Clock and Watches the
Wheels of Progress Grind Fine!

Males, females, androgynes and neuters of the class in archaeology, you have learned, from my previous lectures, all that is known or inferred concerning the crudely realistic art and literature of the ancient Hamurriquanes. With some difficulty, owing to the fragmentary nature of the extant remains, I have reconstructed for you their bizarre and hideous buildings, their rude mechanisms.

Also, you are now familiar with the unimaginably clumsy, corrupt and inefficient legal and economic systems that prevailed among them, together with the garblings of crass superstition and scant knowledge that bore the sacred names of the sciences. You have listened, not without amusement, to my account of their ridiculous amatory and social customs, and have heard with horror the unutterable tale of their addiction to all manner of violent crimes.

Today I shall speak regarding a matter that throws into even grosser relief the low-grade barbarism, the downright savagery, of this bloody and besotted people.

Needless to say, my lecture will concern their well nigh universal cult of human sacrifice and self-immolation to the god Awto: a cult which many of my confreres have tried to associate with the worship of the Heendouan deity, Yokkurnudd, or Jukkernot. In this cult, the wild religious fanaticism of the Hamurriquanes, together with the national blood-lust for which they were notorious, found its most congenial and spacious outlet.

If we grant the much-disputed relationship between Awto and Yokkurnudd, it seems plain that the latter god was an extremely mild and refined variation of Awto, worshipped by a gentler and more advanced people. The rites done to Yokkurnudd were localized and occasional while the sacrifices required by Awto took place at all hours on every street and highway.

However, in the face of certain respected authorities, I am inclined to doubt if the two religions had much in common. Certainly nothing apart from the ritual usage of crushing the sacrificial victims under the wheels of ponderous earth-vehicles, such as you have seen in our museums among the exhumed relics of antiquity.

It is my fond hope that I shall eventually find evidence to confirm this doubt, and thus vindicate the Heendouans of the blackest charge that legend and archaeology have brought against them. I shall have made a worthy contribution to science if I can show that they were among the few ancient peoples who were never tainted by the diabolic cult of Awto originating in Hamurriqua.

Because of a religion so barbarous, it has sometimes been argued that the Hamurriquanean culture—if one can term it such—must have flourished at an earlier period in man's development than the Heendouan. However, in dealing with a realm of research that borders upon prehistory, such relative chronology can be left to theorists.

Excepting, of course, in our own superior modern civilization, human progress has been slow and uncertain, with many intercalated Dark Ages, many reversions to partial or total savagery. I believe that the Hamurriquanean epoch, whether prior to that of the Heendouans or contemporary with it, can well be classified as one of these Dark Ages.

To return to my main theme, the cult of Awto. It is doubtless well known to you that in recent years certain irresponsible so-called archaeologists, misled by a desire to create sensation at the cost of truth, have fathered the fantastic thesis that

there never was any such god as Awto. They believe, or profess to believe, that the immolatory vehicles of the ancients, and the huge destruction of life and limb caused by their use, were quite without religious significance.

A premise so absurd could be maintained only by madmen or charlatans. I mention it merely that I may refute and dismiss it with all the contempt that it deserves.

Of course, I cannot deny the dubiousness of some of our archaeological deductions. Great difficulties have attended our researches in the continent-embracing deserts of Hamurriqua, where all food-supplies and water must be transported for thousands of miles.

The buildings and writings of the ancients, often made of the most ephemeral materials, lie deep in ever-drifting sands that no human foot has trod for millenniums. Therefore, it is small wonder that guesswork must sometimes fill the gaps of precise knowledge.

I can safely say, however, that few of our deductions are so completely proven, so solidly based, as those relating to the Awto cult. The evidence, though largely circumstantial, is overwhelming.

Like most religions, it would seem that this cult was obscure and shadowy in its origin. Legend and history have both lost the name of the first promulgator. The earliest cars of immolation were slow and clumsy, and the rite of sacrifice was perhaps rarely and furtively practised in the beginning. There is no doubt, too, that the intended victims often escaped. Awto, at first, can hardly have inspired the universal fear and reverence of later epochs.

Certain scraps of Hamurriquanean printing, miraculously preserved in air-tight vaults and deciphered before they could crumble, have given us the names of two early prophets of Awto, Anriford and Dhodzh. These amassed fortunes from the credulity of their benighted followers. It was under the influence of these prophets that the dark and baleful religion spread by leaps and bounds, until no Hamurriquanean street or highway was safe from the thunderously rolling wheels of the sacrificial cars.

It is doubtful whether Awto, like most other savage and primordial deities, was ever represented by graven images. At least, no such images have been recovered in all our delvings. However, the rusty remains of the iron-built temples of Awto, called *grahges*, have been exhumed everywhere in immense numbers.

Strange vessels and metal implements of mysterious hieratic use have been found in the *grahges*, together with traces of oils by which the sacred vehicles were anointed, and the vehicles lie buried in far-spread, colossal scrapheaps. All this, however, throws little light on the deity himself.

