

Unil

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Conference of Culture, Psychopathology, and Education / Alzahra University,  
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## **Children's drawings of gods: An Intercultural Approach**

**Pierre-Yves Brandt**

# Drawings of Gods: A Multicultural and Interdisciplinary Approach of Children's Representations of Supernatural Agents

(Research project in progress / Grant : Swiss National Science Foundation n°CR11I1\_156383)

Currently, 6504 drawings

- Japan: 143 drawings collected in public and buddhist schools (2003-2004)
- Switzerland: 1028 drawings: 727 drawings in public schools and churches + 301 in « Mystères de l'Unil 2014 » (Open Days of Unil / children + adults)
- Russia: 753 drawings in public schools and orthodox parishes
- Romania: 394 drawings in public schools
- USA: 982 drawings (Kevin Ladd collection, 1987)
- Iran: 3'032 drawings collected in public and private schools
- Nepal: 13 drawings collected at home
- The Netherlands: 158 drawings collected in school and at home (download in progress)
- Brazil: 1 drawing (more than 200 drawings / download in progress)

<http://ddd.unil.ch> (Dandarova et al. 2016)

# Studying the representation of God with the technique of drawing

- Developmental aspect
- Religious representations studied in their cultural environment
- The task to draw god results in a complex object which combines cognitive aspects with graphic/space organisation and cultural codes
- Has certain similarities to the study of language (religion = symbolic system)

# Princeps study: Harms 1944

- USA
- 3-6 years (800 children) : « fairy tale » stage
- 7-12 years (800 children) : realistic stage
- 12-14 years ( > 4000 children) : individualistic stage

# The study of Hanisch 1996

- Germany
- 1471 children between 7 and 16 years old with religious education (Heidenheim, Western Germany) vs 1187 children between 7 and 16 years old without religious education (Leipzig, East Germany)
- Anthropomorphic representations (all ages):
  - 57,8% in Heidenheim (415 boys + 435 girls)
  - 87,5% in Leipzig (451 boys + 588 girls)

# Percentages of anthropomorphic representations per ages

Age	Heidenheim	Leipzig
7 years	93,2	96,2
8 years	83,8	92,5
9 years	89,7	95,2
10 years	70,3	91,9
11 years	61,1	89,7
12 years	54,4	97,1
13 years	51,8	84,6
14 years	38,2	79,4
15 years	33,1	73,5
16 years	21,1	76,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,8</b>	<b>87,5</b>

# Two factors revealed by this study

- The factor of age (developmental aspect)
- The factor of religious education
- The interaction between these two factors

Conclusion: anthropomorphic representations decrease with age and religious education

# Japanese children drawing Kami

(Brandt, Kagata, Gillieron, 2010)

- Pictures from children between 7-8 years, 10-11 years, 13-14 years
- Task : « When I say Kami (God), what can you imagine? Can you imagine something? If you can now, could you draw (it) ? »
- Part of a broader study

# Hypotheses

- Japan: Anthrop. repres. < Non anthrop. repres.
- Anthropomorphic representations :  
Buddhist schools > non Buddhist schools
- Proportion of anthropomorphic representations diminishes with age
- Masculine Kamis > feminine Kamis

# Population (Japan)

age	7-8 years (7.1-8.9)	10-11 years (10.1-11.9)	13-14 years (13.0-14.6)	total
<b>boys</b> <i>(Buddhist school)</i>	20	20	13	53
<b>boys</b> <i>(public or private school)</i>	9	10	10	29
<b>girls</b> <i>(Buddhist school)</i>	10	10	10	30
<b>girls</b> <i>(public or private school)</i>	10	10	10	30
<b>total</b>	49	50	43	142

Table: Number of subjects according to age, sex and school

# Type of Kami according to children ages (Japan)

Age	Type of Kami		
	Anthropomorphic	Non anthropomorphic	Total
7-8 years	45	4	49
10-11 years	47	3	50
13-14 years	31 [ <b>12</b> in Buddhist schools]	12 [ <b>11</b> in Buddhist schools]	43
<b>Total</b>	123	19	142

Chi 2 [2] = 11.33; p = 0.003

## Type of Kami according to children ages : Buddhist schools (Japan)

Age	Type of Kami		
	Anthropomorphic	Non anthropomorphic	Total
7-8 years	28	2	30
10-11 years	28	2	30
13-14 years	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	23
<b>Total</b>	68	15	83

Chi 2 = 19.024; ddl = 2; p = 0.000

## Percentages of boys and girls representing god as feminine

	Country/region	N	Boys %	Girls %
Hanisch (1996)	Germany	2658	1%	7%
Dessart et al. (unpublished)	Switzerland	329	0,6%	1,2%
Ladd, McIntosh & Spilka (1998)	USA	968	6.8 % of sample	
Brandt, Kagata Spitteler & Gillièron Paléologue (2009)	Japan	143	≈ 4%	<b>38%</b>
Dandarova (2013; unpublished)	Russia/Buryat	213	0,9%	<b>15,4%</b>
Dandarova et al. (unpublished)	Russia/Slavic	292	0%	2,6%

# Feminine representations of god by Buryat girls



ru08\_bo\_f\_rx\_11\_00\_na\_



ru08\_bo\_f\_rx\_11\_10\_el\_

# Feminine representations of god by Japanese girls



jp03\_to\_f\_pf\_07\_01\_ka\_

J'ai dessiné Dieu (Kami sama) gentil. Ce dieu (Kami sama) est très tendre. Mais elle est belle et très tendre.



jp03\_to\_f\_pf\_10\_06\_yu\_

Elle est dans le ciel, très gentille. C'est une fille avec des cheveux longs frisés, et qui porte un vêtement bleu et des chaussures bleues.



jp03\_to\_f\_pf\_13\_06\_sa\_

C'est Dieu au féminin aux cheveux blonds qui souhaite le bonheur, porte une robe décolleté froufrou de couleur bleu clair.

## A first main result: Four factors

- Cognitive development
  - Religious education
  - Cultural background
  - Child's sex
- 
- Inhibition effect of cultural background on the gender factor would not have been detected without intercultural study

# Content of the representation: cultural aspects

## Strategies used by children for representing supernatural agents

- reception of traditional representations typical for the culture in which the child is socialized
- intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures
- hybridization process
- using iconographic codes for representing supernatural agents available in the medias or in arts
- innovations beyond iconographic codes available in the social environment

# Reception of traditional representations typical for the culture in which the child is socialized

- E.g. in the short film
  - Bouddha in Japan or in Buryatia
  - A cross (with Jesus or not) in traditionaly Christian countries
  - etc
- and also in Iran...



ir14\_te\_f\_pr\_9\_04\_me

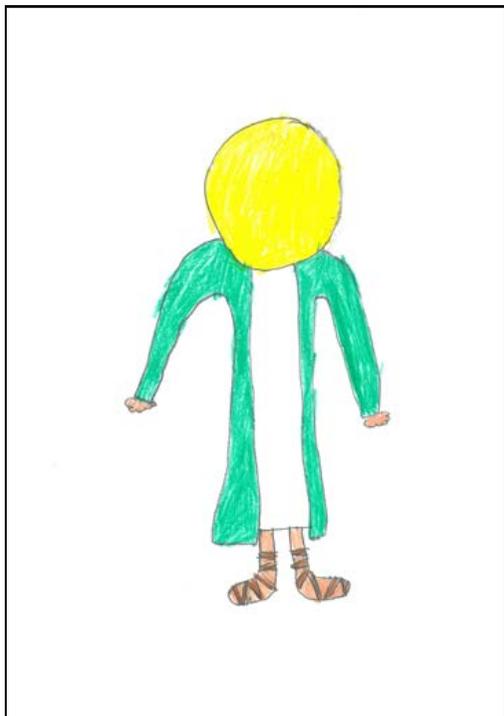
|

I drew God holding a shield to keep Imam Hossein and his family safe.



ir14\_te\_f\_ph\_9\_08\_naz

We could see God by his creatures.



ir14\_te\_f\_pr\_8\_09\_sar

I could draw Imam Hossein

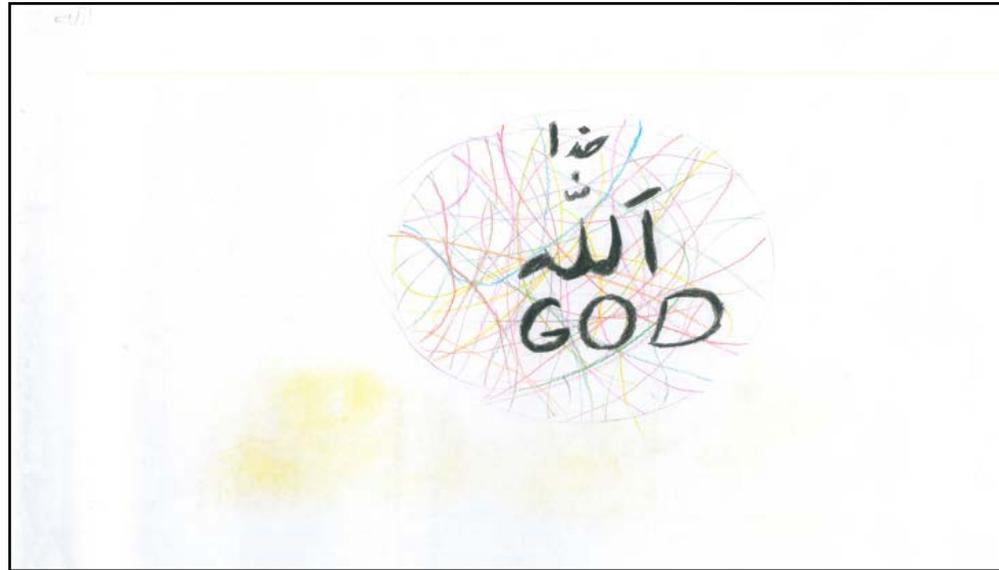


ir14\_te\_f\_pr\_9\_05\_san  
The Imam, Mosque the house of God



ir14\_te\_f\_pe\_8\_04\_han  
I drew the prophet

ir14\_te\_f\_ph\_10\_11\_sar  
I drew a picture that God did all of those and he is very beautiful and kind



ir14\_te\_m\_pl\_13\_02\_art

I drew different names of God

## Intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures

- Japanese child from a Buddhist school drawing Maria
- Swiss child drawing Lakshmi
- Russian children drawing Ancient Greek gods...

