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## Rahan: A hero at the service of physical and moral education

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► **To cite this version:**

Kilian Mousset, Jean-Nicolas Renaud. Rahan: A hero at the service of physical and moral education. *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, 2018, 41 (2), pp.181-191. 10.1080/07053436.2018.1482842 . hal-04001875

**HAL Id: hal-04001875**

**<https://laas.hal.science/hal-04001875v1>**

Submitted on 22 Mar 2023

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Key words: Comic strip, physical and moral education, sport.

Abstract:

In the field of comics, Rahan represents a sort of ordinary hero whose relations with his body are an important part of the humanistic message which he conveys. His physical abilities brings him close to his readers and ultimately to everybody. By means of his physical education and teaching attitude, the hero serves both as an educational and moral model: through the learning of swimming, life saving techniques and navigation, he escapes from dangerous situations, and opposes conflicts between different tribes and the traditions imposed by the tribe's wizard. His altruism and innovative approach make him an exceptional hero for the primitive era. In fact, the movement with which the artist – André Chéret – endows his hero echoes the sport techniques of the era from 1970 to 1980, thus favoring the reader's identification process.

## INTRODUCTION

Emerging from the audiovisual culture (Donnat & Lévy, 2007, p. 27) which was rapidly growing at the end of the 1960s in France (d'Almeida & Delporte, 2010, p. 211), comics embraced different narrative styles and images which suited several generations. The *Rahan* comic strip has become an important reference as part of the youth culture of the years 1970-1980. The physical and intellectual abilities of its hero make him a character that is surprisingly close to his young readers. Unlike American comics heroes like Superman or Spider-Man, he does not possess any extraordinary or superhuman power. Young readers see him as an ordinary man. In fact he has to learn to swim and persevere in the face of failure to manage to cross a river. However, he is nonetheless an exemplary man in the fictional context of a reinvented prehistory. His movement is eminently influenced by modern sports and the many experiences which he faces demonstrate and teach the lessons of his life. If Pierre Vogler considers it an ideological comic strip (Vogler, 1986/1987, p. 157), the challenge is to reflect on how the contemporary sports movements of the hero contribute to the comic's educational, and even ideological message.

Published in the children's magazine *Pif Gadget*, *Rahan* is an important reference for child readers in the 1970s. In fact certain issues of the magazine sold almost a million copies between 1970 and 1971 (Rannou, 2014, p. 6). This comics series continued in *Pif Gadget*<sup>1</sup> from 1969 to 1992, which attests to its popularity and importance. The adventures of *Rahan* occupied about 20.8% of the pages in the different issues from February 1969 to October 1973, (Rannou, p. 60): no other hero was given the same amount of space (*Ibid.*). What is even more important is that *Pif Gadget* seems to have been appreciated as much by girls as by boys, or at least, was not considered as a gendered production. (SOFRES, 1974, in Boltanski,

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<sup>1</sup> We cannot give details on the evolution of the name of the magazine. The chronology of the episodes has been reconstructed from the adventures contained in the collection of the Soleil publications and the comparative table by Louis Cance (in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 2-5).

1975, p. 41)<sup>2</sup>. The interview which we were able to carry out with the artist – André Chéret – seems to confirm this shared interest<sup>3</sup>. Finally if *Rahan* achieved such good sales, if it was bought in such numbers, it was because it was given a lot of visibility in *Pif Gadget*, on the one hand, and on the other, because it constituted both a mirror and a motor for the changing status of the child consumers. Their status changed in the middle of the 1960s thanks to pocket money: the child became a consumer (Sirinelli, 2005, p. 311) and the comics were a barometer of this change of status.

