

The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies

as seen from the perspective of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa

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ABSTRACT. Against the background of topical developments in comparative mythology (especially the work of Michael Witzel), and concentrating on the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia (South Central Africa) my argument extensively offers the descriptive data on which to base a formal consideration of Nkoya –Eurasian parallels, gradually proceeding to a point where such formal consideration could begin to give way to the admission of factual historical continuity. Thus I argue that there is an empirically justified case for such continuity between African and Eurasian mythologies, as a way to open up new theoretical, historical and interpretative horizons. In the process, a number of possible explanatory models of such continuity are considered and evaluated both empirically and theoretically: Frobenius' (1931) model of the South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to East Africa and South West Asia; cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument); combined cultural and demic diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (the Afrocentrist position, and Bernal's Afrocentrist afterthought after his Egyptocentric Black Athena position); van Binsbergen's Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, claiming that 'Pandora's Box' (my proposed term for the cultural heritage with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa in two sallies, 80 and 60 ka BP) contained a few basic mythological themes that were subsequently developed, transformed and innovation in Asia after which the results were fed back into Africa in the context of the recently discovered Back-into-Africa movement from 15 ka BP; and Oppenheimer's General Sunda Thesis, claiming a general fertilising effect (implied to have been Austric / Austronesian based) of pre-insular South East Asia upon West Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Africa.

1. Introduction

After extensive work on historical reconstruction (largely on the basis of mythical and oral historical materials) in the field of North African popular Islam and of Central African precolonial religious forms, and before exploring urban culture and ecstatic cults in Southern Africa, the Nkoya people of Zambia constituted, for decades from 1972 onward, my main research focus in Africa. Speaking a Central Bantu language, the Nkoya (numbering ca. 100,000) emerged (under the effect of the ethnic

dynamics of the colonial state as mediated through the indirect rule of Barotseland, with local Christian intellectuals as major ethnic brokers) as a comprehensive self-affirming ethnic identity towards the middle of the 20th c. CE, as a bundling of a great many smaller identities each characterised by their own name, clan affiliation, areas of residence, royal and chiefly leaders, dialectical variations, historical traditions etc. (van Binsbergen 1992). The Nkoya primarily inhabit the fertile plateau of the Kafue / Zambezi watershed, although smaller branches of this ethnic cluster are found in Western, Central and Southern Zambia, and small minorities of Nkoya urban migrants inhabit all towns of South Central and Southern Africa. In an economy combining highly perfected hunting and fishing techniques with surprisingly complex forms of cultivation (Trapnell & Clothier 1937; Schültz 1976), with an unbroken local pottery tradition going back at least two millennia, and extensive iron metallurgy, the kingship, name inheritance rites and female initiation rites are among their central institutions, which are largely continuous with those of neighbouring peoples in the wide vicinity. The Nkoya also knew male initiation rites including male genital mutilation, but these were discontinued as a result of a complex process spanning several centuries (van Binsbergen 1992, 1993), in the course of which Nkoya distinctiveness was asserted vis-à-vis the kingship and culture of the Lunda under the royal title of Mwati Yamvo / Mwaat Yaamv in Southern Congo (whose overlordship used to be acknowledged for hundred of kilometres into what is today Zambia and Angola) and vis-à-vis the circumcising cluster of peoples in that region: Chokwe, Luvale, Mbunda and Luchazi. The Lozi (Barotse, Luyi) of the Zambezi flood plain,¹ went through a similar process, initially parallel with and hardly distinguishable from the ethnic clusters and ruling groups that were to end up under the Nkoya label, subsequently in an increasingly hegemonic relation vis-à-vis the Nkoya groups – after the Kololo *mfecane*-induced immigration from Southern Africa in the early 19th century, which made a Sotho dialect the language of communication throughout rapidly expanding Barotseland. Nkoya court culture especially its royal orchestra continued to dominate all royal courts in Western Zambia to this day, and the Nkoya-Luyana language remained the Luyi court language. In recent decades, now that Nkoya musical and ritual culture has come to be largely virtualised, it is still through the annual two-day Kazanga festival (a radical transformation of an ancient royal harvest festival, discontinued in the late 19th century)² that the Nkoya through a rich repertoire of music and dance present their identity to the wider world at the regional and national level.

After a series of ethnographic and ethnohistorical articles, I edited (van Binsbergen 1988) *Likota lya Bankoya*, a collection of oral traditions of the Nkoya people of Zambia compiled and synthesised by the first local Christian minister of religion. Soon this was followed (van Binsbergen 1992) by my analytical study *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in Central Western Zambia*, a reconstruction of half a millennium of state formation in the region, based on a close reading of these worked-up traditions against the combined background of:

¹ Cf. Gluckman 1941, 1943, 1949, 1951, 1955.

² Van Binsbergen 1993, 1995, 1999, 2003.

Fig. 1. Scenes from Nkoya life, Western Zambia, 1970s-2000s



a. A Nkoya village scene, Nkeyema, 1978



b. Final coming-out ceremony in the Nkoya female puberty rites, 1977



c. The Nkoya king Mwene Kabulwebulwe at the Kazanga festival, Kaoma district, Zambia, 2003; note the reed ceremonial architecture



d. At a name-inheriting (*ushwana*) ceremony, Njonjolo, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1973, the candidate finds herself inside the ancestral sacred reed fence (*shitete*), where she takes upon her back a child of the deceased relative whose name she has just inherited



e. The Nkoya king Mwene Kahare Kabambi poses in style on his throne seat in his palace, Njonjolo, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1977; he holds a rolled reed mat in order to proclaim the Mashasha identity of his division of the Nkoya people



f. The royal orchestra of the Nkoya king Mwene Kahare Kabambi, Njonjolo, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1977

- (a) traditions I had collected in the region in the course of two decades, not only at the royal courts (where central dynastic oral histories are managed, controlled and transmitted), but also in commoner villages where the traditions were relatively decentralised and unprocessed in the light of dynastic aspirations, and therefore reveal many flaws, contradictions and manipulations in the integrated courtly accounts

Among the Nkoya, the distinction between royal and commoner villages is blurred and situational. Royal villages are those whose headmen carry the personal name – canonised into a hereditary title after death – of historical rules kings from the early 19th century onward, and their close consanguineal kinsmen. Rules of royal and chiefly succession however are flexible (also because the essentially matrilineal Nkoya kinship system had drifted towards bilaterality under the patrilineal influence of Lozi overlordship from the second half of the 19th c. onward. In the *ushwana* name-inheritance rite which is a central institution of Nkoya life (van Binsbergen 1981b, 1990), successors are chosen from among a wide pool of consanguineal and even affinal kinsmen, by a collectivity of elders who manage a particular royal or chiefly title. As a result, there are no true dynastic lineages but merely large and overlapping clusters kinsmen having a stake in a particular title – with each individual having his or her unique personal set of such stakes. The elective clusters largely lack a corporate nature – although they are considered to be invested in a particular village (yet the potential members of an elective cluster tend to be dispersed over half a dozen or more villages); elective clusters are mainly revived and mobilised when a particular succession is imminent. Although slavery (a condition of bondage due to war capture and pawnship) was abolished at the regional level (Barotseland) in 1930, underlying any royal-commoner distinction is still the existence of (‘former’) slave descent lines and villagers, but this is blurred and full of contradictions, as well. Given the fact that the amorous life of female royal children was / is not bound by formal rules of marriage or decency, these princesses often produced children with court slaves, and some of these children, although inheriting their father’s despised slave connotations, were yet known to have acceded to major chiefly, even royal titles.

- (b) the existing historical and theoretical literature; and
- (c) my own background as a long-standing observer, and increasingly participant, in Nkoya village life and regional traditional politics.

The focus of *Tears of Rain* was proto-historical (not a single written text older than c. 200 years existed on the area) and (given the very recent emergence of the Nkoya ethnic identity) trans-ethnic / regional, encompassing the whole of Western Zambia and reaching into Angola and Southern Congo, but even so covering only a small portion of the African continent.

2. *From myth to proto-history – and back, in tears!*

Further exposure to Assyriology, Egyptology and comparative mythology in the first half of the 1990s, however, made me realise that what I had considered to be an distorted traditional account of historical events in Iron Age South Central Africa up to half a millennium BP, contained many highly specific parallels with the mythologies attested in the texts of civilisations extremely remote in space and time from

Nkoyaland. Below I will offer a discussion of these possible specific mythological correspondences with Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Graeco-Roman mythology and South Asia, against the more general and systematic background of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology. So I had to face the possibility (van Binsbergen 1998-2006) that my historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*, however acclaimed by the dean of Central African protohistory Jan Vansina (1993), was yet largely fictitious and based on some sort of proto-historical *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* (Whitehead 1925) – that I had systematically mistaken for

- (a) distorted-but-retrievable facts of South Central African Iron Age history in the second half of the second millennium CE, what in fact were
- (b) mere resonances – devoid of all genuine historicity and spuriously localised – of widespread mythological materials percolating throughout the Old World and among other places attested in millennia-old texts from the outer fringes of the African continent, and beyond.

By Old World I means the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe, having as transitional fringes: (a) insular Oceania (populated mainly in recent millennia from mainly South East and East Asia) and (b) New Guinea and Australia, which to some extent also saw immigrations from South and South East Asia in relatively recent millennia, but which also contain the traces of the first sally of Anatomically Modern Humans outside Africa, 80-60 ka BP. State-of-the-art genetic and comparative mythological insights would admit closeness between New Guinea and Australia on the one hand, and Palaeo-African elements which (because of the Out-of-Africa migration; cf. Forster 2004 for a comprehensive overview) form an implied, theoretical substrate throughout the Old World, yet the intensive modification (both genetically and culturally including mythologically) of the original Out of Africa package (which I have termed ‘Pandora’s Box’) during the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic mainly in Asia, and the feedback of this greatly modified genetic, cultural, linguistic and mythological models back into Africa (whilst skirting Europe and leaving considerable traces there) in the course of the Back-into-Africa migration from Central and West Asia from c. 15 ka BP (Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Coia *et al.* 2005), means that – above a Palaeo-African substratum that seems in principle reconstructible – the genetic, cultural, linguistic and mythological makeup of sub-Saharan Africa in (proto-)historical times from the Bronze Age onward, is to a considerable extent continuous with Asia and Europe. Cf. van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008a.