## Représentations traditionnelles provenant d'une culture étrangère



- Mary in Japan

- I drew Mary shining in a lot of light from the clouds. The sky is blue and beautiful. She sings in chorus

- jp04\_nr\_m\_rx\_10\_10\_ky

## Représentations traditionnelles provenant d'une culture étrangère



- Lakshmi in Switzerland

- Draw a Hindu lady who in her left hand has gold falling, adds two white elephants next to her, and she stands on a large lotus flower !

- ch09\_vd\_f\_pb\_12\_00

# Representations of ancient gods: Poseidon



ru08\_bo\_m\_rx\_10\_00\_s  
an :

« My drawing describes God and his assistant. He stands up and his assistant down. God has a crown. He has a powerful fire power. He holds a trident and below him there is a large ocean. »



ru08\_bo\_m\_rx\_10\_00  
\_bou :

« I drew god. God is above in the sky near the sun. He looks at the earth, he looks at us. »

[Trident]



ru09\_bo\_m\_px\_10\_0  
6\_se :

« This is Poseidon. He is the god of water. He is very angry against human beings and he has come out of the water. »



ru08\_bo\_m\_rx\_10\_07  
\_och :

« Poseidon walks on the sea. I drew God like Poseidon. Behind him there is the coast, with a fortress a little further on. The birds fly away, the sun is radiant. »

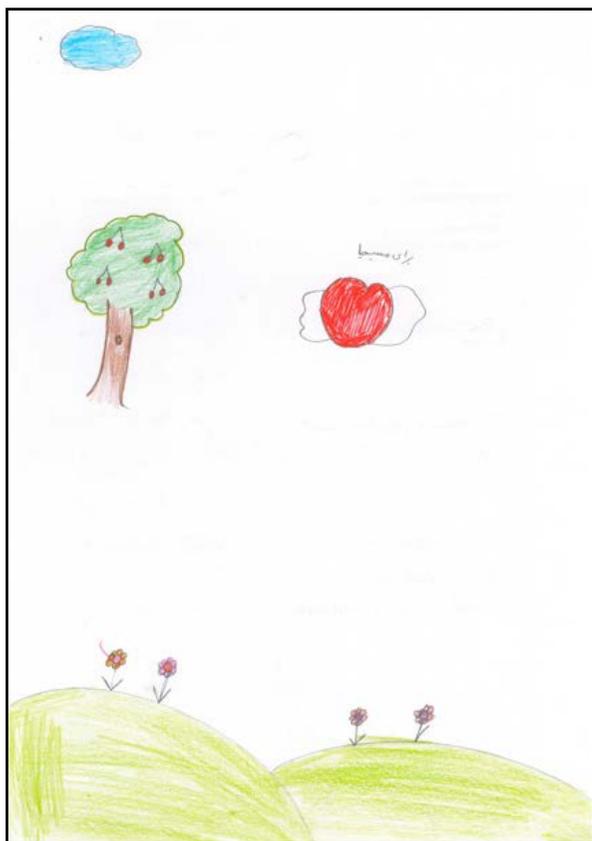


ch14\_vd\_f\_pm\_10\_10\_jul:

« He is tall and has white hair »

## Intercultural contacts and reception of representations from foreign cultures

- Japanese child from a Buddhist school drawing Mary
- Swiss child drawing Lakshmi
- Russian children drawing Ancient Greek gods...
  
- and also in Iran...



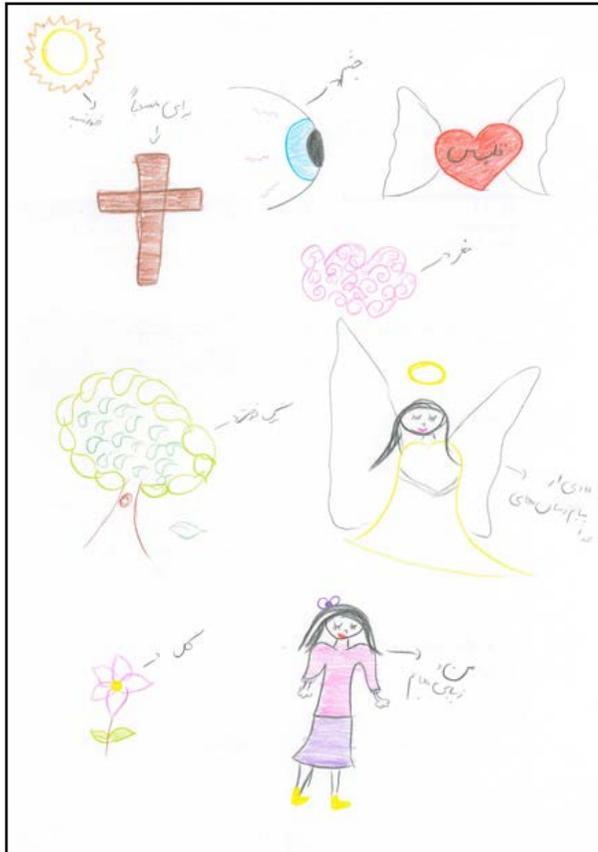
« it's for the Christians »

ir14\_te\_f\_pda\_12\_02\_ati

If you look around, you  
could feel God completely

## Process of hybridization

- Elements of traditional representations typical for different religious systems , including (or not) the one in which the child is socialized, are combined



ir14\_te\_f\_pda\_12\_02\_shc

If you look around, you could see God

A mix of symbolic representations taken from different religious backgrounds

## Using iconographic codes for representing supernatural agents available in the medias or in arts

- cartoons (e.g. manga)
  - films
  - books for children (e.g. illustrations of fairy tales)
  - toys derived from cartoons, films, etc
- 
- e.g.: representation of angels used in books or movies created for children



ir14\_te\_f\_pa\_12\_00\_yeg

I drew the light of God  
and angels were flying  
around it and throwing  
flowers.



ir14\_te\_f\_pa\_11\_10\_has

I drew a girl while praying  
and thanking God and  
angels were around her.  
And they admired her.

# Innovations beyond iconographic codes available in the social environment

- beyond iconographic codes (traditional, present in art, films, cartoons, etc) for representing supernatural agents...
- innovation does not mean that the solutions found are idiosyncratic
- Other children can « invent » the same solutions
  - A face in the sky (... and in the light)
  - The light illuminating from above
  - The beauty of nature
  - The divine presence in the heart
  - A helping hand
- Thus, the same innovation can be find on an international level
- These solution are sometimes really creative, innovative



## A face in the sky



ir14\_te\_f\_pk\_9\_11\_yas

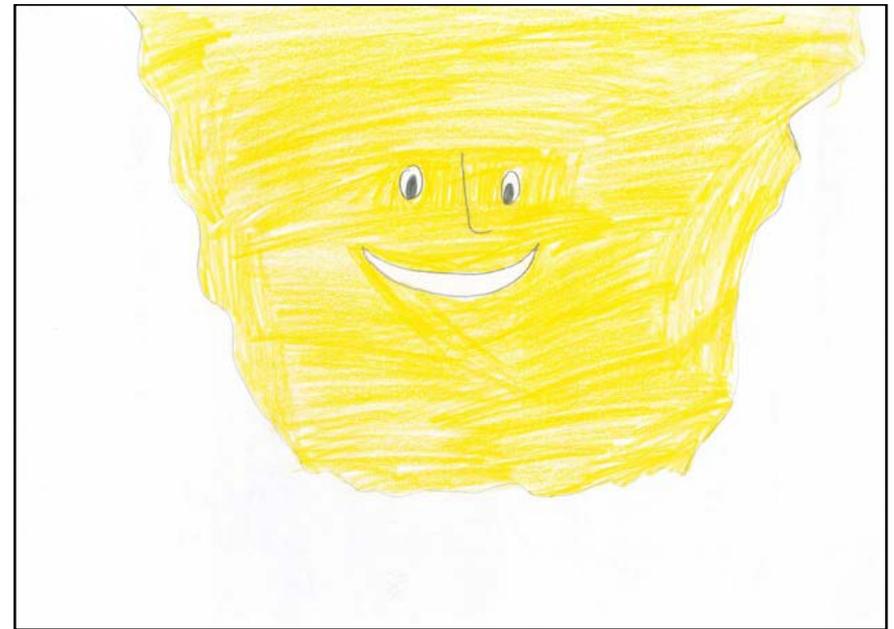
God had come to check flowers, grassland, tree and a mountain, in order to solve problem if there was any problem.

ir14\_te\_f\_ph\_10\_08\_zah

The nature  
God gifts  
The light of sun, the tree, the flower, the dust

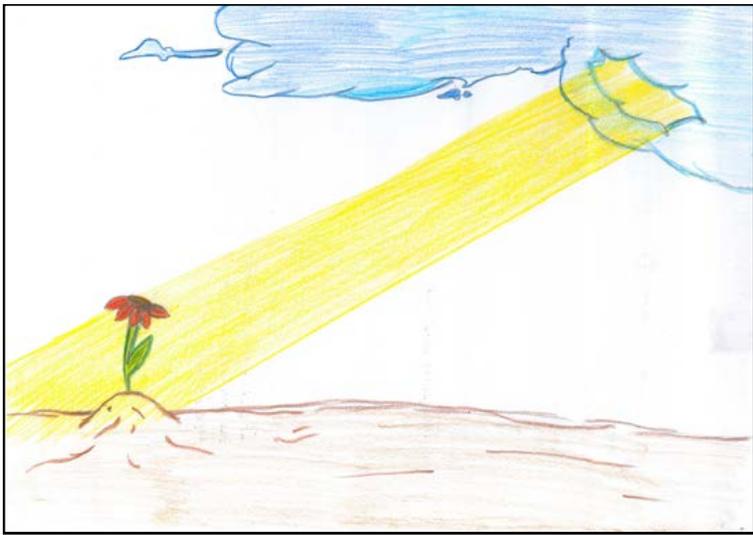


A face in the sky,  
and in the light



ir14\_te\_f\_pda\_12\_  
03\_diy  
God is like light

ir14\_te\_m\_pd\_10\_06\_far  
God



## The light illuminating from above

ir14\_te\_f\_pda\_12\_07\_via

If God's light is still above the world, there is still hope for life.