If the virtues embodied by *Rahan* seem undeniable in the field of ethnology (Vogler, 1986/1987), the present study uses the historical filter to capture the teachings that are latent in the comics. The absorption of the deeds and values which govern the hero's choices constitutes a way of educating by imitation, subtle and insidious, but totally effective. In spite of changes in the creative team, only the duo formed by Roger Lecureux (writer) and André Chéret (artist) is considered in this article. The specificity of Chéret's line, his depiction of the body in movement, makes him the key significant artist in the evolution of our hero. If other artists also worked with Roger Lecureux such as Zampéroni<sup>4</sup>, Roméro<sup>5</sup>, Deshaies<sup>6</sup> – for the scenery –<sup>7</sup> and de Huescar<sup>8</sup>, André Chéret remains the emblematic artist of the comic strip between 1969 and 1992 as he contributed most of the episodes. Moreover, the collection of adventures thus appears as a sufficiently homogenous corpus to consider the comic strip as a legitimate source for a historical study, as the expression of a juvenile culture from 1970 to 1980 as well as a « transmitting machine » (Matly, 2015, p. 4).

Lecureux's project, the backbone of *Rahan's* adventures, is oriented towards the humanistic progress reflected by his hero. This quest allows no rest. It is through his actions that the Rahan manages to escape from his circumstances: the sacred and immobile tradition at the heart of the different tribes which he radically opposes. Like a virtuous circle set in motion by the ultimate courage of effort, movement provokes change, re-thinking and experiences lead to new learning. This acceleration of social mutation is embodied by Rahan who runs, evolving from liana to liana, « who crawls on the water ». His ability to swim, to surf, to bring help, constitute the symbol itself of his capacity to escape from or vanquish the most dangerous environments for a two-legged animal. This emphasis on the body often resembles sports practices which is accessible both to the tribes and to the young readers: he swims front crawl, pole vaults, sails, etc. The apparent proximity between the hero's movements and those of his young readers in the years from 1970 to 1980 reinforces, in our opinion, this process of identification. Moreover, if the comic strip is part of a form of

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<sup>2</sup> The survey was not directly aimed at readers of the comic strip but at those who bought the albums. (SOFRES, Enquête statistique périodique auprès de 2000 jeunes de 10 à 24 ans, avril 1974, in Boltanski, 1975, p. 41).

<sup>3</sup> Interview with André Chéret and his wife Madame Chéret by Jean-Nicolas Renaud and Kilian Mousset 08/01/2016.

<sup>4</sup> « Le pont des singes », *Pif Gadget* n°252, Décembre 1973, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 8, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 89-106.

<sup>5</sup> « Le Wampas sans ailes », *Pif Gadget* n°382, Juin 1975, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 12, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 155-166.

<sup>6</sup> « Le coutelas perdu », *Pif Gadget* n°427, Mai 1977, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 10, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 36-50.

<sup>7</sup> Selon Louis Cance in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> « Les hommes pétrifiés », probably *Pif Gadget* n°685, Mai 1982, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 17, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 25-39.

essentialization of sports movements in the sense that we find sports techniques in the « prehistoric era » when they are a product of modern 19<sup>th</sup> century society, it paradoxically has the merit of considering certain sports gestures as part of human culture. In fact nothing is innate, nothing is taken for granted. To go forward, Rahan has to learn, at times through imitation. The educational project thus develops from two different roles played by the hero: continually learning and teaching.

Finally, the dialectics of changing oneself to change the world imbues all of Rahan's experiences. It makes him an ordinary hero. In each of his encounters, the hero increases his knowledge. Once acquired, he shares it with the tribes he comes across in his wanderings. The model can come from the people. He is a man among other men. He therefore takes advantage of the experiences of others to learn and to better understand and penetrate the world that surrounds him. Imitation, the reproduction of past customs, is supported by the logic of adherence to an operative tradition. The hero learns through the other tribes, even though they are generally perceived as captive and frozen in their own tradition. This situation causes them to live in their self-sufficiency and to reject, even drive out, the unknown. Emancipation as an approach to education via an accumulation of experiences, shifts the references towards a future which we could qualify as modern (Wat, 2010, p. 536)<sup>9</sup>, which, *a fortiori*, refers back to the known world and the references of the young readers in the 1970s-1980s. This struggle at the heart of the continual education of the hero takes shape in the conflicts which Rahan engages in when faced with the outdated inertia of his fellowmen. Though he appears to be superhuman<sup>10</sup>, he is not considered a divine figure but just an exceptional man. What he learns and what he teaches is still accessible, on the one hand to all the men and women of distant tribes, and on the other, to the physical potential of his young readers. His physical education as a continual process shows that Rahan learns all the time. It is thus on this basis that the hero gives « those who walk on two feet » the benefit of his experiences. His approach is to teach. The comic strip offers here this extra dynamism which reinforces the importance of the body and validates the moral dimension of each of our hero's actions.