It is probable that Awto, sometimes known as Mhotawr, was simply an abstract principle of death and destruction and was believed to manifest himself through the homicidal speed and fury of the fatal machines. His demented devotees flung themselves before these vehicles as before the embodiment of the god.

The power and influence of Awto's priesthood, as well as its numbers, must have been well nigh beyond estimation. The priesthood, it would seem, was divided into at least three orders:

The *mekniks*, or keepers of the *grahges*. The *shophurs*, who drove the sacred vehicles. And an order—whose special name has been lost—that served as guardians of innumerable wayside shrines. It was at these shrines where a mineral liquid called *ghas*, used in the fuelling of the vehicles, was dispensed from crude and curious pumping mechanisms.

Several well preserved mummies of *mekniks*, in sacerdotal raiment blackened by the sacred oils, have been recovered from *grahges* in the central Hamurriquanean deserts, where they were apparently buried by sudden sandstorms.

Chemical analysis of the oiled garments has so far failed to confirm a certain legendary belief current among the degenerate bushmen who form the scant remnant of Hamurriqua's teeming myriads. I refer to a belief that the oils used in anointing those ancient cars were often mixed with unctuous matters obtained from the bodies of their victims.

However, a usage so barbarous would have conformed well enough with the principles of the hideous cult. Further research may establish the old legend as a truth.

From the evidence we have unearthed, it is plain that the cult assumed enormous power and wide-spread proportions within a few decades of its inception. The awful apex was reached in little more than a century. In my opinion, it is no coincidence that the whole period of the Awto cult corresponded very closely with Hamurriqua's decline and ultimate downfall.

Some will consider my statements too definite, and will ask for the evidence above mentioned. In answer, I need only point to the condition of those skeletons exhumed by thousands from tombs and vaults dated according to the Hamurriquanean chronology.

Throughout the time-period we have assigned to the Awto cult there is a steady, accelerative increase of bone-fractures, often of the most horribly complicated nature. Toward the end, when the fearful cult was at its height, we find few skeletons that do not show at least one or two minor, if not major, breakages.

The shattered condition of these skeletons, often decapitated or wholly disarticulated, is almost beyond belief.

The rusty remains of the ancient vehicles bear similar witness. Built with an eye to ever greater speed and deadliness, they fall into types that show the ghastly growth and progress of the cult. The later types, found in prodigious numbers, are always more or less dented, broken, crumpled—often they are mere heaps of indescribably tangled wreckage.

Toward the end, it would seem that virtually the whole population must have belonged to the blood-mad priesthood. Going forth daily in the rituals of Awto, they must have turned their cars upon each other, hurtling together with the violence of projectiles. A universal mania for speed went hand in hand with a mania for homicide and suicide.

Picture, if you can, the ever-mounting horror of it all. The nation-wide madness of immolation. The carnivals of bloody holidays. The highways lined from coast to coast with crushed and dismembered sacrifices!

Can you wonder that this ancient people, their numbers decimated, their mentality sapped and bestialized by dire superstition, should have declined so rapidly? Should have fallen almost without a struggle before the hordes of the Orient?

Let history and archaeology draw the curtain. The moral is plain. But luckily, in our present state of high enlightenment, we have little need to fear the rise of any savage error such as that which attended the worship of Awto.

Obituary item broadcast from Toshtush on the 1st day of the year 5999:

We are sorry to record the sudden death of Professor Erru Saggus, who had just delivered the last of his series of lectures on Hamurriquanean Archaeology at the University of Toshtush.

Returning on the same afternoon to his home in the Himalayas, Professor Saggus was the victim of a most unfortunate accident. His stratosphere ship, one of the very newest and speediest models, collided within a few leagues of its destination with a ship driven by one Jar Ghoshtar, a chemistry student from the great College of Ustraleendia.

Both ships were annihilated by the impact, plunging earthward in a single flaming meteoric mass which ignited and destroyed an entire Himalayan village. Several hundred people are said to have burned to death in the resultant conflagration.

Such accidents are all too frequent nowadays, owing to the crowded condition of stratosphere traffic. We must deplore the recklessness of navigators who exceed the 950 mile speed limit. All who saw the recent accident bear witness that Erru Saggus and Jar Ghoshtar were both driving at a speed very much in excess of 1000 miles per hour.

While regretting this present-day mania for mere mileage, we cannot agree with certain ill-advised satirists who have tried to draw a parallel between the fatalities of modern traffic and the ancient rites of immolation to the god Awto.

Superstition is one thing, Science is another. Such archaeologists as Professor Saggus have proven to us that the worshippers of Awto were the victims of a dark and baleful error. It is unthinkable that such superstition will ever again prevail. With pride for our achievements, and full confidence in the future, we can number the Most Honorable Professor

[Transcriber's Note: Publication Information]

THRILLING WONDER STORIES
The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

Vol. XV NO. 2
February, 1940

THE GREAT GOD AWTO
By CLARK ASHTON SMITH 111