Although it had escaped my attention at the time, a similar objection had been brought by Wrigley against the work of my dear friend and sometime academic supervisor Matthew Schoffeleers, who engaged in similar proto-historical research in Malawi in the 1960-80s.³ Wrigley’s summary reads (1988):

‘Debates over the “Zimba” period of Zambesian history prompt a new consideration of the mythical element in oral traditions. The work of M. Schoffeleers on Mbona, presiding spirit of a famous rainshrine in southern Malawi, is exploited in order to cast doubt on his reconstruction of 16th and 17th-century political history. It is suggested that Mbona was the serpentine power immanent in the Zambesi; that reports of his ‘martyrdom’ at the hands of a secular ruler are versions of an ancient myth of

³ Cf. Schoffeleers 1988, 1992; Wrigley 1988; van Binsbergen 2008a.

the lightning and the rainbow; that his journey to, and subsequent flight from, Kaphiri-ntiwa, scene of the Maravi creation myth, is a variant of the visit made to the sky by Kintu, the 'First Man' of Ganda tradition. It is not very likely that such stories attest the rise of a great military State c. 1600 and the ensuing suppression of religious institutions.⁷

Confident in our use of a systematic method to extract fragments of historical fact from local myth,⁴ we did not heed Wrigley's criticism, which meanwhile however I have come to consider as eminently well-taken. Yet even Wrigley's position it still displayed the familiar, main-stream limitation of considering – in a splendid tradition of which Luc de Heusch (1958, 1972, 1982 [**check years**]) has been the principal exponent – the Bantu world as the *exclusive* realm within which any mythological interpretation of South Central African oral-historical narrative should be set. From the perspective of mainstream disciplinary ideology, one of the greatest sins that a modern Africanist can commit is to try and explain things African by reference to phenomena outside the African continent; the condescending futility of this position is clear when we try to apply it, *mutatis mutandis*, to the study of Christianity as a largely European (but not Europe-originating) expression, to the explosive question of the autochthony of Indian languages and of the Vedic scriptures, etc. African societies and cultures cannot be studied meaningful by reifying their Africanity, but must be studied, like any other societies and cultures in the modern world, as part of the global constellation as a whole.

My progressively confident re-reading of Nkoya oral historical narrative as possibly parallel to widely circulating and very ancient Old World mythology suggested otherwise, and set the scene for a book draft provisionally entitled (by reference to the Egyptian royal title) *Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World — Beyond the Black Athena thesis*, on which I have worked since 1998, constantly rewriting previous drafts in the light of successive and hopefully more valid models of global mythology since prehistory. This intellectual struggle⁵ has been largely an attempt to critically come to terms with the tendency to localising compartmentalisation, which has characterised anthropology (especially African ethnography) to an excessive extent ever since the rise of classic anthropology with its emphasis on participant observation within narrow spatio-temporal horizons, but which has also been endemic, in varying degrees, in all other area studies of an ethnographic, philologico-linguistic, or archaeological nature, and which has been built into the very structure of modern academia in the differentiation and or-

⁴ Van Binsbergen 1981, 1985; Schoffeleers 1979, 1985.

⁵ Which is reflected throughout my work since the mid-1990s: my attempts to elucidate the regional and transcontinental antecedents of a geomantic divination system as found and around Francistown, Botswana, Southern Africa: van Binsbergen 1995, 1996, 2005; my contributions to the *Black Athena* debate as an exercise in Afrocentricity and Egypto-Aegean transcontinental continuity van Binsbergen 1997a; my work on the theory of globalisation and virtuality: van Binsbergen 1997b, 1998; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 2005; van Binsbergen & van Dijk 2003; Fardon *et al.* 1999; my work on the fundamental unity of (Anatomically Modern) humankind as a foundation for intercultural philosophy: van Binsbergen 1999, 2003, 2008b; and, most important in the context of the present conference, my attempts to formulate an Aggregative, Diachronic Model of Global Mythology: van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008a.

ganisation of disciplines, journals, libraries, funding structures etc. – creating an illusion of inescapable factuality that it is difficult *not* to project onto the world of our data. Admittedly, without localising compartmentalisation no ethnography, no coherent linguistic description, no recording, archiving and comparing mythologies. yet the compartmentalisation has to be transcended, and all cultural, ethnic and linguistic boundaries need to be considered as potentially porous and dynamic, if cultural process is to be understood across the 200 millennia of the history of Anatomically Modern Humans, and on a global scale. Modern globalisation studies have taught us that the revolutionising of localising compartmentalisation (both for the effacing of boundaries, and for the proliferation of new ones) is one of the salient aspects of the world today; these studies have led to a spate of neo-diffusionist studies (of the diffusion, especially in recent decades, of artefacts, identities, innovations, of political, artistic, scientific and religious ideas) that also brought us to look slightly more tolerantly (but still scornful of their lack of sophistication) at classic diffusion studies – the mainstream anthropology of the late 19th and early 20th century, when culture theory was largely non-existent and therefore artefacts, styles and institutions were considered to hop around the world, limitlessly, and fragmentarily i.e. non-integrated in wider cultural complexes either at their place of origin or at the destinations to which they allegedly were diffused.

If beyond the relatively safe (for mainstream-affirmed) world of Bantu cosmology and mythology as codified by competent specialists, I wish to appeal to an ulterior array of very ancient mythemes claimed to have been widely circulating throughout the Old World, then I make a claim to massive intercontinental cultural continuities and to Africa's being an integral part of the cultural history of humankind. In principle such a claim should be self-evident, yet it is controversial, for a number of reasons. In the first place, how can such a claim be distinguished from the most entrenched, naïve, and discredited forms of classic diffusionism? For the most obvious way to explain whatever parallels are perceived – rightly or wrongly – between sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the Old World, is by assuming that the traits in question originated in one region and subsequently diffused to the other region – either (a) into sub-Saharan Africa (as older, Eurocentric scholarship would a priori assume, e.g. in the context of the notorious Hamitic thesis) or (b) from Africa into the rest of the Old World, as Afrocentrists and the closely related *Black Athena* thesis would have it. Any argument concerning African/Eurasian parallels would risk to be swamped by unsophisticated and dogmatic ideological preferences, until one realises that an alternative, and generally productive and preferable, model is to look for a common prehistoric source of both the African and the Eurasian attestations – and then seek to define the nature and the localisation of that postulated origin in the light of a systematic, empirically underpinned theory – which is in fact the approach advocated (through not necessarily realised) in the present argument. Then again, as already noted, out of a potentially counter-hegemonic yet by and large ill-advised sense of continental distinctiveness, historical rehabilitation and vicarious chauvinism, modern Africanists have tended to explain African phenomena by exclusive reference to Africa; claiming Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Graeco-Roman, and South Asian mythemic parallels in Africa is likely to incur the accusation that one is trying to reduce Africans to transcultural passive receptivity and nothing more. Less lofty, and implying an inveterate racism, have been the tacit assumptions that Africa cannot

have greatly participated in the give and take of transcontinental exchanges in prehistory, because the inhabitants (and their displaced descendants), societies and economies of that continent have been globally relegated to passive marginality in the most recent centuries. Finally, more as an accident of scholarship than as a deliberate analytical principle, until the work by Michael Witzel (2001 and in press) African mythologies (which have been relatively poorly collected, studied and anthologised as compared to other continents) tend to have been aloof from comprehensive global statements of comparative mythology. And even in Witzel's work, as in so many other intellectual, ideological and media contexts today, Africa features as the ultimate Other (van Binsbergen 2006), whose 'Gondwanan' mythologies (allegedly shared with New Guinea and Australia) are alleged to lack linear time and a sense of sustained history, true cosmogony, flood myths, kingship etc., – features that, by contrast, constitute the 'Laurasian' mythological heritage of Asia, Europe, Oceania and the New World.

Michael Witzel's nomenclature on this point is somewhat unfortunate even though one can always take refuge in a nominalist position according to which concepts and labels only mean what one explicitly and arbitrarily declares them to mean by definition, regardless of the wider historical resonances that may be imputed to them. Gondwana and Laurasia are geological terms to designate phases and sections of the postulated original land mass from which, ever since Wegener, modern geophysics has claimed that present-day continents were formed, on a time scale measured, not in tens of millennia (10^4 years or 10 ka) like the cultural including mythological history of Anatomically Modern Humans) but in hundreds of million years (10^8 years or 100,000 ka)! Because by its play on such utter primordality, Witzel's distinction confusingly suggests a fundamental and perennial separation of African / Australian / New Guinean mythologies on the one hand, Eurasian / Oceanian / American mythologies on the other, – a gap which would appear to be impossible to bridge and which seems to suggest that there are, basically and inevitably, two main sections of mythologising humankind: the primitive southern section with high levels of skin pigmentation, and the more advanced northern one with lesser levels. Michael Witzel, in his splendid detachment as a disinterested intellectual producer, cannot have been aware of any potential misuse of his distinction for racist purposes. My minor difference with him (while acknowledging the enormous inspiration which his work and person has been for me in recent years), however, is not primarily ideological or epistemological, but primarily factual: given the combined paradigms of the Out-of-Africa migration and the Back-into-Africa migration, which are extensively supported by state-of-the-art scientific research, 'Laurasian' and 'Gondwana' mythologies can only be relative and connected ideal-types, inevitably continuous and interpenetrating – with 'Laurasian' mythology developing out of 'Gondwana' in Asia during the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic ever after the Second out of Africa sally (from ca. 60 ka BP; for a provisional reconstruction of the specific steps in this genesis see van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008a), whilst subsequently 'Laurasian'-type mythologies percolated into Africa, largely overlaying and obscuring the Palaeo-African 'Gondwanan' heritage, as a result of the Back-into-Africa movement (from ca. 15 ka BP).

The present argument hinges on the proposal to proceed audaciously, yet not

without elaborate empirical grounds, from the identification of formal parallels between sub-Saharan African and Eurasian mythologies, to the claim of actual historical continuity, for which then specific origins and specific mechanisms of transmission localisation, innovation and transformation would then have to be proposed. *The suggestion of sub-Saharan mythological continuity with Eurasia – invoking an unbounded geographical transmission of cultural materials that is the everyday reality of our globalising age but that flies in the face of established compartmentalisations and fragmentations of scholarship – is admittedly controversial, counter-paradigmatic yet (as a consequence) potentially innovative* on a number of counts. However, in order to substantiate these claims, a number of steps need to be taken, first in the present argument and (since this can only be provisional and short) in subsequent, more comprehensive treatises:

- (a) *Definition and classification*: before mythemes can be compared and parallelism and continuity can be claimed, the tricky methodological problem of all intercultural comparison must be tackled: how to identify the same mytheme, or closely related mythemes, in different societies that are remote from each other in time and/or space. It is the central preliminary assumption of comparative mythology that this problem can somehow be solved to satisfaction. I have considered some of the attending difficulties elsewhere, and must reluctantly consider the problem solved here.
- (b) An empirical discussion of the mythemes in question, their sources of attestations, a sketch of their distribution in space and time. This will be the subject matter of *section 2*.
- (c) *An general interpretative framework of analysis*: even if a solution can be found for the definitional and classificatory problem, and even if such solution allow us to compile a manageable corpus of data, it is not meaningful to simply compare any spatio-temporally specific mythological in time and place with any other with different spatio-temporary parameters; specific comparisons only become meaningful against the background of a comprehensive theory of global cultural history, which tells us which specific items to select for comparison, where and when and why. I will discuss half a dozen of such interpretative frameworks, some of which have already given rise to considerable debate, whilst others are still being pioneered and in fact appear to find here their first explicit formulation as rival or – as the case may be – complementary models of African-Eurasian continuity in the mythological field. These models are not merely offering an interpretative analytical framework within which to consider and understand such factual continuity as we may find in the mythological data. They also offer *concrete proposals for the logistics in other words the geographical and technological means of transmission and sustenance involved*. In other words, they begin to suggest ways in which the mythological materials in question could have ended up, both in a twentieth-century Central African backwater, while their earlier attestations, several thousands of kilometres and thousands of years away from their attestations, were in the Ancient Near East, Ancient Egypt, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia.

These will be the subject matter of the final sections, which however for reasons of time and space appear only in truncated form in this draft version. But let us first consider Nkoya mythology in some detail.