There is thus a whole section of youth over several generations who would be intrigued by the acts of Rahan. It is not, therefore, so much the influence of the links between the Communist party and the Pif Gadget magazine which we are investigating as what Rahan develops in his behavior as an educational model. Altruism and sharing are without doubt constituents of the Communist ideology, but they cannot be confined to just that. More importantly, our interest is in analyzing the moving body as one of the motors of the educational message that lead in part to the success of Rahan's adventures. This demonstration cannot be generalized to all sport gestures in the sense that only aquatic activities are sufficiently permanent to be able to draw conclusions. If certain activities (wrestling, athletics, etc.) can offer certain similarities, they are too reduced in number to support any

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<sup>9</sup> This meaning of modernity recalls the contemporary culture of the 20th century and what « *cela implique d'ambition universaliste : culture au sein de laquelle l'innovation, la recherche permanente du nouveau, devient une quête incessante vécue sur le mode de la nécessité* [ that implies about its universalist ambition : a culture in which innovation, the permanent search for novelty, becomes an incessant quest experienced as a necessity] » (Wat, 2010, p. 536)

<sup>10</sup> We understand superhuman as the fact of possessing abilities which surpass those of the members of the tribes without however surpassing human possibilities. He therefore stands out as a model.

generalization. The idea is to show how Rahan's physical movement, – here, his front crawl or life saving techniques for example – are part of a more general physical and moral education of the young readers.

## 1. From a thirst for learning and innovation ...

### 1.1 An ordinary hero: from necessity to learning by trial and error

The experimental approach of trial and error makes Rahan an ordinary hero. His readers can project themselves more easily into his adventures as their hero's power to act does not surpass human abilities. This realism in movement – at the level of his possibilities for action and not at the technical level<sup>11</sup> – partially reinforces the young readers' identification process with the hero. Rahan's learning to swim is particularly conspicuous in the course of his adventures. From the very first episodes, the initial perception of water as a dangerous environment makes him land one day in this unknown element. Thinking of sailing peacefully on the back of a turtle, the reptile dashes his expectations and decides to dive under water<sup>12</sup>. Rahan is faced with the *fait accompli*: he is alone in the middle of the water. Swimming thus becomes an essential element for his survival. Like any beginner his first movements are hesitant: « his hands and feet initially thrash about in the water with no apparent order »<sup>13</sup>. He can be seen struggling in all directions trying to float. However, it is when he calms down that he is able to dominate this unknown environment. The plot is thus rich with meaning: Rahan is an astonishingly normal hero. He doesn't know how to swim. He therefore has to learn how to swim to be able to reach the shore. His initial errors confer a human character on the hero which helps to transmit the educational message. He is realistic about his difficulties and analyzes the gestural obstacles that he has to overcome. Rahan is a rational being who learns by experience, through practicing swimming by trying to imitate what he has been able to observe. In fact, the hero remembers « the men from the river » who remained on the surface and advanced through the water<sup>14</sup>. The need to learn serves the educational message: all men and even heroes need to learn. Swimming is perceived culturally by an exceptional being that preserves nonetheless his human qualities. The myth under study is thus that of an exceptional being whose superiority does not separated him from his human condition, in contrast to an Achilles who is a semigod with limited humanity. This proximity or optimal distance, in the adventures depicted, probably facilitates identification for young readers. Rahan only takes advantage of his human abilities to float and attain the shore. The artist André Chéret then tries to briefly illustrate the first attempts of a neophyte.

If the model makes a mistake, like everyone does, he is intelligent enough not to insist too much in his errors. To accept to learn from nature is to accept its lessons and therefore to

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, certain drawings depict body positions which are anatomically impossible.