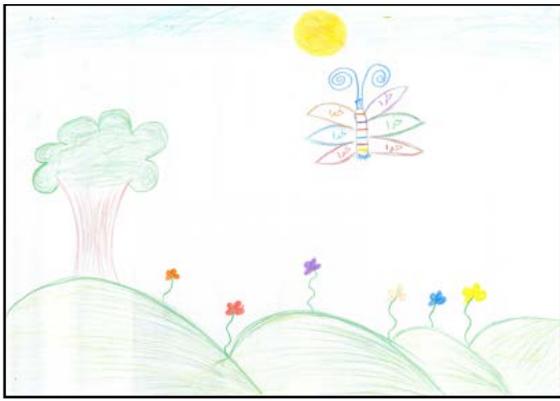
I drew Mary shining in a lot of light from the clouds. The sky is blue and beautiful. She sings in chorus

jp04\_nr\_m\_rx\_10\_10\_ky



ir14\_te\_m\_pd\_9\_09\_ari

God is light and is every where



ir14\_te\_f\_pa\_11\_06\_han

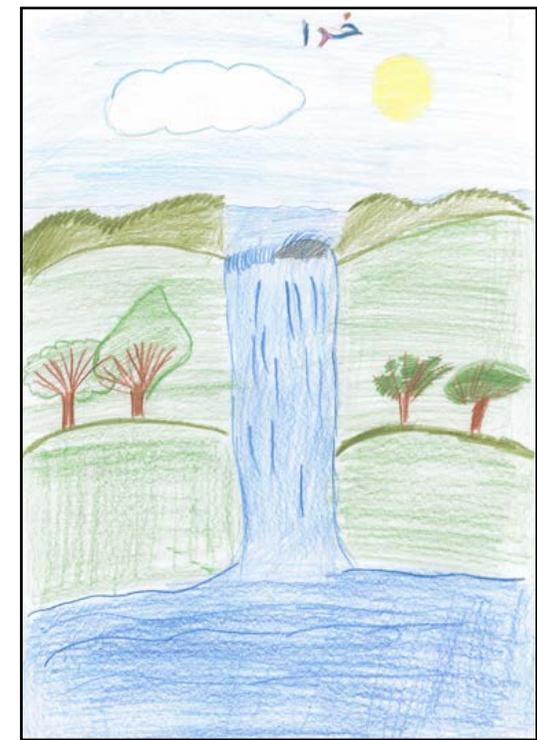
The subject : God  
I drew this painting,  
because I love God.  
I always thanks God.  
God has given us a lot of  
gifts.  
God! I love you.

## The beauty of nature (that God has created)



ir14\_te\_f\_pa\_11\_04\_mel

The subject: God  
I drew God and his gifts



ir14\_te\_f\_pa\_12\_04\_del

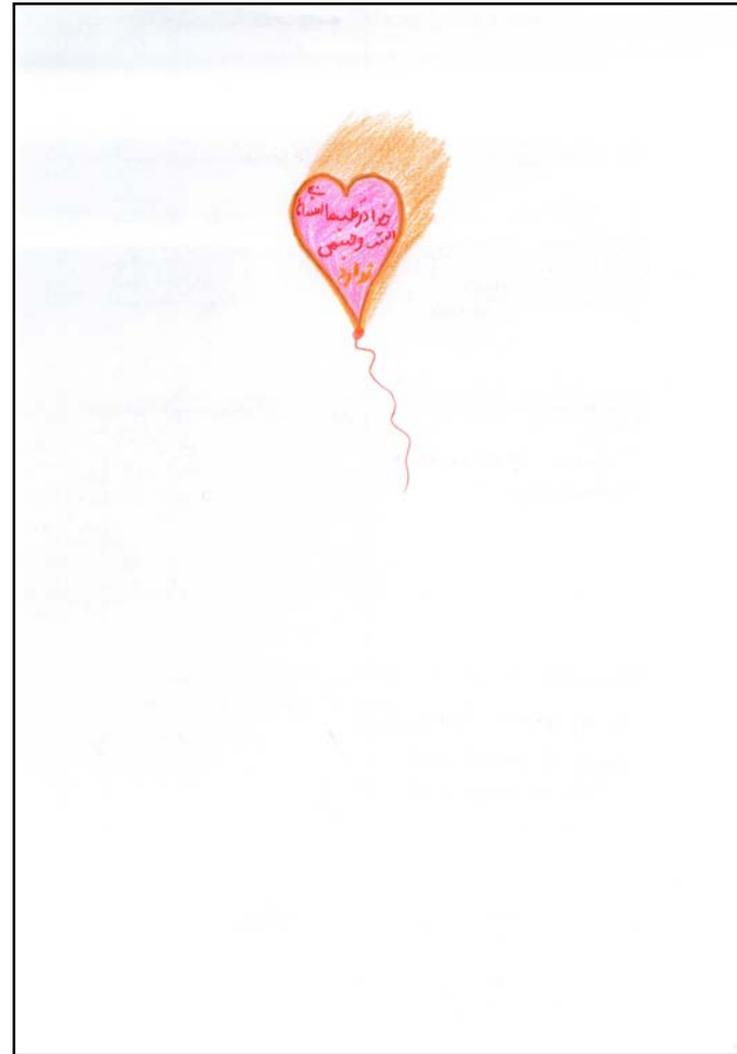
I drew a river, a hill and  
the sun which showed  
the beauty of God's  
creatures. Everything  
begins from a single  
point and it's God.

## The divine presence in the heart



ch10\_ge\_f\_rt\_14\_11\_aur

God is in every heart  
that beats



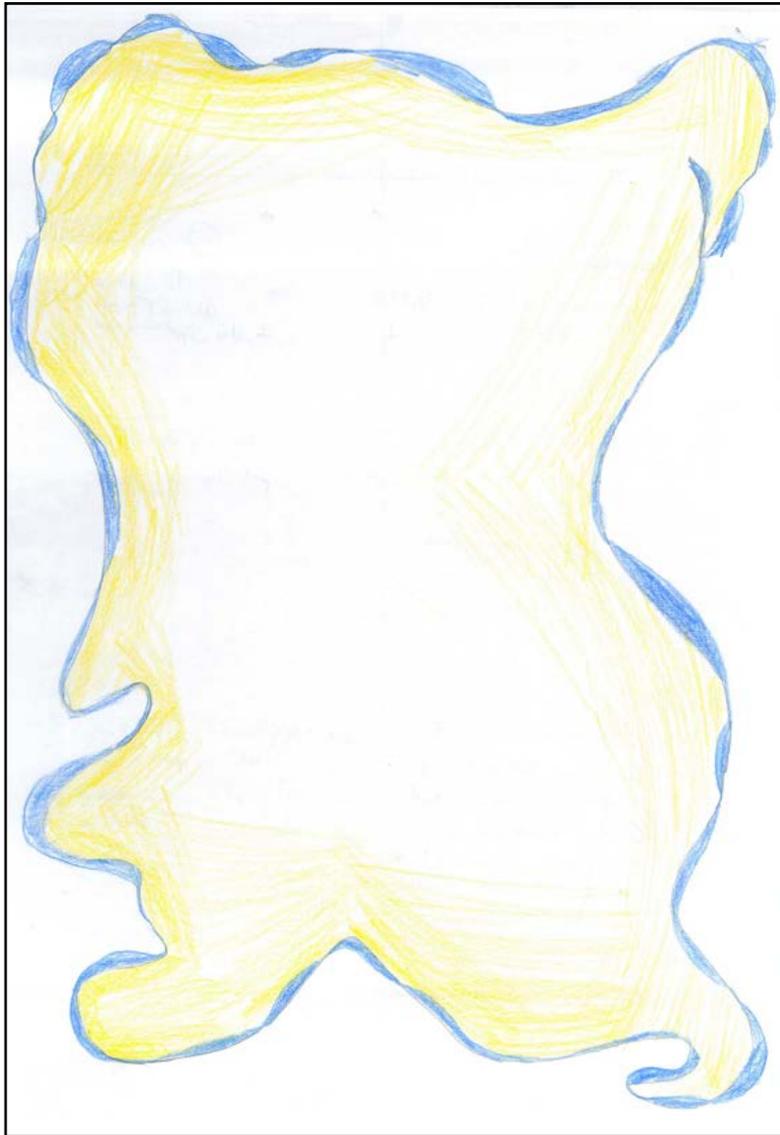
ir14\_te\_m\_pqa  
\_13\_01\_key

In my opinion,  
God is in  
hearts of  
people and he  
has no body  
that could be  
drawn