3. Glimpses of Nkoya mythology

3.1. Introduction

In the first place a remark on method is in order. Comparative mythologists typically deal with existing written texts, that have been collected, processed, published, canonised, streamlined, by others, and whose intertextuality they explore and interpret. Elsewhere I have explored the intercultural philosophical implications and limitations of such an approach (van Binsbergen 2008a). Here my perspective is that of an anthropological and oral-historical fieldworker, who in real-life situations in which he has an essentially limited linguistic and cultural competence, is confronted with a confusion of unprocessed, mainly oral data, none of which present themselves as labelled ‘mythical’ or ‘factual historical’, and most of which appear in great variation. In the Nkoya case, my task has been rendered easier but more complex by the availability of a local compilation of mythology, *Likota lya Bankoya*, which circulated in one or two heavily contested manuscript copies before I edited and published the text around 1990 – however, it is the confrontation of *Likota lya Bankoya* with other, more diffuse and less controlled, oral traditions that produced my proto-historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*. This reminds us of the essential nature of mythology as a scholarly construct; it also suggests that the comparative and theoretical framework with which a researcher collects and interprets local textual material greatly affects the ultimate shape of that material when published. In my case, I evolved, in the course of the last two decades, from a regional South Central African comparative perspective to an arch-comparativist seeing the whole of the intellectual history of Anatomically Modern Humans, across their 200 ka of existence, as one sustained and coherent process of diffusion, transformation and innovation, and that can only mean that I now look with very different eyes at the Nkoya material which I collected mainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

Then, the following accounts of Nkoya mythology are mere glimpses in more than one sense. Often the stories are highly truncated and summarised for lack of space; often they need to be interpreted and expanded from highly hermetic and compact sources such as song texts and praise names. As someone who, despite being recognised as Nkoya, lives most of his life in distant Europe, as a non-native speaker, a male,⁶ a non-hunter, increasingly recognised as a non-Christian traditional healer


⁶ Perhaps maleness has not been the point. Below we will touch on Nkoya female puberty rites, which despite being recognised as a central institution in their society, yet appear to be without mythical elaboration, whereas male puberty rites – discarded a century ago – do have such elaboration. The solution could simply be that as a male I had no access to female puberty rites as constructions of intra-gender female identity and solidarity. However, I have entertained a keen and admiring interest in female rites for decades, have written about them (van Binsbergen 2003 ch. 3) and have successfully

(*nganga*), and as one increasingly associated with royal circles (like my role model and occasional adviser for ethnographic research in Western Zambia, Max Gluckman, I ended up as a member of the local aristocracy, being formally adopted into the Kahare royal family and inheriting from King Kahare Kabambi when he died) I could not expect to have and retain unimpeded access to all sectors of Nkoya life; the virtual annihilation of local figurative art under the onslaught of fundamentalist missionary teaching from the 1910s on and of anti-witchcraft movements from the 1920s, suggests that also much mythological knowledge has been wiped out in the course the 20th century CE; and finally I have deliberately omitted certain genres of Nkoya mythology e.g. star myths.

Yet one of the most popular Nkoya myths, often repeated by grandmothers at the evening kitchen fire, is the story of *Kangonda* ('Mr Moon') with his four wives, each corresponding to a moon phase: the first kills him, the second buries him, the third revives him, and the fourth restores him to full splendour; the story is indicative of an ambivalence between spouses (as against the unconditional loyalty between siblings) to which we shall return below. As incomparably skilled hunters covering great distances in the dense savannah forest in search of game, the Nkoya have orientated by the stars, and must have had an interesting astronomy and star lore, of which however I have not been able to collect more than a few scraps – predictably focusing on the Moon and the Pleiades.

Finally, a note on purity. Having lived under the influence of the fundamentalist South Africa General Mission since the 1910, with additional Roman Catholic missionary influence, and having Rev. J. Shimunika, the first Nkoya Christian pastor, as compiler of their collection of mythology *Likota lya Bankoya*, cannot have remained without effect, as we shall see. The very format of *Likota lya Bankoya* is biblical, and I have retained that form in my edition and in the selections below.

3.2. A reed-and-bee complex?

The Nkoya mythical material turned out to contain several intriguing parallels with *one of the principal Ancient Egyptian royal titles, nsw-bit* , 'The One of the Reed and the Bee', as attested in writing and iconography from earliest dynastic times onward⁷. Thus the apical ancestress of the Nkoya, Libupe, in the mythical account

stimulated one of my students to explore the topic further in other parts of Zambia (Rasing 2001). Paying the imposed fee (which is a recognised mode of access to restricted knowledge in Africa) to cross the otherwise impassable gender boundary, female leaders have spend days in 1978 to explain to me the details of Nkoya puberty rites, sing the songs for me, show me the secret string figures that to them are at the heart of the social, sexual, domestic and hygienic teachings, and share with me whatever they had to share in the form of articulate textual knowledge and motion patterns. But apart from the demon of female blood, K'anga, which is to be propitiated and negotiated in menarche and menstruation but about which no further details could be given, no mythology materialised. Rasing's experience, although a woman, was not very different: she was allowed to see and hear everything, all sacred figurines and wall paintings were shown to her, some with obvious astronomical implications, but no myths and not meta-textual explanation were shared with her. The latter may be lost in the mists of time.

⁷ Cf. Thierry 1913; Sethe 1930; Müller 1938; Kaplony 1963; Schott 1956; Otto 1960, Dosrev

appears as a Queen Bee travelling with her Swarm and landing at the land of Nkoya⁸ – which was the name of a deserted forested area at the Kabompo / Zambezi confluence before it became an ethnic designation. The groom's family approaching a bride's village in order to collect her in marriage, in their conventionalised songs still apply the imagery of bees (*mapuka*) to themselves. Without a doubt, the bee-related aspect that is most on the minds of the Nkoya, and especially of men close to court circles, is the fermented drink that is made of honey: *mbote*, 'mead', the possibility of whose consumption overrules literally all other priorities and brings the drinkers into an ecstatic bliss close to paradise. In the Ancient Near East (especially Anatolia) and Ancient Europe, mead was held in similar esteem, as a focal element in cosmology and social interaction. In the Ancient Near East (especially Anatolia), Ancient Europe, South Asia (mead is one of the identifications of *soma*), and on Madagascar, [**add refs**] mead was held in similar esteem, as a focal element in cosmology and social interaction.

The Nkoya and their ancestors have known, probably for thousands of years, a diffuse form of apiculture, providing wild bees with large, individually owned bark cylinders hung horizontally high in the trees, and collecting honey through smoking out – but not the careful management of swarms, hives and bee queen characteristic of Eurasian apiculture since the Bronze Age.

There is, incidentally (Crane 1983) a sharp distinction between African and Middle Eastern beehives, whose basic orientation is horizontal and whose basic shape is narrowly cylindrical –, and the 'bee-hive shape' hives, which are vertical, woven from sedge, and which seem to have standing tree trunks as they proto-form. In this respect there is a contradiction: technologically, Old Kingdom Egyptian beehives appear to be continuous with the rest of Africa, but linguistically (*bit* has a convincing Indo-European etymology but not an Afro-Asiatic one), cosmologically and mythically, the Egyptian bee cult rather seem to be continuous with Anatolia and West Asia in general – as so much in Delta culture anyway.

Among the Nkoya, *Smoke*, *Firewood* and *Bee* form a triad of clans linked by ritualised joking and burial obligations. More such triads (whose elements are conceptually linked by mutual enhancement or destruction) may be spotted in Nkoya clan nomenclature, and together they make up the fossilised remnants of what once appears to have been a widespread cosmological transformation cycle – throughout Eurasia (with extensions into sub-Saharan Africa and North America) apparently the implied basis of a considerable variety of mythologies, of cosmologies such as the four-element doctrine of Empedocles and of the eight-element Chinese *pa kua* cosmology, and therefore of divination systems such as *I Ching*. I propose that these systems all go back to a West to Central Asian prototype of a 2ⁿ-based, cyclical cosmology, already implied in the world-view that may be glimpsed from the reconstructed Borean vocabulary, c. 20 ka BP and perhaps to be associated with the Mal'ta archaeological culture on Lake Baikal. As part of my work in progress on the global history of divination systems, and on the Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, I have drafted a extensive study setting out these relationships, which

1993, and numerous more recent general accounts including Edwards 1985, Spencer 1993, Kemp 1995, Gundlach 1997, 1998, Wilkinson 2001. Gardiner has consistently 'sedge' instead of 'reed'.

⁸ Likota 2.

while ultimately inspired by Nkoya ethnography, cannot be convincingly presented within the present scope.

More cogently, the primordial mythical twins of complementary gender, Katete ('Reed Person') and Luhamba ('Royal Going from Branch to Branch, i.e. Travelling in Stages'), to whom the latter-day format of the Nkoya kingship (with its brother-sister complementarity even ritual incest, and the possibility of *male and violent* kings whereas Nkoya myths suggest that before Luhamba all kings were female and implicitly pacifist) is largely attributed, in an aetiological story⁹ are associated with, respectively, Reed Mat and Bee Hive.

7₁ Oho Luhamba
Iwa Shilayi na Katete babaholekele Bakambunze Luhamba mu shikumba, Katete bamuholekele mu linala. 2 Bahumbu bezile ku munzi wa Lyovu lya Mbuwa mukwipula ngayi,

'Tutongwezenu oku kuli Mukasheta?'

Bakambunze bakumbwile ngayi,

'Kowa Bakasheta kuno nimwabo banabamanishi ku lungu. 3 Oho tukwamba noho shinga shiya shikumba niye muntu shinga ha yuwako bene, Shikumba uyuvu? Kami shinga liya linala niye muntu shinga ha yuwako bene, Katete uyuvu?'

Niho Bahumbu bayuvwile mazu awa a Lyovu lya Mbuwa. 4 Pele babokele bakandaminine na Miluzi mwana Lalafuta, bayile ku Lushimba mwana Lufupa. Niko kukotoka kwa nzita ya Bahumbu pele.

Oho Luhamba

7₁ When
Luhamba and Katete were being hidden by the Mbuze — Luhamba in a bark container, Katete in a mat — 2 the Humbu came to the village of Lyovu lya Mbuwa and asked:

'Tell us if there is any Sheta here?'

The Mbuze answered:

'There are no Sheta left alive. 3 This is what we are saying and if the bark container had been a person it would have heard. "Do you hear, Bark Container?"' Also, if the reed mat had been a person it would have heard. "Do you hear, Reed?"'

The Humbu heard these words of Lyovu lya Mbuwa. 4 They left and camped on the Miluzi, a tributary of the Lalafuta, and then went along the Lushimba, a tributary of the Lufupa. Thus the Humbu war came to an end.



In this mythical account, the Royal siblings Katete and Luhamba (not specified to be twins; also a brother Lipepo, 'Wind', is mentioned), represent, in that order,

- a reed mat (the central locus of investiture during the ushwana rite;¹⁰ moreover, royal courts, *ushwana* ritual sites and royal dead bodies are sheltered by reed mats, which is also the standard bedding. The Eastern Nkoya (Mashasha) consider the reed mat their emblem – when the Lozi expelled them from the Zambezi flood plain the Mashasha are remembered to carry their reed mats, now rationalised as items of bedding, but more probably moveable shrines contained their chiefs ancestral relics. Among the Eastern Lunda (Cunnison 1968), like among the Nkoya, royal graves were surrounded by reed fences.
- a beehive made of bark.