<sup>12</sup> « Le secret du soleil », *Pif Gadget* n°1, mars 1969, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, pp. 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> « Le secret du soleil », *Pif Gadget* n°1, mars 1969, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> « Mais ceux de la rivière savent se coucher sur l'eau et y glisser comme les poissons ! Rahan ne sait pas lui ! » dans « Le secret du soleil », *Pif Gadget* n°1, mars 1969, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 55.

learn humbly from the failures with which life confronts you. The educational message is quite explicit: nature is good to those who know how to observe it. This way of looking at culture as just the result of a vast analogical transfer between nature and its material or immaterial creation is emphasized by the ethnologist Pierre Vogler (1986/1987, p. 170). The road from need to discovery is sometimes very short (Vogler, 1986/1987, p. 169). However, the example of front crawl somewhat complicates, in our view, his relation with invention and *a fortiori*, his relation with human culture. Learning is not achieved *ex nihilo*. As we mentioned previously, Rahan imitates « the men from the river » who stayed on the surface and advanced through the water<sup>15</sup>. He therefore finds support in the social and cultural foundations of certain tribes he has observed. More specifically swimming is an eminently social and cultural skill even if the time needed to learning it is usually not indicated. The hero attains a high level sports technique which can only be achieved after a long process of trial and error. The imitation somewhat hides the series of stages which characterize learning the front crawl. Finally, Rahan is a hero who needs the community to succeed in his quest: that of discovering the unknown in the direction of the sun. It is this visceral need of the other, and his at times uncomfortable proximity, which make him a hero who is surprisingly close to his readers.

This process of identification is also favored by the choice of the swimming style itself: the front crawl. As he flees from the horde of hunters who pursue him<sup>16</sup> or at another time from the iguanas which surround him<sup>17</sup>, Rahan's use of front crawl clearly appears from the 13<sup>th</sup> episode on<sup>18</sup>. To emphasize his growing expertise, the drawing is increasingly built around the lengthening of his movements to give him the appearance of a swordfish shooting through the waves at an astonishing speed<sup>19</sup>. This choice of swimming style is undoubtedly not without meaning. The fastest and most economic style, the front crawl, illustrates the rational thinking of the period 1970-1980, but even more, it constitutes a point of perfection in human movement showing the principle of an ideal model which Rahan embodies. The young reader who is passionate about the adventures of the primitive age can probably imitate his hero using a series of gestures which, far from being natural, represents a model produced by the high performance sport culture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and constitutes a technical creation of the beginning of that century (Osmond & Philipps, 2006). It is in fact the swimming style which was increasingly taught to secondary school pupils between 1960 and 1986 and then primary school children at the beginning of the 1980s (Auvray, 2010, pp. 158-160). Following the icon of Johnny Weissmuller, an Olympic swimming champion and Hollywood interpret of the mythical Tarzan, Rahan takes advantage of an echo effect between the generations to attract both parents and children. In fact the codes of excellence represented are those of the criteria for competitive swimming. Thus we see Rahan diving with a

<sup>15</sup> « Mais ceux de la rivière savent se coucher sur l'eau et y glisser comme les poissons ! Rahan ne sait pas lui ! » dans « Le secret du soleil », *Pif Gadget* n°1, mars 1969, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> « Le dieu mammoth », *Pif Gadget* n°32, septembre 1969, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, pp. 150-153.

<sup>17</sup> « Comme aurait fait Crao », *Pif Gadget* n°60, avril 1970, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 3, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> « Comme aurait fait Crao », *Pif Gadget* n°60, avril 1970, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 3, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> « Le collier de griffes », *Pif Gadget* n°70, juin 1970, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 3, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 78 ; « Le lagon de l'effroi », *Pif Gadget* n°152, janvier 1972, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 6, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 8.

silhouette like a drop of water, which is emphasized by his hair style<sup>20</sup>. The hero's clean entry into the water is edifying: only a few splashes can be seen. This visual indicator, showing the expertise of the diver, very probably accentuates the sport inspiration of the movement as well as demonstrating the perfection which Rahan represents. Although André Chéret confesses that he did no specific research into sport techniques to apply them to his hero, his observational qualities and his skill at drawing movement fill his project of human perfection with amusing sports details. The story is imbued with a context – that of modern sport techniques (Vigarello, 1988, p. 15) – and the way Rahan is depicted seems to confirm this. Moreover, the ease with which Rahan dives into the roughest waters<sup>21</sup> symbolizes his capacity to face life's obstacles, overcome them and turn them into an asset. This rapid, fluid and easy movement which Chéret confers on his character shows his competence for confronting the hero with the unknown. By being able to advance in an environment which is judged by the primitive peoples as hostile, Rahan shows his qualities of reflection and self-improvement. He is therefore a sufficiently close model, in spirit as well as in body, for the young reader to feel able to imitate him: he is ordinary and can improve. He needs to imitate what the other hominids do. The traditional process of learning is evident here but the technical gesture does not only teach physical perfection which is sometimes undermined by the drawings. He is a moral model who never conceitedly takes his position for granted. He is humble and ordinary, and has to learn in order to improve and overcome the unknown.