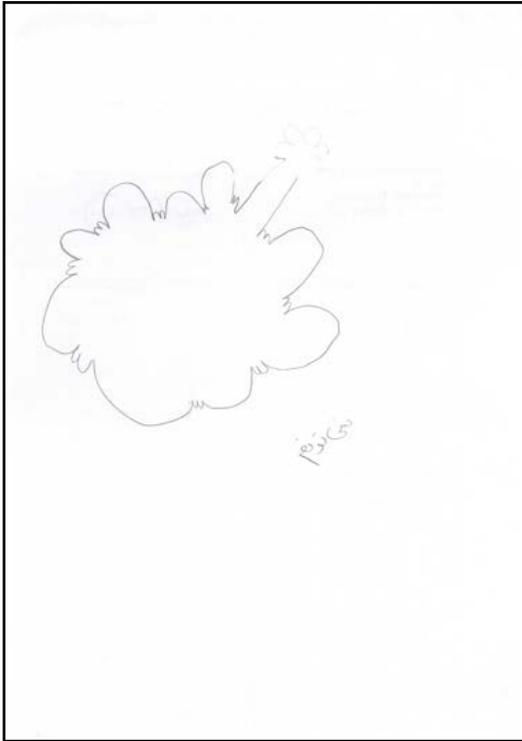
ir14\_te\_f\_ph\_12\_00\_sah

God is very larger even than  
planet Earth

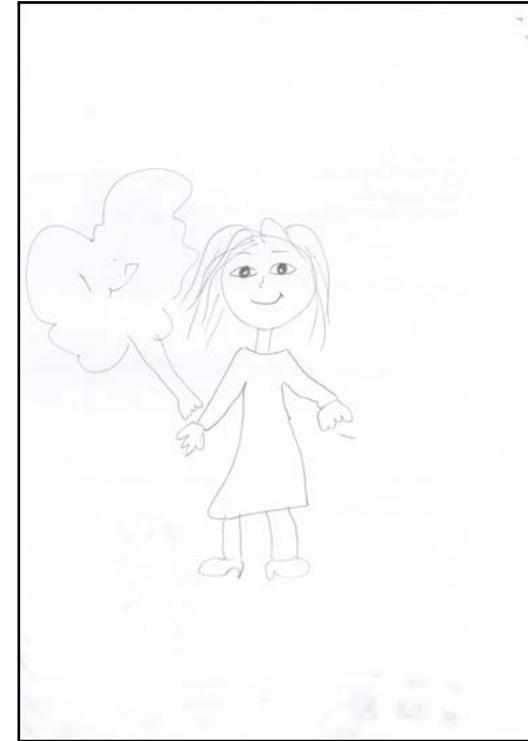


ir14\_te\_f\_pk\_10\_04\_bit

I drew big picture to show the greatness of God. God is great and he is everywhere. I painted him with yellow, blue and other colors. I wanted to show God is kind. Maybe it is funny, but I think my painting is showing characteristics of God.



ir14\_te\_f\_pda\_13  
\_01\_ran  
Greatness



ir14\_te\_f\_pg\_13\_02\_  
mit

God is everywhere  
with me

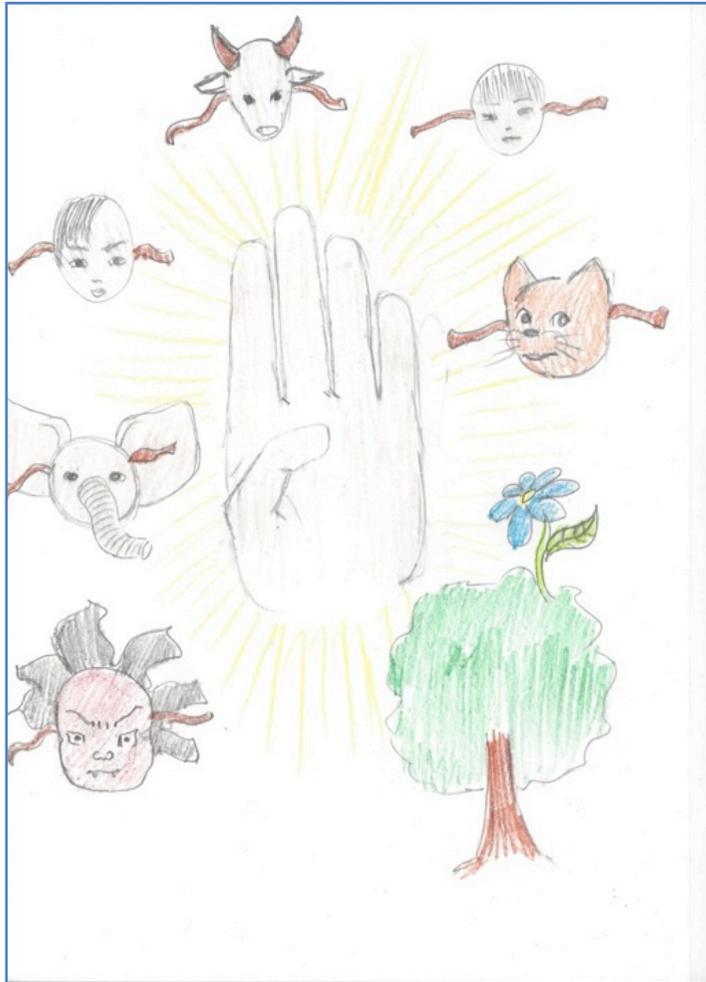
# Symbolic representation: the hand



I drew God who gave me the hand to show me the way I must follow. There is a path that goes straight and after a while there is another path but it is not the path that I have to follow and that is why God is with me, he shows me by where I have to go.

ch05\_ju\_f\_pr\_11\_02\_li\_

## Symbolic representation: the hand in Russia



ru15\_bo\_f\_px\_14\_07\_tou

The idea of my drawing is that God is unique. It's just that he comes to everyone under different appearances. I drew this hand because I noticed that there is a similarity between Christian gods and Buddhist gods: it is that they all hold their hands in this way in which certain fingers are bent. Around the hand are masks that God puts



ru15\_bo\_f\_px\_14\_03\_mas

I can not imagine god, but he exists and that's why I drew just one hand with a girl's hand, as if he is there and can help us.

## A really innovative one...

ir14\_te\_f\_pg\_13\_00\_jin

God was taking care of his creatures  
like an umbrella in thunders.

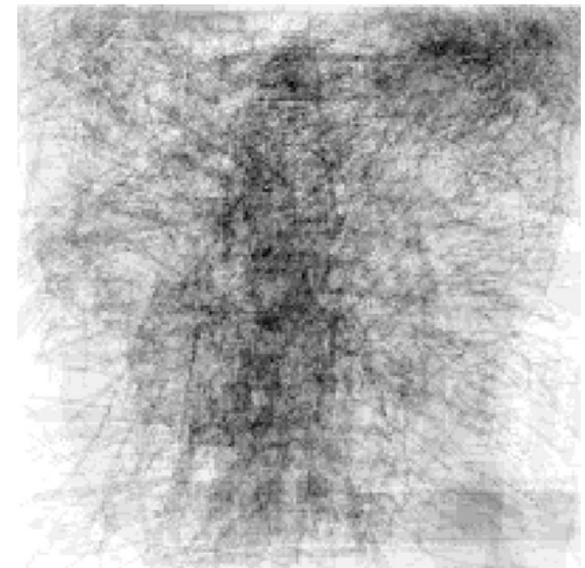
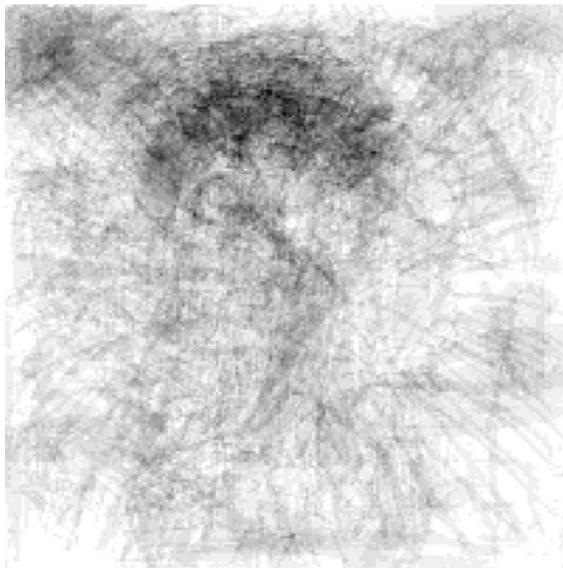
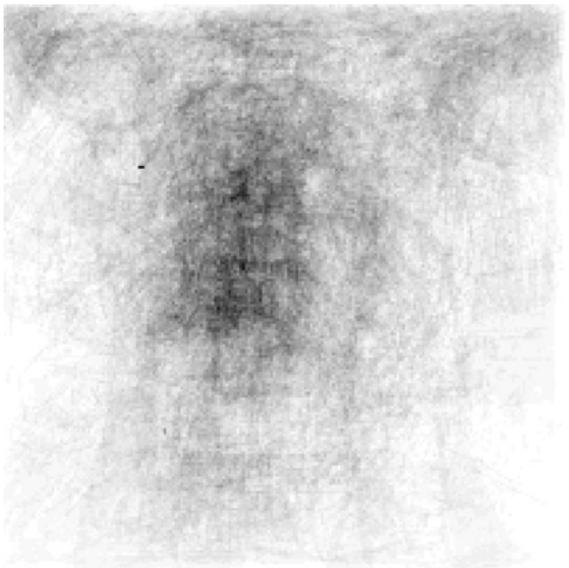
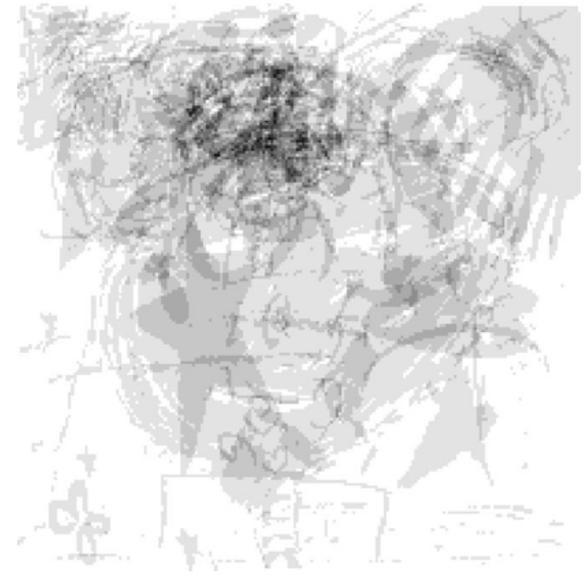
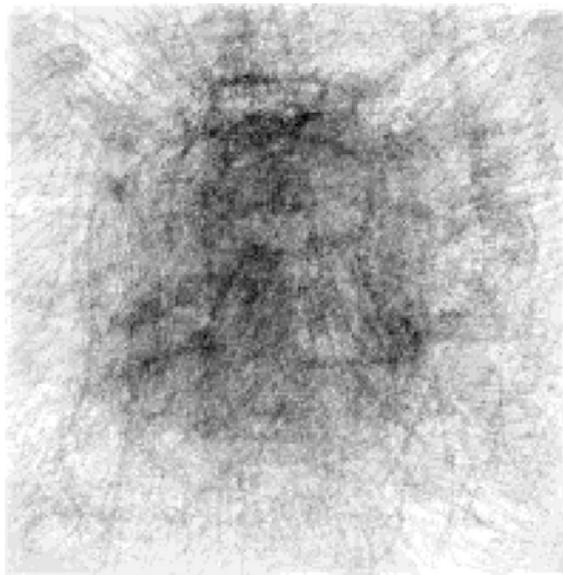
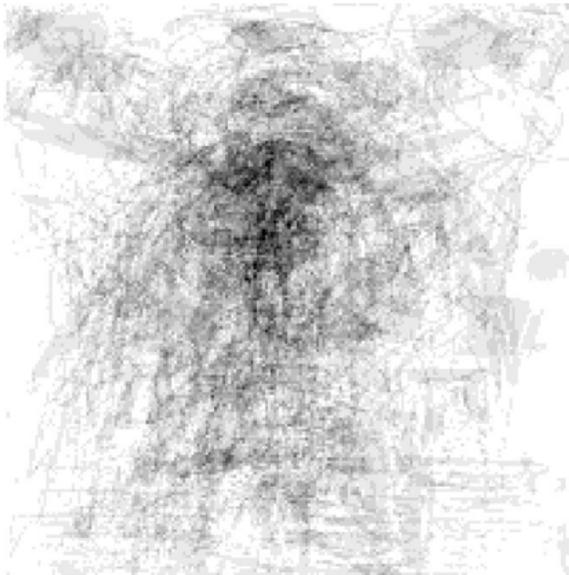