⁹ Likota 7: 1f.

¹⁰ Cf. in Nkoya (following, like elsewhere in this paper, standard Nkoya orthography): *babipanikile mu shitete na babishwanine niye N.N.* 'they put him/her inside the reed fence and performed the name-inheritance rite upon him so as to become N.N.'

Reed had a central symbolic significance in Ancient Egypt from earliest dynastic times, when (as emulated in later stone buildings from the 3rd dynasty onward, and in numerous other decorative conventions) royal and temple architecture were predominantly executed in reed. Also compare the Ancient Egyptian custom of reed mat burial.¹¹

The meaning of the royal title ‘The One of the Reed and the Bee’ has constituted one of the perennial puzzles of Egyptology. The complementarity between Reed and Bee has been frequently but superficially attributed to the ideological complementarity between Upper and Lower Egypt, after their mythical unification under the mythical king Menes / Min / Minos; apart from the stereotyped context of the royal nomenclature with its circular signification, more common symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt are the lotus and the papyrus, which occur together in the riverine and delta environment. Lower Egypt has featured, from earliest dynastic times, a Saïs-based cult of a goddess associated with bees and honey (a variant, no doubt, not of Upper Egyptian and ultimately African continuities, but of more general Eastern Mediterranean Bronze and Iron Age mother goddesses with similar connotations, notably a priesthood designated as bees); the lexical element *bit*  ‘bee, honey’ (typically with an Indo-European, rather than Afroasiatic etymology) is also reflected in the name of Horus’ mythical birthplace in the Delta (*ah-bit*, , and by a twisted Greek rendering *χέμμυς*), and sometimes in the designation of the King of Lower Egypt as *bit*. However, I am not aware of a mythological elaboration of the reed connotation for specifically Upper Egypt. Possibly, the reed element is ultimately a reference to a very widespread prehistoric mythical image (found all over the Old World and the Americas, and according to my Aggregative Diachronic Model proposed to go back to a Narrative Complex dating to Central Asia 30 ka BP – the well-known Earth Diver motif also attaches to this complex) of the first land emerging from the primordial waters, in this case in the specific (sweet water, non-maritime) form of a reed clump; the latter image cosmogonic found in various places in the Old World (e.g. among the Southern African Zulu; it is also implied in Nkoya cosmology – whilst in various North American cosmogonies (notably Na-Dene-speaking S.W. USA, i.e. with putative distant Sino-Caucasian connections), protection inside or ascent through, or along, a reed marks the origin of humankind or survival after the Flood,¹² but if it ever informed Ancient Egyptian mythology as recorded then it had already been formalised, presumably, into the image of the Primal Hill (referent of the *benben* stone topping a pyramid) emerging from the Primal Waters, and touched by the First Sun. The latter is an indication that upon the very ancient, in principle horizontal cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land already a rather newer dispensation had been superimposed, namely the vertical cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (dating from c. 15 ka BP). Hymenoptera (including bees) and Diptera (including flies and midgets) – the Ancients, of course, were not bound by our

¹¹ As discussed and illustrated in Goneim 1956: fig. 19, opposite p. 64.

¹² E.g. Navajo, cf. Capinera 1993: 226-228, Newcomb 1990; Hopi / Sia, Alexander 1916: 203 [**check year**] ; Pima, Frazer 1919 [**check year**] : 283-287; Hopi, Waters 1963: 12-20; Caddo, cf. Erdoes & Ortiz 1984: 120-122.

painstaking taxonomic distinctions – have tended to be associated with the sun and the Supreme God in Ancient Egypt and throughout the Ancient Near East: their domain (like the sun's) is the air, and their wings spectacularly reflect and refract sunlight in a shimmering fashion. In Ancient Egypt, this link even gave rise to the golden fly as an accolade for military prowess. Another suggestion of the Northern, Eurasian connotations of the bee in the context of Ancient Egypt lies in the fact that the Hittite Kumarbi epic is the only known ancient text in which a bee, despite its unimposing size, appears as saviour of the world. The reed counterpart and perhaps transformative equivalent is that Prometheus, in Ancient Greek myth but with Anatolia / Caucasus resonances, brought fire from heaven in a narthex i.e. a hollow *reed* – a more general Flood myth element is suggested here because many Flood stories, from many parts of the world (again in implied evocation of a cosmological transformative cycle) stress that immediately after the flood there is, either a prohibition on fire, which needs to be lifted, or a disastrous absence of fire (sometimes rationalised as a result of general flooding), which needs to be remedied; although the dominant Greek versions of Prometheus fire-bringing (Hesiod's *Theogonia* 507-616 and *Opera et Dies* 42-105) does not stress a Flood context, Prometheus, father of the Greek flood hero Deucalion, father's brother of the flood heroine Pyrrha, cannot be seen outside the comparative context of flood myths, which encompass the entire Old World, the New World, and Oceania. For a comparative mythological perspective on flood myths informed by my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology, cf. van Binsbergen 2008b and in preparation.

'Do you hear, Reed', is in the Nkoya myth the cryptic expression by which, according to the aetiological myth, local people warned Katete (rationalised to be hidden in a reed mat) of the presence of the Humbu people's punitive expedition from the North. There, a few hundred kms. north of the Congo-Zambezi watershed, the capital of the Lunda king / hereditary royal title Mwati Yamvo / Mwaat Yaamv ('Lord of Death') is situated.

At one level of analysis this ruler is unmistakably a mythical concept (also recorded in Angolan myth) with Old World parallels in Ancient Greek Hades / Pluto, South Asian Yama, Chinese Yanluowang / Yan and Japanese Enma Dai-Ō.

However, perhaps by the same endemic 'fallacy of misplaced concreteness' that made me and Schoffeleers read millennia old myth circulating in South Central Africa as only slightly distorted factual statements on protohistory in the second half of the second millennia CE, Mwaat Yaamv is also an actual royal title, which is held in the greatest esteem throughout South Central Africa, and to which most kingships in Zambian and North-eastern Angola, and even several in Malawi and Zimbabwe, trace their origin and continued allegiance. According to one particular Nkoya myth of royal origin, the ancestors of the Nkoya kings originally dwelled at the capital of Mwaat Yaamv, where however they were despised, forced to do menial tasks, and were housed near the pig sties. Like all subjects of the Mwaat Yaamv, and like most Lunda-speaking peoples in South Central Africa to this day, by that time the Nkoya royal ancestors generally practiced male genital mutilation, which was strictly imposed and supervised by the Mwaat Yaamv. Breaking away from bondage, the Nkoya royal ancestors moved south with their people, across the Congo-Zambezi watershed,

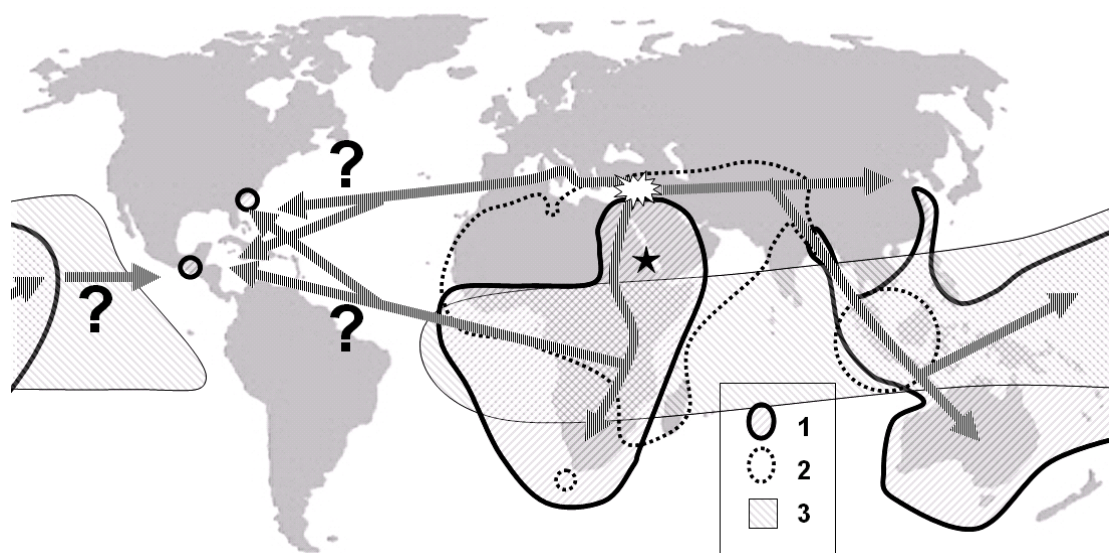
and abandoned male genital mutilation. Sending his loyal subjects of the Humbu ethnicity as an *impi*, Mwaat Yaamv succeeded in forcing some of the Nkoya royals back into allegiance hence resuming the practice of male genital circumcision, but others resisted the Humbu and continued to refrain from male genital mutilation. The story has an interesting empirical anchorage in that in the early 20th century, a few Nkoya royals associated with the title of Mwene Mutondo (the Western Nkoya) were still known to be circumcised. Today however, circumcision is abhorred by the Nkoya, and to them – like for most Zambians, especially in the interethnic situations of the modern towns – a ridiculous sign of Lunda backwardness, exclusivity (for women from the ethnic groups practising male genital mutilation, only male partners thus marked are eligible as sexual partners), and exclusion – so that the circumcising groups ended up, in the early colonial cities of Zambia in the mid-20th century, as the urban immigrant group controlling the most despised sector of the urban economy, faecal collection and sewage. Cf. van Binsbergen 1992b. However, the reference to pig husbandry and to humiliation at the hands of a the despotic king suggest that again, underneath this apparently proto-historical account dealing with kings who were, in the early 20th century, only four or five generations back, there is also a mythical account that probably lack historicity and must be considered to be situated, not in historical but in mythical time. Among the Bantu-speaking peoples in South Central Africa it is not uncommon to encounter a taboo on pig's meat, which is available mainly from wild pigs rather than from domestic ones. The Nkoya primarily identify as hunters; the savour wild pig as a delicacy, but have not been known to engage in pig husbandry in historical times. This suggests that Mwaat Yaamv's pigsties are a narrative element originally situated, not in South Central Africa but in North Africa, the Middle East or further a field.