## 1.2 An innovative hero: excellence as a transitory state

His learning approach makes him an innovative hero who astonishingly mobilizes certain contemporary physical activities of the young readers of the years from 1970-1980. The principle of innovation is continually mobilized and is not restricted to sport innovations: once Rahan experiences natural phenomena in several situations, he obtains a functional model which he repeatedly improves even more. He permanently searches for excellence through his innovative approach. For example, his understanding of flotation is enriched with every new experience. His implementation process improves. From an episode where he observes a tree which glides over the water to the construction of a small raft<sup>22</sup>, the notion of buoyancy is conceptualized to be developed. This constant creative attitude prevents the hero from appearing smug. The ever increasing number of obstacles motivate him to imagine new activities, to improve them and in this sense to innovate. Described as an engineer (Vogler, 1986/1987, p. 169), he is able to go beyond the material level to find more creative expressions. In the case of physical activities, the examples strongly challenge the readers. In fact, Rahan does not hesitate to use the forces of nature to move around. While he is fleeing from a tribe wizard, a thrown spear crashes into his cane shield so hard that it makes him lose his balance and fall over a cliff. Seeing that the shield is carried away by a wave, Rahan turns it into a surf board. First of all he balances on his knees to get past the first wave and ends up

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<sup>20</sup> « Comme aurait fait Crao », *Pif Gadget* n°60, avril 1970, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 3, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 20 ; « Le lagon de l'effroi », *Pif Gadget* n°152, janvier 1972, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 6, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> « Comme aurait fait Crao », *Pif Gadget* n°60, avril 1970, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 3, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> « Le secret du soleil », *Pif Gadget* n°1, mars 1969, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, pp. 55-56.

standing on the board and surfing in the barrel of a second wave<sup>23</sup>. This type of navigation is clearly inspired by the fun activities of the period 1970-1980 with which the young readers of the magazine were familiar. In fact, this activity increasingly became part of seaside leisure sport on the fashionable French coasts during the 1970s (Attali, 2007, p. 74). According to the analysis that Joël De Rosnay makes in 1977 (Pociello, 1981, p. 173), there is a rocking movement in the main principles of sliding that Rahan echoes<sup>24</sup>. This approach clearly shows an education which follows the changes of the post-1968 generation. The social space for sports evolves, sport practices become hybrid and the young take them over. As Pierre Vogler explains, « all this culminates with the (boom of) the leisure society, (as) the focal point of evolution » (Vogler, 1986/1987, p. 170). The young readers identify even more with their hero as their common practice appears exceptional in the primitive age. This example is not unusual. From the logic of the force of the wind in a tanned animal skin coupled with<sup>25</sup> that of the buoyancy of two bamboo branches tied together, Rahan also « invents » a close cousin of kite-surfing in a sitting position<sup>26</sup>. If the man with the fiery hair flies, thanks to his initiative, from 1974 on, we had to wait for 10 years before some young people from Quimper filed a patent for an inflatable structure in 1984 (Belliard & Legrand, 2010, p. 23). This example is even more singular because in his drawings Chéret features a hybrid activity – kite surfing – before it arrived in France. According to our interview, there was no model and this illustration was the fruit of his imagination. We cannot delve any more here into the hypothesis of imagination. But the logic of getting inspiration from the principles of sliding in Rahan's innovative approach clearly reflects a context: that of the fun activities of his young readers. In short, this hybrid activity thus permits their hero to explore new spaces, but also new activities of which the readers are or will become aware.