به نظر من خداوند مانند چتری  
در طوفان موافق نگاهش است.

# Image processing analyses

?

- Early attempts by Ksenia Konyushkova (2014)
  - Gravity center
  - Color palette
- Expected next step: technical tools and algorithms for pattern recognition
- Developed by Christelle Cocco in collaboration with Images and Visual Representation Group, EPFL, dir. Sabine Süsstrunk



Yellow color intensity among different countries. Upper row: Switzerland, Japan, Romania. Lower row: Russia Buryatia, Russia St-Petersburg, USA. (Konyushkova et al., unpublished)

UNIL Faculté de théologie et ... x Google Traduction x Identification - swisset... x dessine moi un mouton... x Antoine de Saint-Exupé... x Drawings of gods x http://d2d.vital-it.ch/ x +

d2d.vital-it.ch/#/ php mysql

Visas Les plus visités Démarrage Dernières nouv... réseau unil Apple .Mac Amazon eBay Yahoo! Musiciens Actualités Maison Chercheurs

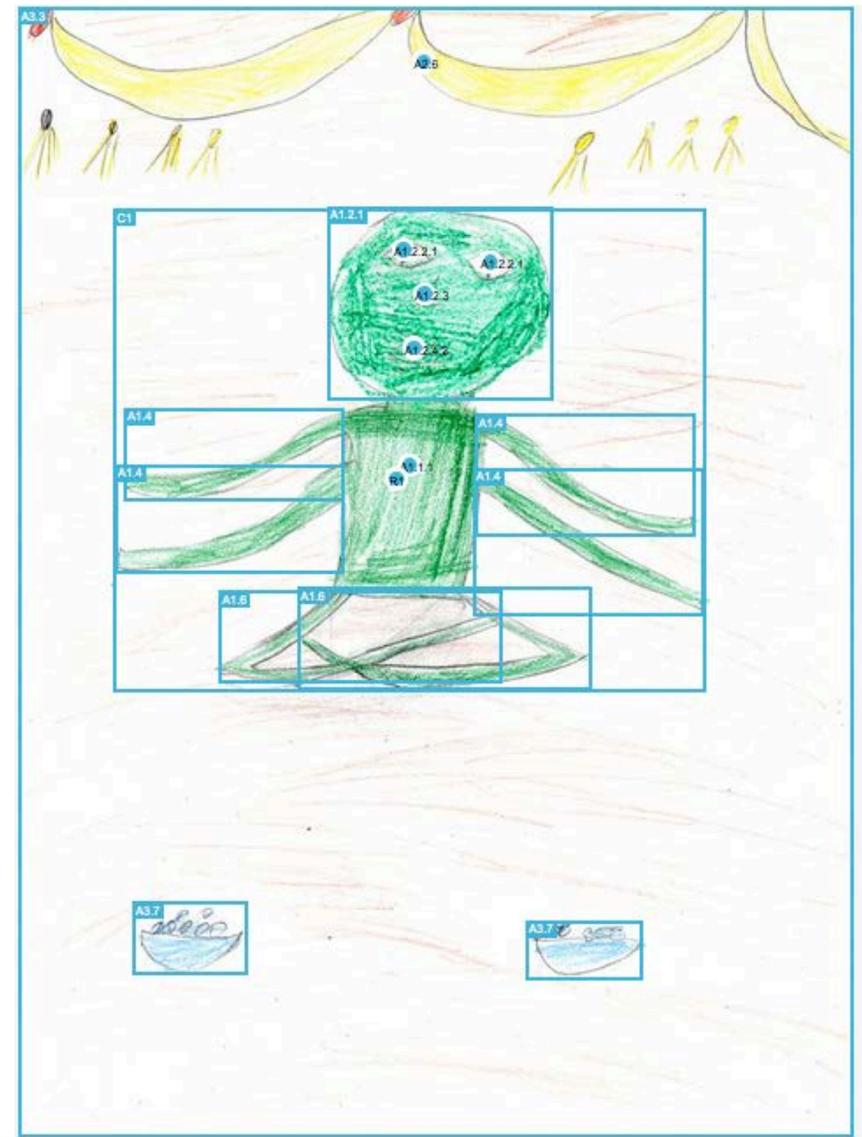
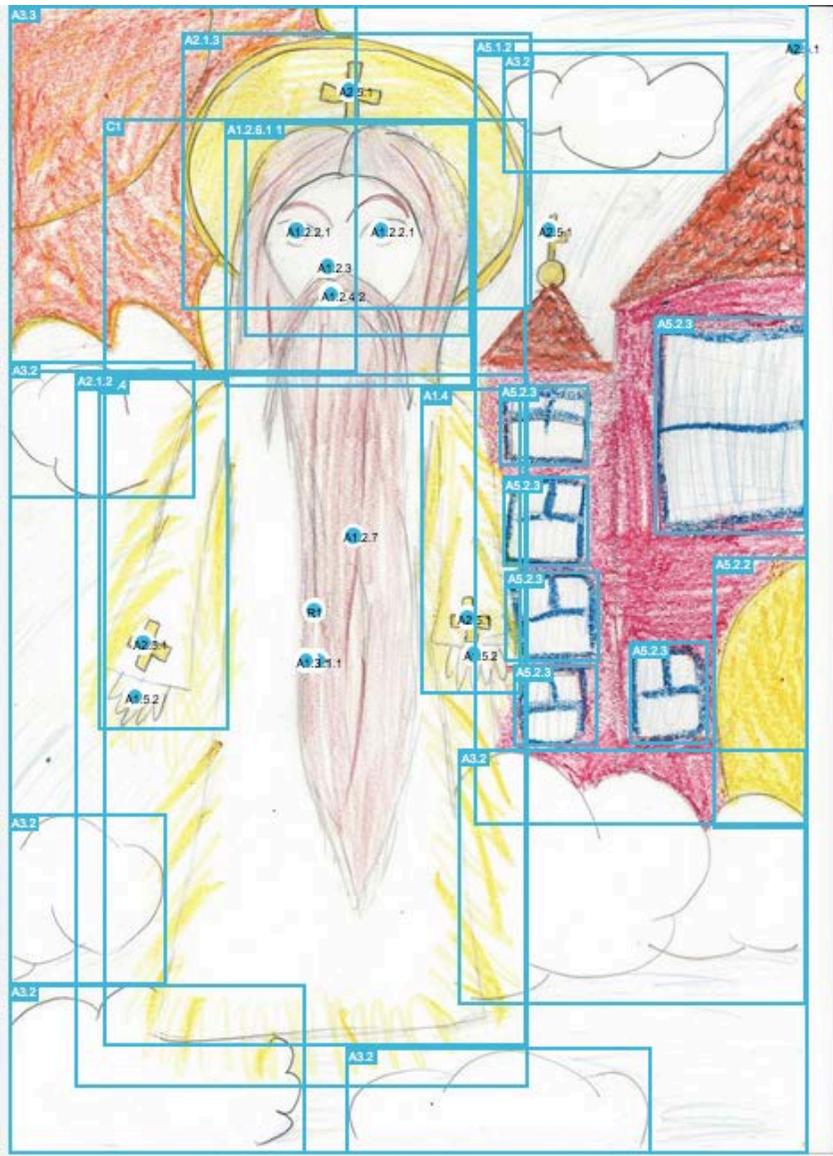
GAUNTLET ANNOTATION TOOL CONTACT