The cultural cluster best known for its abhorrence of pig meat are the Semitic speakers of the Western Mediterranean and the Middle East, from whose midst sprung the world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. African pig taboos in selected areas have often been attributed to a diffuse influences from Judaism and Islam, e.g. among the Kalanga of Zimbabwe and Botswana, and the Lemba of Northern South Africa [**add refs**] . From an African, clan-centred perspective, a taboo on the consumption of pork simply (in a manner that, from a Jewish or Islamic viewpoint, is rather difficult to digest) means that one identifies as a member of the Pig clan, which is widespread in Bantu-speaking Africa (e.g. Schapera 1952, for the Tswana). The escape from Mwaat Yaamv's overlordship is certainly reminiscent of the Israelites' formative (but, according to modern biblical scholarship, largely mythical) exodus from Egypt claimed to have taken place during the New Kingdom. Interpreting the Mwaat Yaamv / Nkoya / Humbu episode as a distorted Exodus echo however runs into the difficulty that the scenario for male genital mutilation does not match the Egyptian-Palestine Exodus account. Male genital mutilation, which the Bible [**add ref**] claims as an innovation introduced by Abraham once arrived in the land of Canaan from Mesopotamia, remains a somewhat shady and controversial practice in so far as Ancient Egypt is concerned. However, there is fairly general consensus (supported by contemporary iconography; **add refs**) that the practice was widespread in Old Kingdom Egypt, and in later millennia continued especially as a prerogative of royals and of the priesthood. Among the nine or so different ethnic groups listed as Sea Peoples on contemporary Egyptian monuments, the Ekweš (widely, but wrongly,

identified with Homer’s Achaioi – for whom not the slightest record for circumcision exists) were singled out: their dead were exempted from the general practice of counting vanquished enemies on the basis of the number of severed genitals – since they, like the Egyptians, practiced male genital mutilation, their genitals were considered sacred and instead their hands were severed and counted. [**add ref**] . As an ethnic group associated with the apical and partly mythical ancestor Abraham, the Israelites are considered to have practiced male genital mutilated before, during, and after their alleged stay in Egypt, whereas the Nkoya are claimed to have largely given up this practice after their split from the Mwaat Yaamv realm.

Considered in a long-range perspective, the Nkoya and Israelite regional history (however mythical) of male genital mutilation can be seen as part of a near-global process since proto-Neolithic times, which I have sought to analyse elsewhere (van Binsbergen, in prep, ‘Sunda’) and of which I can only present the bare outlines here:

Fig. 2. World distribution of male genital mutilation, with tentative historical reconstruction of origin and spread



1. Regions where male genital mutilation has been practiced ‘traditionally’ since pre-modern times
 2. Extend of diffusion of male genital mutilation in the context of Islam, from Mecca (★), from 7th c. CE onwards
 3. Distribution of hunched statuettes – irrelevant in the present context
- ‘explosion’ sign: proposed origin in proto-Neolithic times
hatched arrows: proposed diffusion

If the Nkoya / Israelite equation does not quite convince (my overall reconstruction as in Fig. 2 derives from work in progress and is not under discussion here), another Eurasian parallel however comes to mind: treated cruelly by their Muslim overlord the conqueror Maḥmūd al Ġaznāwī (who no doubt sought to impose the Islamic practice of male genital mutilation) in Northern India around 1000 CE, the Roma people (*Tsigani*, also known as *Gypsies* because of a temporary stay in Egypt)

emerged as an ethnically and linguistically identifiable group of fugitives who spread to the Middle East, Europe and Africa, dropping their initial association with the military, but retaining their expertise in metallurgy and music. [**Add refs**] This scenario fits some of the Nkoya kings surprisingly well: all Nkoya kings are supposed to have initiated iron-working (like other Zambian kings, ceremonial ironware features prominently among their regalia), and moreover, especially the Kahare royal title is mythically associated with music (as a stranger arriving in Nkoya lands, the first Mwene Kahare's royal orchestras – mainly composed of xylophones, hourglass drums, and thumb pianos) is claimed to have so enchanted the local population that a local chieftainness insisted upon immediately marrying him. This is a local selective of the well-known mytheme of Queen Luweji ('Moon Royal') and the stranger immigrant hunter Chibinda ('Hunter'; **add ref** ; a West African parallel would be the famous Sundjata epic). Luweji had to pay dearly for this marriage, for (apparently imposing an alien male sexist and violent – Semitic? Islamic? – conception of rulership upon the earlier woman-centred model of the clan leader as mediatrix between humankind, Nature and the Land) Chiwinda usurped Luweji's kingship on the pretext that a person given to periodic menstruation could only constitute a pollution for the high office of kingship... Among the Nkoya, the full Luweji / Chibinda story is also told with the names of Nkoya royal ancestors inserted as protagonists. In the Kahare case, the Roma / Gypsy connotations are more specific than just strangerhood, music and metallurgy: the alternative name for the Kahare title is Kale (cf. Smith & Dale 1920; van Binsbergen 1992), and Kale ('Black One') is recognised as a major Gypsy name.¹³

3.2.1. 'Do you hear, Reed?' – An Ancient Mesopotamian parallel?

In addition to the Ancient Egyptian resonance there is possibly also an Ancient Mesopotamian one in the expression 'Do you hear, Reed?', cf. the Gilgamesh epic, where, after the gods had decided to destroy humankind, the God Enki went to warn the prospective flood hero Atrahasis:

'...That night, Enki went out and sat beside the reed wall of Atrahasis' house. He spoke aloud, saying, "*Wall, listen to me! Reed hut, make sure you hear my words!* Take this house apart and build a boat. Leave your worldly possessions behind and take aboard living things..." [**add ref; italics added WvB**]

Below we will see that an elaborate flood myth is among the Eurasian resonances in the Nkoya mythical repertoire, which makes it *slightly* more plausible that the Gilgamesh parallel is not just a chance coincidence.

¹³ Karst (1931: 535f) claims that the Kale have Tewelkan (Karst suggests: cf. Vulcan) as their eponymic hero, and specialise in music and metallurgy. A difficulty that arises here is that Karst – as is suggested by his reference to Vulcan – seems inclined to count the time depth of the Roma / Gypsy identity in millennia (he also suggests [**page ref**] that the Italian toponym Roma, the later capital city, is a cognate of Ancient Egyptian *rmt* [**check**] , 'people', although there the link with Gypsies is not explicitly made), yet there seems to be scholarly consensus that the history of Roma / Gypsy expansion from North India has a time depth of only one millennium.

3.3. A flood-and-tower complex?

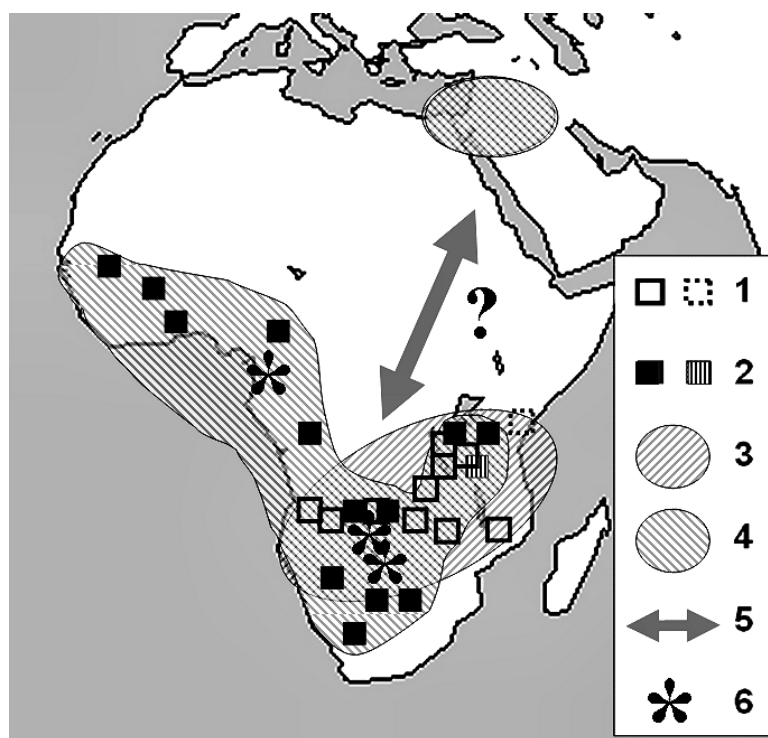
The plausibility of a South Asian connection in the Nkoya kingship is further brought out by the regional variant of the tower myth, which is found all over the Old World and which usually accompanies a flood myth – in ways and for reasons that are largely beyond our present scope [**add refs**] A brief summary however is in order here.

Flood stories celebrate a cosmogony (which I have argued to have arisen in West to Central Asia c. 30 ka BP; van Binsbergen 2006 **etc. add refs**) which revolves on the emergence of the first Land from among the Primal Waters – if cosmic order thus is thought to reside in the Separation of Land and Water, the annihilation of Order and of Being would amount to undoing that separation, i.e. a universal flood. While for millennia the Mother of the Primal Waters dominated Eurasian cosmology during the Upper Palaeolithic, its essentially horizontal orientation was to give way, perhaps 20 ka BP, by an alternative cosmology stressing the vertical gaze (also implied in naked eye astronomy and in shamanism as a travelling between Underworld, Middle World and Upper World), in which the cosmogonic moment would now be conceived as the Separation, not of Water and Land, but of Heaven and Earth. This very powerful image was to dominate Old World cosmology ever since, spilling over into the New World when the latter was populated from the Old World towards the onset of the Holocene, and informing a whole series of central mythico-religious themes that, ever since, have constituted the stock-in-trade of Eurasia and (because of the Back-into-Africa migration from c. 15 ka BP onward) Africa: if the painful Separation of Heaven and Earth is the pivot of earthly existence, then the main image of eschatological cosmoclasm is the dramatic undoing of that separation (the widespread mythical theme of the falling sky), but also verticality (in geography, social status, iconography etc.) becomes the main expression of reconnection as the main source of blessing and life force – hence geographical features such as trees, mountains, rocks, and their man-made imitations (towers, menhirs, erected poles, shrines, temples), but also social roles such as gods, demiurges, prophets, kings, shamans, priests, and – especially after the invention of food production through agriculture – heaven-given food crops that sprout from the earth toward the sky, are non-eschatological devices to re-connect heaven and earth, and thus to bring heavenly power and blessing to the earth and its inhabitants. However, the supplanting of the Land-Water cosmology by the Heaven-Earth cosmology has never been total, older horizontal, water themes (such as the great Mother of the Waters and its many aquatic, maritime and riverine derivations, often with male transformations) have continued to seep through and to interact with the vertical Heaven-Earth themes. Flood stories with towers are a notable example throughout the Old World, Oceania (with inroads into New Guinea and Australia), and the New World.

In various locations in South Central Africa, e.g. the Bemba of Zambia (Roberts 1973) and in Mozambique (Feldman 1963), mythic mention is made of a king who build his tower into heaven, with disastrous results: the tower collapsed, and the ensuing confusion caused the diversity of nations and tongues that constitutes humankind's present-day condition. In Central Western Zambia, i.e. among the Nkoya, Kaonde, Ila, Mbwela etc., this king is explicitly known as *Ba Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda*, 'The *Kapesh* Who Joins the Forked Branches', the tower therefore is supposed to be constructed out of forked branches (*mpanda*); there is a homophonous and

possibly cognate Nkoya word *mpanda* for ‘sister, sibling’, and the royal name may carry an oblique punning with incestuous reference) that, in local villages, are ubiquitous building materials supporting roofs, racks for implements etc. but that particularly serve as ancestral and cultic shrines.

Fig. 3. The African distribution of the Tower and Flood motifs in historical times



1. Tower mytheme attested
2. Flood mytheme attested
3. African distribution of (1)
4. African distribution of (2)
5. The thrust of my present argument is to *establish* formal parallels, and then to *propose* historical continuity, between sub-Saharan Africa and South West Asia (where both mythemes occur together in the biblical context; *but what, then, explains the wide geographical gap between these two complexes of attestation?*)

6. The mythical name Mbedzi as an ancestor or demigod (not relevant in the present context)

hatched outline or hatched fill indicates doubtful attestation

Sources: Hastings 1909-1921; Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; van der Sluijs n.d.; van Binsbergen 2006, in preparation (a); Isaak 2006; Willis 1994: 273; Kahler-Meyer 1988.