## 2. To rise through sharing: the imperative of transmission

In each of his encounters, the hero continually increases his knowledge. It is true that he takes advantage of the experiences of others to learn and better understand the world that surrounds him. But once he has acquired knowledge, he disseminates it within the tribes he comes across. If the model can come from the people, he is also a model who emanates from the people, as at times he embodies them. In the sense that what he learns and what he teaches remain accessible to all the men of the distant tribes, while also referring to the physical and sports activities of his young readers, Rahan remains an ordinary man. If he attains the status of a hero in the prehistoric era, because the others seek to imitate him, he is not considered as a divine figure but only as an exceptional man, who is elevated especially because he shares his techniques, particularly physical ones, to overcome certain obstacles or conflicts the tribes have to face.

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<sup>23</sup> « Rahan l'homme-chien », *Pif Gadget* n°796-798, juin/juillet 1984, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 18, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 82-86.

<sup>24</sup> « Rahan l'homme-chien », *Pif Gadget* n°796-798, juin/juillet 1984, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 18, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 82-86.

<sup>25</sup> Rahan gets his inspiration especially from the inflated wings of flying reptiles.

<sup>26</sup> « Le captif du grand fleuve », *Pif Gadget* n°296, septembre 1974, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 9, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 141-142.



## 2.1 An altruistic hero: the art of transmitting for no reward

Multiplying his means of moving in water, Rahan is exemplary. He is in this sense the positive emanation of the people. He uses everyone's experiences to improve humanity. He is a humble man who carries, almost unwillingly, the strength of the embodied example (Girardet, 1986, p. 79). In fact, through his swimming, he is able to escape from danger on the land by crossing a lake<sup>27</sup> or defend himself against underwater creatures, etc.<sup>28</sup> Yet for certain tribes advancing through water is a means of emancipation to achieve freedom. It is in this context that Rahan plays a central role. He is a cultural transmitter. Held up as a reference, his physical skills serve as an example and feed his altruism. Rahan thus teaches front crawl to alleviate the tensions between rival communities. In fact, the tribe of « those from the land who talk » physically stop a neighboring tribe from approaching their island to collect large quantities of shellfish. The latter cannot get them<sup>29</sup> as they have never learned to swim. If the symbolic value of the shellfish crystallizes the tensions, in reality, accessibility to this resource is what appears to be the source of jealousy and conflict: there are enough shellfish for everyone. Swimming thus becomes a means of exchange to extinguish the rivalries, as they end up fishing each on their own side, some on the shores of the island and the others on the shores of a lagoon. Here the transmission of this means of moving through water – the front crawl – is less a tool for social appeasement than an element of physical culture necessary for man's emancipation. Every man should know how to swim to live freely and take advantage of the riches offered by the environment. The image of the expert swimmer acting as a monitor helping and guiding prosaically reinforces Rahan's altruistic and dedicated appearance. This transmission is all the stronger because it is not imagined in a liberal society based on exchange. The act of teaching is most often gratuitous and disinterested, except in the case where his or another's life is in danger. The exchange thus only has value in the free quality of the deed: only disinterested sharing elevates the human community. Making it accessible to all, the hero's altruism aims to make knowledge the gathering place for humanity.

Different pedagogical learning methods – real or imagined – feed Rahan's disinterested and exemplary character. First of all, he indirectly intervenes with the aid of a piece of equipment which helps to keep the learner on the surface. For this he uses a rope to prevent his sidekick from drowning<sup>30</sup>. This teaching equipment had in fact already been used in France since the 1870s for learning breast stroke (Terret, 1994, p. 92). In the same way as the pole, this tool makes it possible to keep the learner on the surface of the water. The young readers of the years between 1970 and 1980 felt even more involved because they had

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<sup>27</sup> « Les larmes qui volent », *Pif Gadget* n°203, janvier 1973, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 7, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> « Le spectre de Tarao », *Pif Gadget* n°597-8-9, septembre/octobre 1980, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> « La terre qui parle », *Pif Gadget* n°116, mai 1971, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, pp. 163-164.