# GAUNTLET

A flexible and interactive annotation tool  
by SIB/Vital-IT DH projects

Go

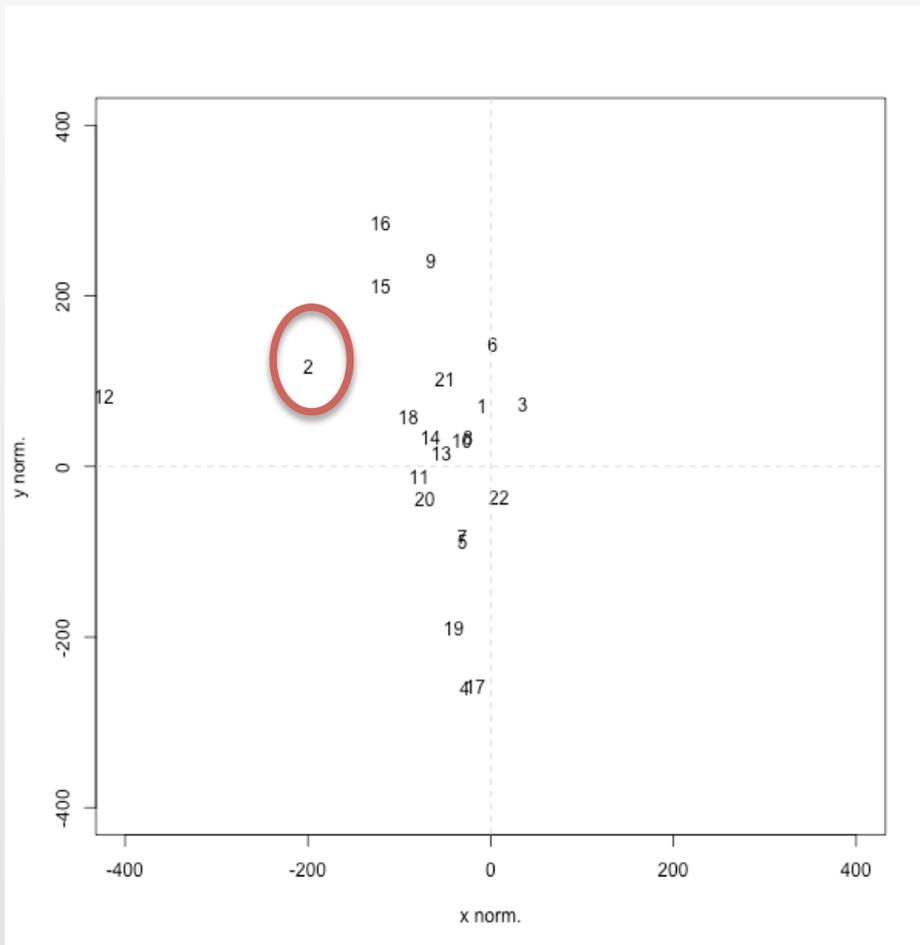
# Annotated images



# Preliminary statistics with Gauntlet (by Martial Sankar)

E.g.: Where are the figures (R1) located in drawings?

# Scatterplot of figures coordinates

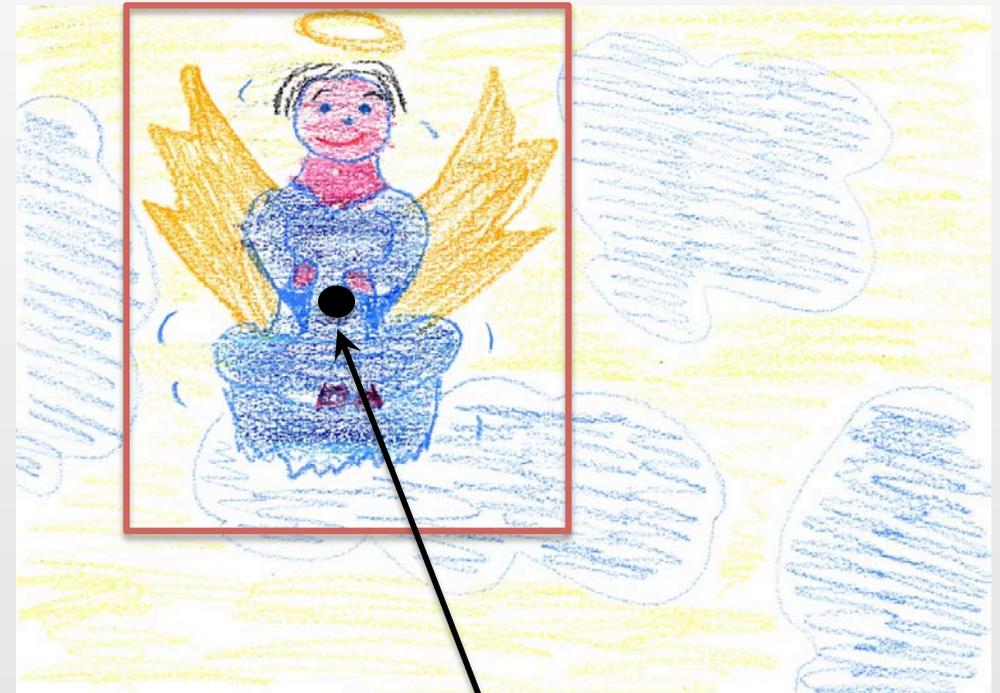
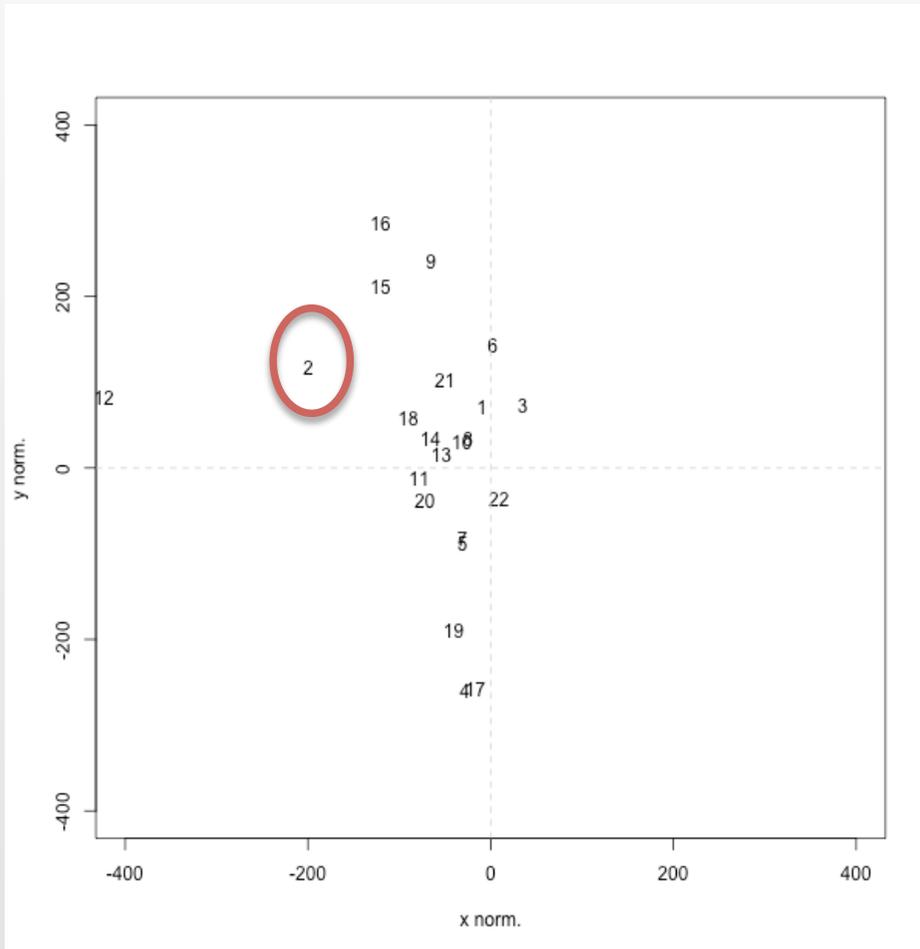


Each dot corresponds to a figure of a drawing in our data subset (c.f. R1\_geometric\_with\_ID.csv)

The point coordinates represent the center of mass of the figures we annotated in Gauntlet with a box.

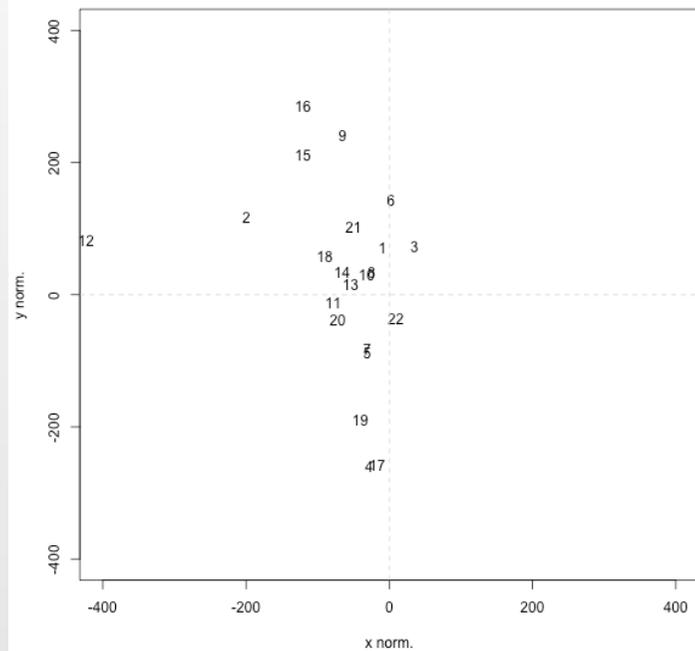
Coordinates are normalized according to the center of the images to avoid bias due to the landscape/portrait formats.