In the Central Western Zambian version, the purpose of the construction of the tower, disconnected – at least on the conscious narrative surface – from flood connotations, is to reach the Moon, which is again rationalised as the attempt to steal the moon from heaven so that it can serve as a *mpande* (note the assonance with *mpanda*) specifically for the king’s child (Nkoya does not express gender morphologically, and usually leaves it unspecified) – as a central regalia (the praise name for the first

King Kahare is claimed to have included the line *Kahare bayenda na mpande* ‘Kahare Whose Characteristic Attribute is the Mpande’), with solar or lunar connotations, the white, spirally-grooved bottom of a Conus shell¹⁴ which, endemic in the Indian and Pacific Ocean (the Nkoya are situated in the very interior of Africa, where the time-honoured Atlantic and the Indian Ocean trade route fizzle out into small capillaries, and meet. The tower collapses, and humankind is dispersed into a plurality of clans and tongues. However, Kasempa district (now to the North of Nkoyaland proper, but in the 19th century the site of many royal capitals associated with royals featuring in present-day Nkoya royal genealogies) still has a gazetted headman Kapesh, and another headman Kapesh lived as a nonagenarian at the Kawanga stream, in the present Nkoya heartland. Nkoya kings and headmen are supposed to be the timeless incarnations of a continuous and unaltered office-based identity, speaking in the first person whenever relating the exploits of their predecessors in the title, so the old and senile Mwene Kapesh was generally considered to be identical to the Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda, and to have personally lived the episode of the collapsing tower – without detectable irony, he was said to have stepped aside and thus saved his life. What this means for the definition and appreciation of mythical time I have explored elsewhere. [add ref]

The Luba people straddle the Congo-Zambezi watershed and made major military inroads into Nkoyaland in the late 19th century – leaving even a group explicitly identifying as Luba in Ilaland; moreover, whereas Nkoya royals pride themselves on speaking Lunda among themselves (a reminiscence of their historical connections with the Lunda of Mwaat Yaamv), in fact the Nkoya language, like the Kaonde language, is closely related to Luba. Among the Luba an interesting variant is given of the Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda myth. Here the tower is built, not out of a king’s greed (to appropriate the Moon as royal ornament), but (cf. Nimrod in Gen 12) out of Ngorongoro’s (the rainbow-serpent king, who is a role model for the historical king) desire to wage war on the sky god; and the tower was destroyed by an earthquake, as if to emphasise the essential unity of the celestial and the chthonic aspects of some underlying, Poseidon-like Ruler of the Primal Waters. This is almost identical to the Pare version from Tanzania, and comes close to the Luyi/ Lozi (including Subiya, but as far as I know, not Nkoya) variant, where Nyambi and his wife Nasilele, ascend from their original dwelling on earth along a spider’s web, pursued by humans, who build a tower to continue their pursuit, but in vain because the tower collapsed, followed by the confusion of nations and tongues. (Incidentally, among the Boni or Sania, near Lamu, Kenya, Indian Ocean coast, such confusion is attributed, not to the flood, but to a famine.) [add ref]

As a name, Kapesh seems to confirm the surprising existence of a North Indian connection in the Nkoya kingship. Kapesh does not have a Nkoya or, in general,

¹⁴ Conus shells, called *ndoro* in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi; cf. Jeffreys 1953; von Sicard 1953; Guiggin 1974; Harding 1961; Gelfand 1952 reports that among the Zimbabwean Shona, the Conus shell is a solar symbol; Lancaster & Pohorilenko 1977 bring evidence that the Conus shell has been used as regalia in South Central Africa for at least half a millennium; interestingly, these shell bottoms are used in much the same way in New Guinea, cf. Kirk 1986.

Bantu etymology, and my Nkoya informants, while readily volunteering the obvious explanation of the epithet Kamununga Mpanda and of many other mythical proper names, could not explain the name Kapesh. The nearest source of a plausible etymon would be Western Semitic (not such a far and wide shot, for flood and tower myths have conquered the world of myth, in the course of the last two millennia, especially in the Semitic versions of the Hebrew Bible and the Islamic Qur’ān – the latter however does not mention the tower element), where e.g. קפֿשׁ *qpš* occurs in Biblical Hebrew as the capering movement of a fleeing deer¹⁵ – but that etymology is semantically unconvincing. Much more to the point is the Indo-Aryan form **-gabhasti-*, which means ‘forked carriage pole, hand’ (de Vries 1958 s.v. ‘gaffel’), combining a perfect phonological fit with an equally perfect semantic one: in a South Central African environment where horses and horse carts were completely unknown until introduced by Europeans in the late 19th century, the chariot’s forked carriage pole can only become a forked branch *tout court*, such as occur in abundance in the *Brachystechia* forest savannah of Nkoyaland. It is conceivable that this plausibly South Asian connection is only a thousand years old, and that it was brought to Nkoyaland as part of a putative Roma connection. However, the etymon *gabhasti-* seems to be specifically Indo-Aryan, whereas in Sanskrit a different, equally intriguing and mythically significant, lexical form is found: *īṣā*, ‘the pole or shafts of a carriage or plough, the double or fork-shaped pole, plank, board, a particular measure’, cf. *īśa*, ‘God’ (Monier-Williams 1979).

Lacking specialist knowledge of the varieties and spread of Indo-Aryan languages including Roma dialects, it yet seems unlikely to me that **-ghabasti-* derived from any Roma connection which therefore would seem to be too recent. Instead its ending up in Nkoyaland must, in my opinion, be attributed to the spread of the chariot all over the Old World including Africa: invention in Kyrgystan c. 2000 BCE, spread east and west to the Pacific and the Atlantic, arriving Middle East as Indo-Aryan speaking Mitenni in second millennium BCE, further spread as Hyksos and dispersal after Hyksos defeat, further dispersal after defeat of Sea Peoples, then into Africa by well-known and iconographically marked routes into Sahara associated with the Garamantes, and from there into Central Africa where tsetse fly imposes a firm limit to the expansion of the horse-drawn chariot – or from Egypt as X-Group (also with horse and chariot elements in their burials) south along Nile Valley and Ethiopia, and then again into the rain forest shedding the postulated equine connection.

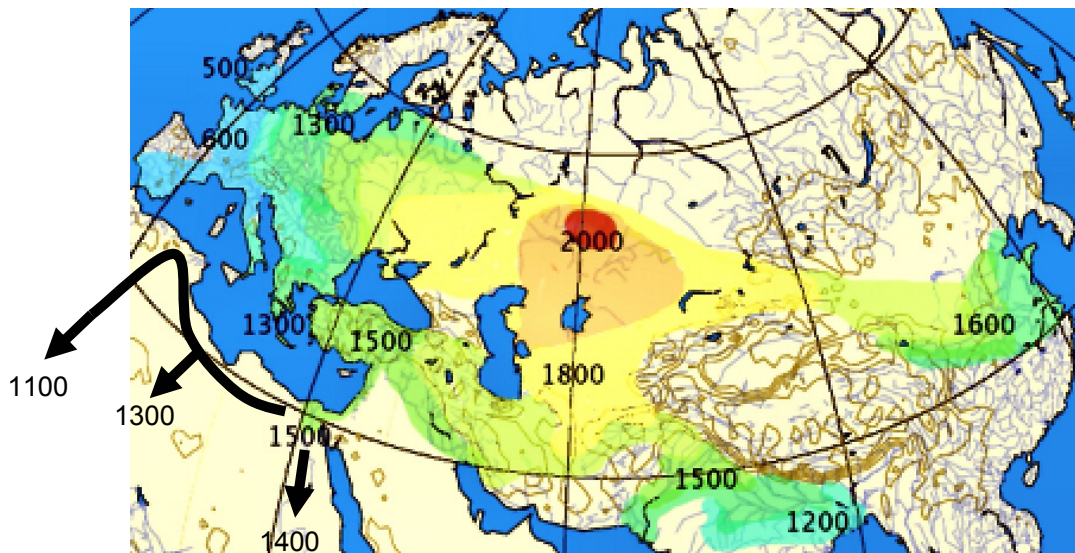
Typical for the South Central African tower stories is that they are no longer part of a coherent flood narrative but became disconnected, yet are often found in oral literatures contexts that also know elaborate flood stories.

¹⁵ I owe this information to my brother, the Semitist Peter Broers.

Fig. 4. A graphical representation of Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda



Fig. 5. Origin and spread of chariots from Kyrgyzstan, 2000 BCE; dates shown are BCE; Sahara dates after Lhote 1959; Mauny 1947, 1955; Carpenter 1956.



3.4. A Nkoya Flood story?

This is also the case for the Nkoya, whose flood story was recorded in the Zambezi flood plain by the first missionaries to Western Zambia, in a form that could still be claimed to be free of recent Christian contamination [**add ref**] ; during my own fieldwork about a century later, the Nuhic biblical version had so interpenetrated and ultimately eclipsed any local flood story that I could no longer detect and record the latter. The following flood story, however, derives from the Congo-Zambezi watershed where the Nkoya dwelled only a few centuries ago, features Mwene Manenga who is a central mythical figure among the Nkoya, and although attributed to the Chokwe people, must be representative of what flood stories once circulated in Nkoyaland:

A Queen named Mwene Manenga sought food and shelter in a village. She was refused, and when she reproached the villagers for their selfishness, they said, in effect, 'What can you do about it' ? So she began a slow incantation, and on the last long note, the whole village sank into the ground, and water flowed into the depression, forming what is now Lake Dilolo¹⁶. When the village's headman returned from the hunt and saw what had happened to his family, he drowned himself in the lake. (Vitaliano 1973: 164-165; Kelsen 1988: 136; Isaak 2006 no. 47.)

3.5. Nkoya cosmogony: Nyambi and birds

Perhaps because they are felt to be rival with the Biblical discourse which has become dominant among the Nkoya in the 1930s-1940s, local mythological statements of cosmogony are rare and incoherent.

Mwene Nyambi ('The Lord Nyambi, the Lord God') is considered the creator, but (if Christian theology is subtracted) this entity (whose gender remains fully implicit in the Nkoya language) is the typical African *deus otiosus*, whose dealings with the present-day world are minimal. Yet the mystique of the forest is closely associated with Nyambi: his praise name is *Nyambi balengile bitondo na bantu*, 'Nyambi who created the trees and humans', and the forest is (besides the many dangers, promises and surprises with which it is filled, see below under Mwendanjangula) in the first place Nyambi's domain.

A century ago elaborate creation myths featuring Nyambi were collected by missionaries, but I have never come across anything like them in my own fieldwork.