<sup>30</sup> « La terre qui parle », *Pif Gadget* n°116, mai 1971, in *Rahan, L'intégrale* Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 163.

probably safely learned to swim using this equipment – the pole. Sometimes the hero intervenes directly to physically guide the learner. He assists a young woman in that way to teach her breast stroke<sup>31</sup>. Learning is also considered as using imitation. The learner is put into the water, keeps afloat, and then directly attempts to swim reproducing the actions of the hero. The scant technical advice is limited to attitude: « Don't gesticulate so much Gâa ! You have to keep calm to really « crawl on the water »<sup>32</sup>. The crucible of Rahan's learning approach seems to have multiple influences. One especially thinks of guidance, direct help, learning by imitation or a method based on sensations in the water as was perhaps proposed by Raymond Catteau and Gérard Garoff in the 1970s (1974). Yet, even there, Chéret's imagination seems to play a singular role: having learned to swim by himself, the artist exemplifies his context without however being able to explain his choices; he makes no references to these pedagogical methods. The books support André Chéret when he affirms that he did not adopt any specific documented approach to produce his drawings. The purely fictional character of the comic strip is in fact at times the only motive. For example, to keep a companion on the surface of the water, Rahan holds him up by his hair<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, what matters is not the pedagogical method. The goal is to show that Rahan helps and teaches swimming in a disinterested manner. Although possessing is important, man is elevated by sharing with the human community, and thus helping to bring social change to the tribes. And so, much more than a sports movement, front crawl appears as human progress. In fact, it favors the idea that the sport movement and sport reintroduce evolution to mankind. Philosopher Michel Serres talks about «hominization» in what the human being possesses as the capacity to invent using the body (Serres, 2010, p. 15). Sports would thus be considered as the culmination of movement. In this sense, sports techniques allowt Man to clarify the unknown, to access a better future and to overcome ignorance, often embodied as the old tribe wizard. More importantly, the myth of the ordinary hero has the double valence of learning and teaching. Rahan shows the young these two aspects and embodies them dialectically. Through this storyline and images, Rahan becomes a contemporary of his young readers, as – through movement – he imitates the sports practice of the period between 1970 and 1980. If man is elevated by his growing abilities, he rises even higher when he transmits them. The importance of this virtue is made evident in the plot. The hero is very often offered the position of chief, which he systematically refuses. The free transmission of knowledge to raise humanity seems to be the main reason for his existence. The educational message addressed to the young readers in no way lies in hierarchical power but totally in personal and social enrichment.

## 2.2 Giving oneself raised to the status of a dogma: a life-saving hero

To act disinterestedly is the characteristic approach of our hero. This virtue is again revealed when a man is in danger. Through life-saving techniques in the water, the educational message shows Rahan's altruism. He saves other men in perilous situations, at

<sup>31</sup> « Le grand amour de Rahan », *Pif Gadget* n°862-3-4, octobre 1985, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 18, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 23 et p. 34

<sup>32</sup> « Les larmes qui volent », *Pif Gadget* n°203, janvier 1973, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 7, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> « La terre qui parle », *Pif Gadget* n°116, mai 1971, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 4, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 164.

times risking his own life. Nature's order is thus weakened. In fact, in an environment as uncertain as water, daring to enter or accidentally falling in can cost one's life. Rahan then intervenes to save the drowning men. From the first episodes on, he has understood that the extended body floats. For this reason the hero runs on saving his energy to keep himself on the surface<sup>34</sup>. He puts Archimedes' principle of buoyancy to good use by almost totally immersing his body to be able to float. This principle is used many times, notably to keep a fellow in misfortune afloat in a cave filling with water<sup>35</sup> or aid a child in the water<sup>36</sup>. His engineering qualities then resurface when he has to use his body in the water. Here again Chéret is a child of his time: he does not draw using a model<sup>37</sup>. The forms of rescue in water are however very similar to life-saving techniques. One more or less reflects the method of towing with the eggbeater kick which consists of towing the body cheek to cheek, holding it up with an arm passed around the throat<sup>38</sup>. The other recalls towing with a crawl type movement permitting the body to be pulled through the water again held around the neck<sup>39</sup>. Although the approach to life-saving by holding around the neck would lead to strangling – it should be done under the armpit – this image is less important than the multiple proofs of heroism depicted throughout all the episodes. In fact, at the purely technical level, the exact positioning of the legs is sometimes blurred by the distorting filter effect of the water. The act of rescuing becomes a moral virtue: every life is worth saving. Life in its widest sense, whether human, Neanderthal or animal is thus considered a supreme gift. Life deserves giving oneself up and putting oneself in danger. In fact we also find Rahan saving a chimpanzee that has fallen from a skiff<sup>40</sup>. Ultimately, Rahan in this sense becomes exceptional, not because he possesses divine abilities, but because all of his actions only have value because they help foster life and the betterment of the community. The act of aiding appears as a real vector of social mutation and change but also as a factor of relational insertion. When Rahan saves someone, he transforms the nature of the relationship: that of altruism. Yet in the primitive eras, death was part of fate, of everyday life. Rahan's actions make him an ardent defender of life. Given that he has been helped since his childhood, and adopted by an unknown tribe on the death of his parents who were attacked by the « Goraks »<sup>41</sup>, he in turn helps other tribes. Again this is one of Rahan's essential virtues. Altruism is what makes Rahan exceptional. Without his possessing divine power, it is through his deeds and especially through sports movements that this virtue is raised to the status of a dogma in the eyes of his readers. The educational message for the young readers is explicit: every life deserves to be saved and this approach makes Rahan a hero.