# Example with figure object 2 (in ch05\_ju\_f\_pr\_11\_00\_nor-r.jpg c.f. R1\_geometric\_with\_ID.csv)

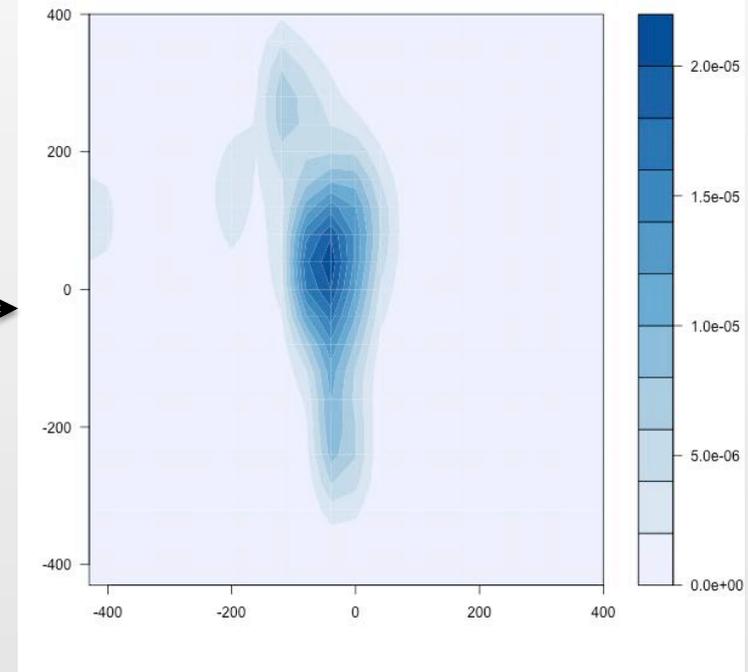


Center of mass

The figures (R1) are drawn on top-left very close to the centre of the image



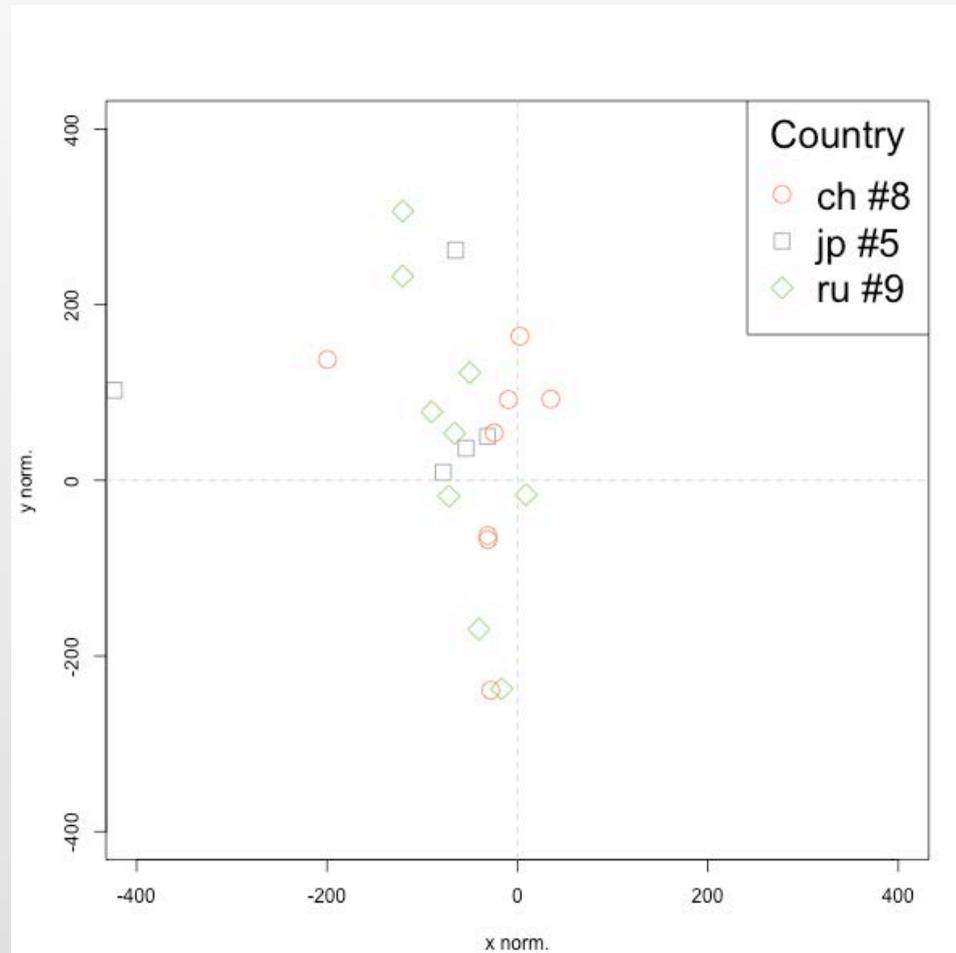
Scatterplot representation



Density representation

The darker the blue color, more dense are the number of points

# More variations on the vertical axis for Russian drawings

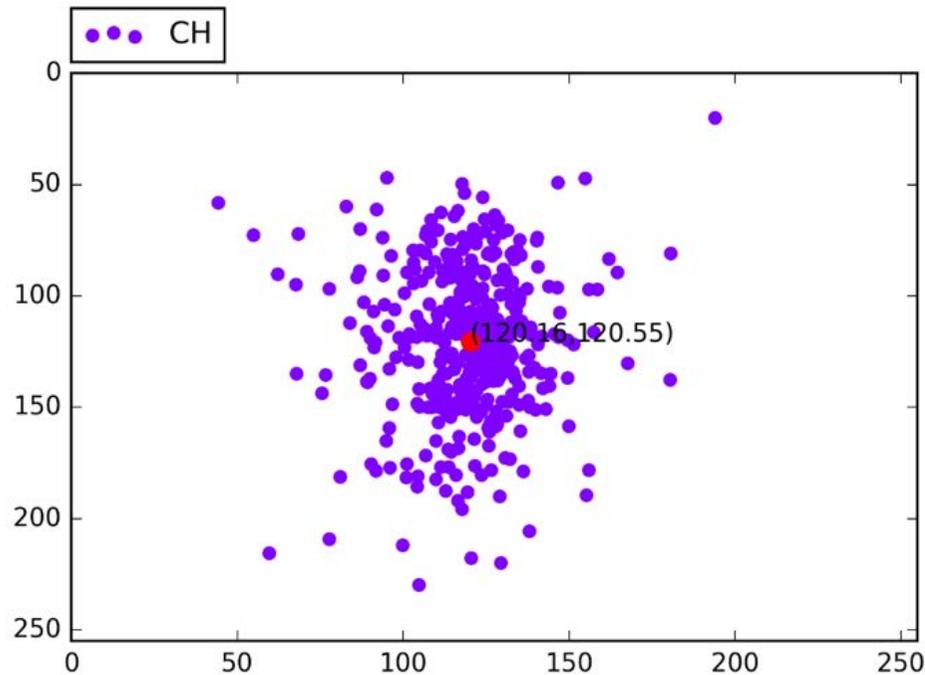


## Composition of the representation: Gravity center of the drawing

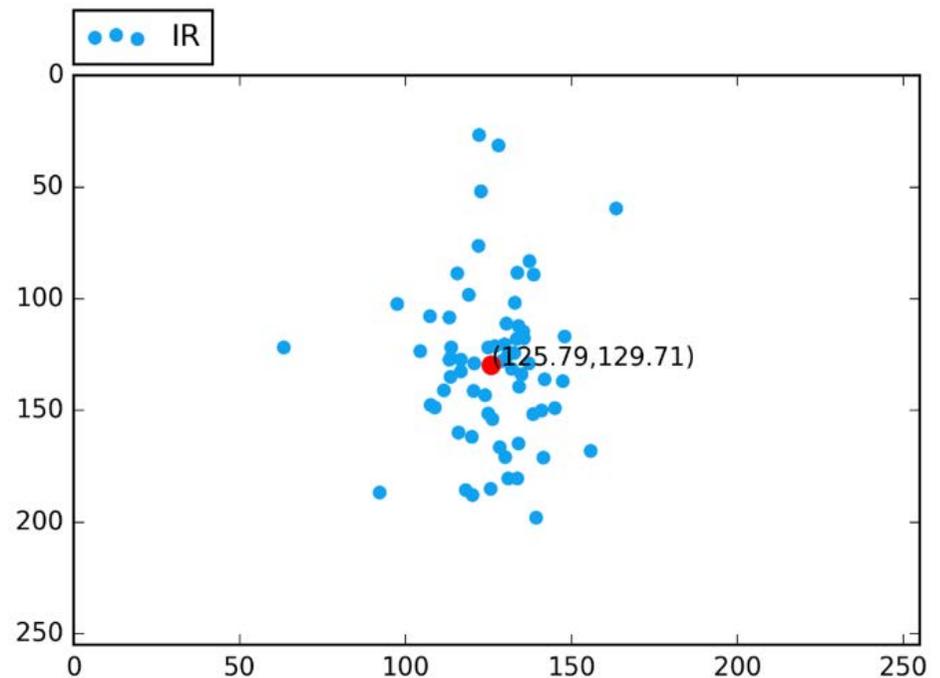
- Generally, children are centering their drawings (Winner, 2006)
- Is it also the case for drawings of god...
- ... or heavenly connotations of god's concept would influence the position of gravity center of the drawing...
- or of the figure of god in the drawing?