Nyambi's creation is not considered to be perfect: a well-known love song that belongs to the standard repertoire of the royal orchestras, complains that Nyambi is only a clumsy creator, because the Creator / Creatrix has equipped humans with the innate tendency to love their siblings of the opposite gender. This is not mere flippancy or poetic license: the bond between sister and brother is generally very strong, it seems to imply an image (which is hardly ever expressed explicitly) of primordial twins of opposite gender who constituted the first humans or the only flood survivors, and lovers' standard vocabulary of intimacy is that of siblings. For both genders,

¹⁶ Lake Dilolo is situated at the Congo/Angolan border, about 150 km west of the Zambian district capital Mwinilunga.

sibling equivalence is far more than a theoretical possibility in Nkoya marriages, which lends a real-life dimension to the Nkoya adage ‘she is your sister-in-law in front of the house, but behind the house she is your wife’. I mentioned already the ritual (classificatory) sibling incest that has been part of the Nkoya royal intronisation ritual to this very day. Brother-sister complementarity informs Nkoya kingship to such an extent, that most traditions (invariably with a high mythical element) concerning past kings to whom male gender can be ascribed or imputed, appear as if reigning in lieu of their sister who would seem to be the ultimate owner of the royal title and who implicitly passes it on to her daughters – which makes the husband (*mukwetunga*, ‘royal escort’) of royal women the obvious role for men to play in indigenous politics, and also helps to explain the unlimited sexual freedom royal women among the Nkoya have traditionally enjoyed, both before, in, and after marriage.

All these themes are full of parallels with Bronze and Early Iron Age conditions in the Eastern Mediterranean, where a woman’s preferring the consanguineal bond with her brother over the bonds of marriage and motherhood constitutes a major tragic theme, where male aristocrats – a case in point is Odysseus and the suitors, all depending on Penelope’s ownership of the kingship of Ithaca – often gain access to the kingship through marrying a hereditary queen (although the male-centred idiom of the Middle Iron Age makes these arrangements already impossible to understand in the times of Homer and Hesiod, and gives rise to all sorts of mythological distortions; cf. Graves 1964), and where young women’s pre-marital sexual license is recorded by a scandalised Herodotus visiting the fringes of the Greek world. As usually the case in South Central African cultures,¹⁷ no meta-text exists or can be elicited in which *expressis verbis* an interpretation and commentary is given of this incest dimension of kingship, but a transcontinental comparative argument informed by the mythology of cosmogony, anthropogony, twins and of the Flood would suggest that, again, the reference is to the king in his symbolic quality either as one of the first pair of humans, or one of the first pair of flood survivors. The implied cosmogonic or flood dimension also tallies with the fact that in neighbouring, closely related cultures e.g. the Soli and Lenje of Central Zambia, all fires are annually extinguished throughout the nation (in a symbolic emulation of the pre-cosmogony or flood situation), after which all households receive freshly kindled fire from the king’s capital, ideally produced from a fire bore.

I stress once more the fact that, although these mythic layers can be surmised to underlie the recorded latter-day institutions, they are hardly ever verbalised. Of the only explicit cosmogonies I have recorded among the Nkoya, one (Likota 4:1) equates Nyambi with a bird, and Nyambi’s child, the demiurge Mvula (both of indeterminate gender) is also a bird; the birds are unspecified, but the human clans Hawks and Buzzards are declared to be the relatives of Mvula, so Mvula may be thought of as a large bird of prey. The latter are not explicitly declared to be the relatives of Nyambi, and the only clues we have for this god’s nature are

- (a) the spider-like association that Nyambi / Nzambi etc. (the name occurs in many variants as a theonym all along the Atlantic coast from West Africa and

¹⁷ Cf. the work of Victor Turner, René Devisch [**add refs**] etc.; however, cf. de Heusch 1958.

to Angola, and hundred of kms. into the interior) carries in certain West African cultures (where there is a link with the trickster figure Anansi, another variant of the Nyambi name), – the comparative mythology of the Creator / Creatrix as Spider is very rich and reaches from West Africa, via the Egypt, the Middle East and Ancient Greece (with the semantically and phonologically closely related cluster of Neith / Athena / Anahita / Anath, goddesses of weaving and warfare and perhaps to be understood as domesticated demoted Creation Goddesses demoted and supplanted under a later masculine cosmology

- (b) the etymology of the name Nyambi, which may reside in the general Bantu form *-amb-*, ‘to speak’: as the creator / creatrix who through an utterance brings the world into being (with many Eurasian parallels e.g. in the Bible, Gen. 1: 3).

The latter point which also brings to mind two animals: the *bee*, which has widespread Eurasian connotations of ‘the speaker’ (because of its humming noise) but also, as we have seen, takes on the quality of a divine epiphany; and white aquatic birds, especially the swan, which are symbolic of, or identical with, the Mother of the Primal Waters and hence an ancient creator goddess, all over Eurasia from the Celtic and Uralic realms all the way to East Asia. Swans are not endemic in Nkoyaland so the parallel could not be elaborated locally; however, an ancient *makwasha* song (*makwasha* is a sacred repertoire of song and dance absolutely reserved to male and female elders) fondly sings of the

‘Yekenu mumwebele shinyange, woo,
Shinyange mwine mbuwa,
Yekenu mumwebele shinyange, woo,
Shinyange mwine mbuwa.’

‘Come and behold the stork
the stork, the owner of the plain
Come and behold the stork
the stork, the owner of the plain.’









in a context where Owner is equivalent to King, Ruler, and Valley is sometimes used in the Nkoya mythical context in order to designate the world as the general dwelling place of humankind.

The *makwasha* song text in *Likota lya Bankoya* thus looks innocent and local enough. I recorded the same song text locally in 1977. Brown¹⁸ broadly defined *makwasha* as:

‘the most ancient repertoire of Nkoya royal music’.

Makwasha however also has a more restricted meaning: using the ancient musical repertoire as accompaniment, it is a dance reserved for (predominantly male) elders; the dancers bend their knees, alternately lifting now their left leg now their right leg, in movements which could be interpreted as impersonating a long-legged bird. In our passage from *Likota lya Bankoya* however, a mythical and alien nature is suggested by the fact that, like the cat, the stork is otherwise absent from Nkoya imagery and

¹⁸ Brown, E.D., 1984, ‘Drums of life: Royal music and social life in Western Zambia’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, School of Music; University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, p. 151.

symbolism. Could the Plain be an echo of the ancient Egyptian Delta; and could the stork be a local interpolation for the flamingo, ? This sign is used as a hieroglyphic sign with the phonetic value *dšrt*, and marks the Delta-associated ancient Egyptian goddess ,  Nt [Neith] as ‘the Red One’   , also marking her shrines as ‘belonging to the Red One’, and her high-priestess (the first Dynastic queen on record, king ḥ3’s great wife Nt Ḥtp  ) as ‘Red Queen’ (*Hmt Dšrt*) or ‘Red Shrine’ (*Hm Dšrt*)?¹⁹

Another cosmogony was revealed to me in private by the aged village headman, nature prophet (one of the quite numerous South Central African self-styled religious figures – cf. van Binsbergen 1981, which deals with this category, to concentrate on one of their most famous exponents, the tragic prophetess Alice Lenshina – who claim to have died, visited heaven, and to have been sent back by God to discharge an earthly duty) and former witchcraft eradicator Lubunga, according to whom heaven was the original dwelling place of all beings (a theme also emerging in the old creation stories regionally recorded by missionaries and early district officers), until the Lord of Heaven found out that some of his subjects, led by his own son, had invented sorcery and were planning murder, at which point they were forever evicted from the sky and became earth dwellers. Remarkably, the demiurge Mvula, who has Christ-like characteristic as the mediator of heavenly blessing (especially rain, which is indispensable to Bantu-speaking agriculturalists) assumes, in this account, the features of the original sorcerer. Lubunga was active (and convicted) as a witch hunter in the Namwala district in the 1950s; whereas many of the witch hunters who were active in the regional countryside from the 1920s onward were acting on a Christian inspiration and on the basis of a new, youth- and modernity-centred conception of society derived from work as labour migrants in towns, mines and commercial farms, Christianity in his message had been reduced to a few fragmented echoes – in a way reminiscent of the nature prophet Mupumani, who in 1914-15 attracted a hundred of thousands of followers in a short-lived nativistic cult centring on the ritual gesture of prostration, and the planting of debarked forked poles as cultic shrines all over Western and Central Zambia.

3.6. Nkoya myths of kingship

Whereas the contours of the kingship of Mwene Nyambi remain very dim, most Nkoya mythology can be said to focus on the kingship as one of the central institutions of this society. (Remarkably, there are hardly any mythological elaborations of what the Nkoya subjectively and consciously consider as their other central institution, notably female puberty rites; there is only mythology about male puberty rites notably the imposition, abolition and institution of male genital mutilation. Here the Nkoya have their own version of the widespread Central African myth according

¹⁹ Kaplony, *Inschriften*, o.c. The interpretation of *Hmt Dšrt* leaves many possibilities, since depending on the writing variants used (which are often very elliptical in Archaic texts anyway), the former word may be read as ‘wife’, ‘queen’, ‘female servant’, ‘vulva’, and the latter as ‘red’ but also as ‘of the Red One’.

to which circumcision was instituted when a female royal allowed her son to play in the grass, where his foreskin was accidentally cut by a sharp blade of grass. Grass has a high silicate content and many people have cut themselves on grass blades. The puzzling thing about this aetiological myth, however, is that – in the absence of an accepted symbolic meaning of grass in the Nkoya context – it is difficult to attach a meaning to it, beyond the implication that male genital imposition emerged, not from the male but from the female domain, perhaps in order to make men look more like women rather than to celebrate manhood in its own right. Numerous are the mythical accounts featuring specific kings, such as Queen Manenga (a queen also featuring in the above flood story, and with some of the trappings of a greatly transformed Mother of the Primal Waters), the first Mwene Mutondo (a major Nkoya royal title), the first Kahare, the exploits of Queen Mwene Shikanda, King Shihoka Nalinanga, King Kayambila, and the general aetiological account of the Cooking Pot of Kingship.

3.6.1. Queen Shikanda

Queen Shikanda,²⁰ whose epithet is *Shikanda bakandile baKaonde* ‘Shikanda who crushed the Kaonde’, is a mythical female warrior to whom extraordinary prowess is attributed – true to a model of female military prowess ranging from the Queen Nzingha / Jinga c. 1600 CE of the Mbundu people of Angola (cf. Fraser 1988), via Shikanda of the Nkoya, Queen Naumba of the Sala (a Zambian people closely related to the Nkoya; cf. Brelsford 1935), to West African female warriors in Benin (formerly Dahomey), warrior connotations of North African women in Antiquity (Lhote 1959), the West Asian Amazons²¹, and warrior women in Celtic Europe e.g. Queen, Boadicea, ancient Nordic Europe (Saxo Grammaticus. 1979 and writers from Graeco-Roman Antiquity), and in the extreme East Japan’s women samurai – to complement the series of warrior goddesses discussed above, from Neith via Athena to Anahita. Shikanda’s name may be indicative of a further South Asian connection. The *-kand-* form certainly has a possible Nkoya etymology, but the prefix *shi-* in principle defines a non-human, abstract noun class and therefore is suspect as a name of a person (typically: *mu-* or *ka-*), a royal even (typically *lu-*, which is used for all royal entities regardless of their animate or human nature), and thus stands out as a possible foreign intrusion; however, the Nkoya do have many other personal names with *Shi-*: Shimbwende (headman of Shumbanyama village, Kazo valley, until his death 1995), Shiyowe (Shimbwende’s son and successor), Shimbotwe (‘Frog’, Shimbwende’s sister’s son and for decades steward of the royal household of Mwene Kahare Kabambi), etc. Whereas Shikanda has retained the female gender that Nkoya tradition implicitly²²

²⁰ My middle daughter officially inherited the name of the royal ancestress Shikanda, which yields my Nkoya name as Tatashikanda.