<sup>34</sup> « Le tombeau liquide », *Pif Gadget* n°25, août 1969, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> « Le tombeau liquide », *Pif Gadget* n°25, août 1969, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> « Le dernier homme », *Pif Gadget* n°166, avril 1972, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 6, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with André Chéret and his wife Madame Chéret by Jean-Nicolas Renaud and Kilian Mousset 08/01/2016.

<sup>38</sup> « Le tombeau liquide », *Pif Gadget* n°25, août 1969, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, p. 142 ;

« Les longues crinières », *Pif Gadget* n°119, juin 1971, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 5, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 14 ;

« Les hommes sans peau », *Pif Gadget* n°511, janvier 1979, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 14, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000,

p. 57.

<sup>39</sup> « Le secret de Wandaka », *Pif Gadget* n°400, novembre 1976, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 13, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 103 ; « La boue qui dévore », *Pif Gadget* n°321, mars 1975, in *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 11, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> « Pour sauver Tamao », *Pif Gadget* n°570, février 1980, dans *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 10, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> « L'enfance de Rahan », *Pif Gadget* n°984-5-6, février 1988, dans *Rahan*, L'intégrale Tome 1, Toulon, Éditions Soleil, 1998, pp. 8-14.

## CONCLUSION

Rahan is a model in movement. The education of his body serves a double purpose. On the one hand, there is that of a moral dimension. By learning or teaching swimming, life-saving, the hybridization of sport activities, he opposes the incessant hostilities among the tribes, the traditions embodied by the wizard. These moral values come alive in the eyes of the readers through the adventures of an altruistic hero, whose actions for the good of all are only motivated by his respect for life as the ultimate possession which is worth giving himself up. On the other hand, the project is undoubtedly both in the values in the physical and sport activities, and the activities themselves. On the other hand, his project is to promote the values attached to physical and sports activities, as well as the activities themselves. The hero is simultaneously a mirror and a motor of the physical and sports activities of the young readers. From sports swimming to the optimization of his movements through the hybridization of his activities, he facilitates identification on the part of the young readers. This approach is even more apparent as Rahan relies on the physical and sport practices of the years between 1970 and 1980 and the human abilities of the young readers. Finally, movement is one of the crucibles of the comics' project. The thirst to learn, to help others, is an existential source for Rahan, and *in fine*, of the conception of human culture which is being emphasized. It is the whole force of human culture which is highlighted. Man must overcome nature, and that also involves physical and sport activities. If the comic presents a form of essentialization of sport techniques in prehistoric times, it has the merit of considering sport techniques as an element of human culture. We can therefore wonder about the effective acceptance of these drawings and the incorporation of their virtues by young readers of the 1970s and 1980s, who are today mostly in their fifties or sixties<sup>42</sup>;

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<sup>42</sup> This line of work came out of the closing remarks of the Conference « Bande dessinée et Sport » in Besançon on November 27 2015, from the comments of sociologist Gilles Ferréol.

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