# Gravity center of the drawings

## Comparison of two samples: Swiss and Iran



N = 447

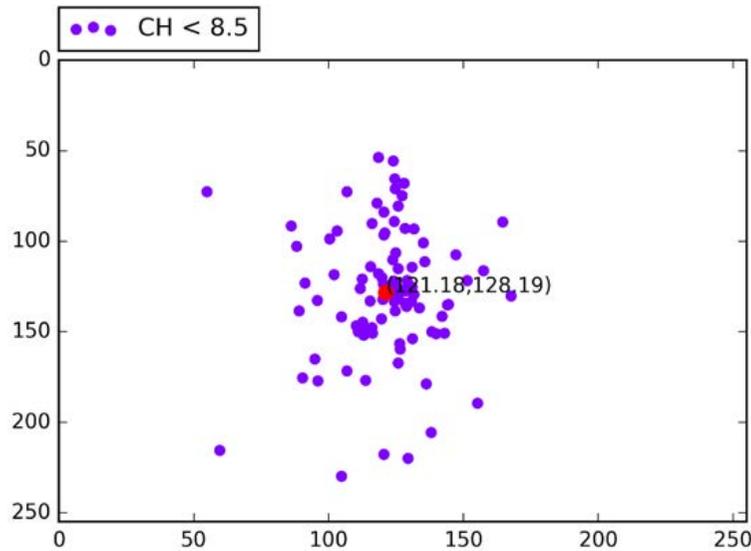


N = 66

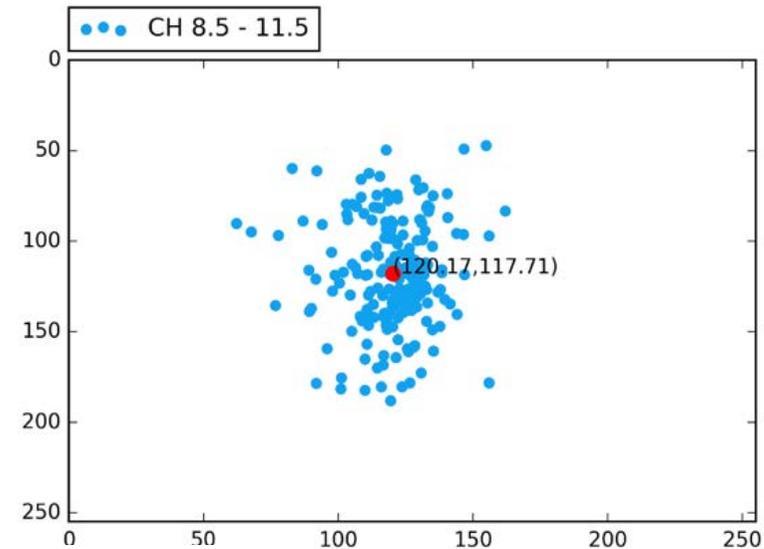
# Gravity center of the drawings according children's age

## Swiss sample is splitted in 3 subsamples

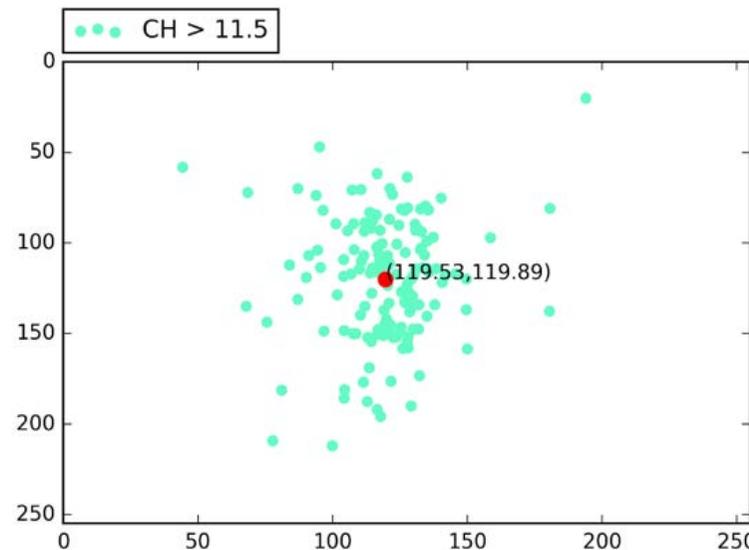
(data analyzed by Dr. Christelle Cocco and Gregory Dessart)



N = 30

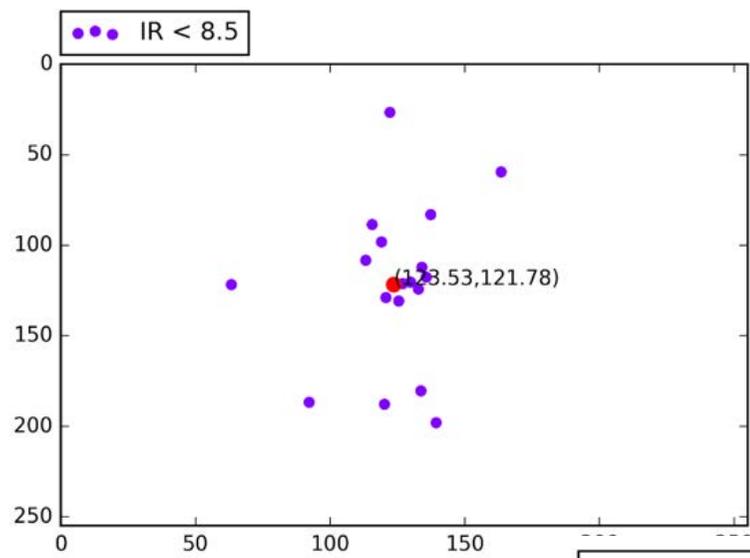


N = 207

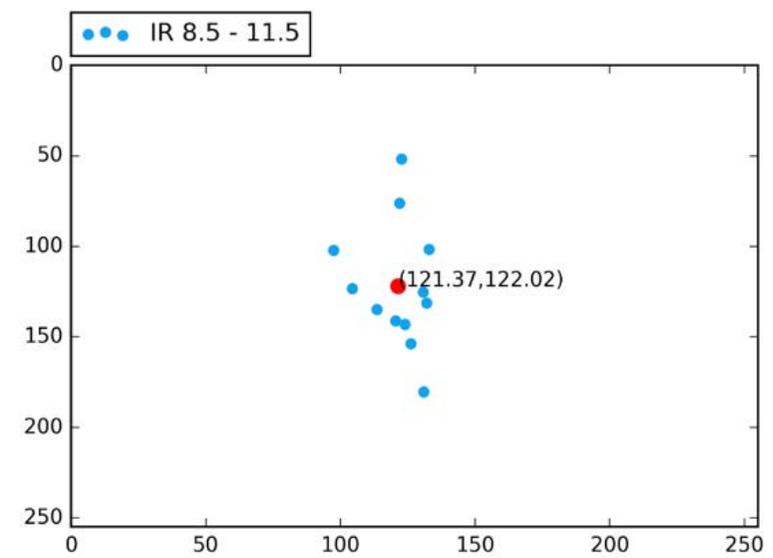


N = 150

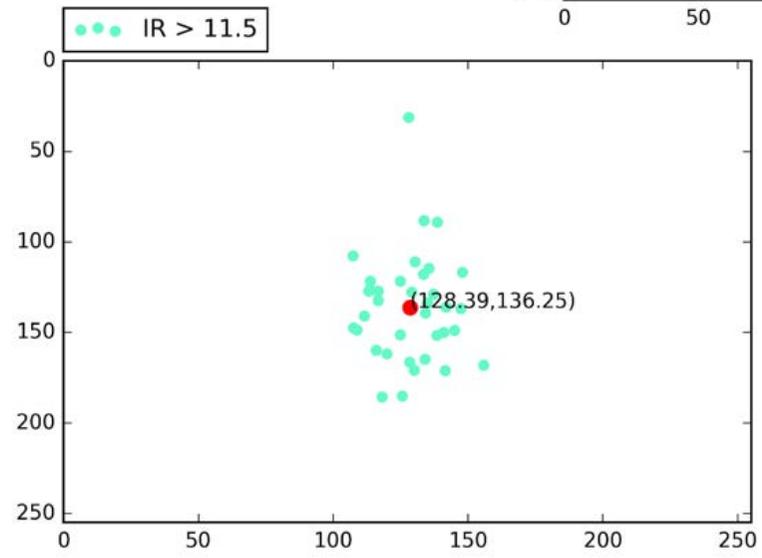
# Gravity center of the drawings according children's age Iranian sample is splitted in 3 subsamples (data analyzed by Dr. Christelle Cocco and Zahra Astaneh)



N = 18



N = 12



N = 36

# Conclusion

## Role of school in terms of religious education

- Give access to the cultural background necessary for decoding religious signs, and for interpreting the meaning of the religious objects, artefacts, etc, present in the public space
- Help understand the challenges related to religious diversity (within culture and at the global level)
- Not to reduce religions (only) to their doctrinal aspects
  - Consider also practices, rituals, artifacts, etc

## Conclusion:

# Role of religious institutions in religious education

- To assume their own vision of the world and to show what sense of human existence emerges from it.
  - To thematize the references, proper to the religious tradition of which they are claiming, which form the basis of living together and the reception of difference
- These tasks can be carried out either in a school setting or in a religious community (parish, church, mosque, yeshiva, temple etc.)

## ... and...

If certain among you are interested ...

- ... in the study of children's representations of God
- ... in collecting children's drawings of supernatural agents
- ... and more generally...
- ... in the construction of the psychological identity ...

... it is with pleasure that I would meet with you during this conference !

# Thank you for your attention !



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