²¹ Dismissed, in the best tradition of *Besserwissen*, as a mere myth of male altering self-construction (Blok 1995), yet in the recent decade confirmed by sound archaeological research, cf. Davis-Kimball 2002; Guliaev 2003,)

²² On this point there is an extensive discussion in van Binsbergen 1992: 80f; gender cannot be distinguished morphologically in Nkoya, hence in most cases where our English text has ‘he’ or ‘she’, ‘King’ or ‘Queen’, in Nkoya the case remains unspecified.

attributes to most occupants of the kingship prior to the mid-19th century, Shikanda would be how the name of the male South Asian war god Skanda would sound if pronounced by mouths attuned to Nkoya phonology. It would bring further corroboration to this identification if some of the characteristics and exploits attributed to Skanda in South Asian mythology would seep through in the Nkoya construction of the Shikanda character, e.g. the semen-related etymology of Skanda's name, but Shikanda remains a sketchy figure in the mythological accounts so far at my disposal, and I would have to collect specific detail on this point. However, there is an obvious parallel between Shikanda as the arch-enemy of the Kaonde (the Nkoya's northern neighbours and, in the days of slave raiding – which persisted into the first decade of the 20th century –, mortal enemies) and Karthikeya / Skanda born in order to destroy the Asura Mahisha.

3.6.2. Shihoka Nalinanga and his (classificatory) sister

While all male Nkoya kings are considered to share the kingship with their sisters (they have their own quarters at the palace) and to rule in their name, such implied male usurpation is particularly manifest in the myths surrounding one of the most colourful king, Shihoka Nalinanga (Likota 10 and 39: 1), claimed to be the son of Queen Mulawa (then living at the fringe of the Zambezi flood plain, present-day Mongu the capital of Western Province), and Royal Escort Mwandumunenu.

Present-day Nkoya speakers have interpreted this name for me as 'Shihoka from the Nalinanga area' (a place whose location is very precisely identified in *Likota* 39: 4), and when pressed 'Snake (*shihoka*, the standard word) Son of Drought (*linanga*)'. However, in the latter translation we see the tendency of the moderns (cf. van Binsbergen 1992: 90f) to project onto the past, as a matter of course, the condition that, throughout the 20th century, Nkoya kings have been female (only around 2000, a woman succeeded to the kingship of Mwene Kabulwebulwe, a Nkoya king formerly near the Kafue River and now situated in the Mumbwa district, forced to move eastward when the gazetted Kafue National Park was installed in his area in 1930. Moreover, the prefix *na-* in names of neighbouring group usually serves as a matrinyimic (e.g. in Ila, whose culture and language overlaps with those of the Nkoya) Namvula, 'Mother' of Rain'), which would give 'Snake Mother of Drought' as a better translation. The name is full of mythical implications which however find no conscious explanation or commentary at the level of common, public Nkoya culture of today; it is not impossible however that a few elders still manage such knowledge. The notion of the Rainbow Snake is widespread in Bantu-speaking Africa. It is one of the traits that – considering its occurrence in New Guinea and Australia – can be argued to have been part of the pre-Out of Africa cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans, in other words, that constitutes a Palaeo-African mytheme. The Rainbow snake is a central mytheme among the Luba people (Reefe 1981)-*Ngorongoro*, 'Rainbow Snake', underlies several place names in the heart of Nkoyaland. Even though no explanation is available at the conscious level, the mytheme of the Rainbow Snake makes the name 'Snake Mother of Drought' eminently meaningful, for the rainbow appears in the sky after it has stopped raining (Nyambi's ultimate blessing, in the person of Nyambi's child the demiurge Mvula, 'Rain', with trickster and leopard connotations – the leopard's spots are ultimately rain drops, and in many

language families of the world including Bantu, Khoisan, Sino-Tibetan, Afro-Asiatic and Indo-European, the leopard derives his name from a root ‘speckledness’, whose ultimate referent is rain drops).

In Shihoka Nalinganga, a specific parallel with Ancient Egypt may be pointed out: the fact that there we have the First-Dynasty King Snake (W3d) whose name may also be translated as Green. Moreover Šw, the ancient Egyptian air-god whose name means Emptiness or Dryness, has a son Gb, the earth god, – the latter is not himself represented as a snake but displaying the chthonic connotations of the snake which are virtually universal.²³

Despite its mythical connotations of a primordial being notably the Rainbow Snake, the Nkoya mythological compilation *Likota lya Bankoya* situates the figure of Shihoka Nalinanga comfortably at a point in time when Nkoya kingship is firmly established Shihoka settles in the Lukolwe region (which some consider the original Land of Nkoya, perhaps from *-kolwe*), on the Maniinga River, a tributary to the Kabompo River not far North of the Zambezi-Kabompo confluence. Here Shihoka engages in cattle raiding (whereas the woodlands of the present-day Nkoya region are tsetse-infested and could scarcely sustain cattle herds for more than a few years before the introduction of the colonial veterinary practice of cattle-dipping, the Barotse-inhabited Zambezi flood plain is densely populated with cattle), canoe construction, and trading, notably in slaves. We enter here the realm of amply recorded and studied Barotse mythical history [**add sources**, Mutumba Mainga 1966, 1972, 1973; Muuka 1966], for as Shihoka’s siblings are listed Likambi Mange (‘Witch’) (explicitly called the daughter of Malovu [‘Beer’], which makes her a parallel cousin rather than a full biological sibling, but in Nkoya the distinction is not obvious – by the rules of classificatory kinship, a parallel cousin is still a sister), Mwanambinyi Silumesi (known in Barotse history as one of the first kings of that people), and Mbuyu Muyeke (who is considered the ancestress of most historical Nkoya queen and kings from the nineteenth century onward. Royal sibling rivalry became Shihoka’s doom (Likota 10: 5-9).

WENE WA SHIHOKA / KU LUKWAKWA

5 Mwene Shihoka wa zikile lukena lwendi ku Manyinga lwengile lwa kemberi, pele wene wendi wa nenehele shikuma ndaba mu litunga lyendi bantu bendi balilongeshele ku baza mato shikuma ndaba kwengile ku mashaka a manene shikuma munciza ya Kabombo. Lukena lwendi balutumbile ngayi ‘Lukolwe’ litunga lyendi kami ngayi ‘Lukolwe’. 6 Lizina elye lyafuma ha kunwa mbote shikuma kukolwanga pele ngayi

‘Hi Balukolwe lwa bambindika bakumbindika langana kubula kulangana pele ukukwatiwa ku Shimbwi,’

THE KINGSHIP OF SHIHOKA I AT LUKWAKWA

5 Mwene Shihoka lived on the Maniinga. The capital there was a fortification. Mwene Shihoka had very many people and they learned how to make canoes which they used on the Kabompo; there were many large trees suitable for the construction of canoes. Mwene Shihoka’s capital was called ‘Lukolwe’ and so was the area as a whole. 6 The name Lukolwe derives from their fondness²⁴ of the mead they made from honey:

‘The Lukolwe are hurrying
Intoxicated they are hurrying back
For fear of being caught by the Lion,’

²³ The claim of a sub-Saharan presence of the Gb theme is also argued convincingly for the Cameroonian Basaa people; cf. Ndigi, Oum, 1996, ‘Gb/K.b/Gbgb/Kòbá/ Kòbákòbá: Ou le nom du Dieu de la Terre et de l’oiseau créateur mythologique chez les Égyptiens et les Basaa du Cameroun’, *Bulletin: Société d’Égyptologie* (Genève), 20, 1996: 49-70.

²⁴ *ku kolwa*: to be fond of.

kami ngayi lyafuma ha kupanga shikuma. Nohobene yayi yendi Likambi *Mange* aha ayuvwile mpupo ya mato na zindonga za bitondo pele niye watumenengako bantu bendi kuli Shihoka ku Manyinga ngayi bakamuletelengako mato na zindonga za bitondo. Mwene Shihoka wa batandilenga mu litunga lyendi, niho yayi yendi Mwene Likambi Mange, wa mutuminine shiyumba sha mukazi niye wehanine nganga. 7 Oho akumine *nganga* watemene mutondo wa mukazihehe (mubulwebulwe). Pele babazileho kanankishi kakufweka mukazi ngo nehe mukazi bene na mabele wako na shali. Niho bakakashile ncompo niho kafutukile hi muntu wa mukazi niho ayile ku Manyinga. 8 Nohobene oho bantu bamu lukena Iwa Mwene Shihoka bamuwanine hinga emana kunkumo ya lukena, pele niho bashimikilile Mwene ngayi,

‘Etu tunawana mukazi wa kahombeli wamuwahe shikuma limonwamonwa.’

9 Oho Mwene Shihoka ayuvwile noho wambile ku bantu bendi ngayi

‘Yenunga mukamulete kuno ku musheke enge Lihano.’

Niho bayile na ku muleta ku musheke pele wengile Lihano pele oho bene niho ha fumine wulweli owo afwile Mwene Shihoka, niye wafwila ku Lukwakwa ku Manyinga. Lizina Iya Lukwakwa lyafumine ku Balui kuli Imashiku mwana Mubukwanu niye wetukilile ku Manyinga ha nzita ya Mubukwanu na Bakubu. Baka Shibitwane. Mwene Shihoka mandi yendi Mulawa tati yendi Mwandumunenu niye Mukwetunga Linanga.

in other words from brewing a lot. When Shihoka’s elder sister, Likambi Mange,²⁵ heard about the canoes and wooden dishes that Shihoka’s people were making, she sent her people to Shihoka in order to request such products as were being made in the Lukolwe area. Mwene Shihoka chased them from the land. Likambi Mange sent a woman who had been pawned to her, to fetch a diviner-priest. 7 He cut medicine from the poisonous *mubulwebulwe*²⁶ tree. Then he made a *nankishi*²⁷ in the shape of a woman, with breasts and all. When this was doctored it turned into a living woman, and she went to Maniinga. 8 When the people of Mwene Shihoka’s capital saw the beautiful girl standing just outside the capital, they went to report to the Mwene:

‘We have seen a most beautiful young woman.’

9 When Mwene Shihoka heard this he said to his people:

‘Go and bring her here into the capital so that she can be Lihano [King’s Wife].’

They went and brought her into the capital. And she became Lihano. This was the cause of the illness from which Mwene Shihoka died in Lukwakwa on the Maniinga. The name Lukwakwa was given to this area by the Lozi under Imasiku, the son of Mubukwanu. Imasiku fled to the Maniinga valley for the war between Mubukwanu and the Kololo of Sebitwane. Shihoka’s mother was Mulawa and his father was Mwandumunenu, also called Mukwetunga Linanga.

It is particularly the Celtic parallels that strike me in this account: cattle raiding (which is also a persistent Indo-European / Indo-Aryan theme), royal sibling rivalry (cf. Arthur and his sisters Morgause and Morgan le Fay, cf. Likambi’s epithet *Mange*), as a result of which the king dies at the hands of a freak (his son by his sister Morgause, at least in Sir Thomas Malory’s version of *Le Morte d’Arthur* – 1978, first published 1485) created and sent by one of his sister’s sorcery acts. The freak woman working mischief is also an Ancient Greek theme (Zeus ordered Hephaestus to mould an artificial woman, Pandora, out of earth / Earth so as to punish humankind for Prometheus theft of the fire, and all gods added beautiful evil to this creature, which nearly succeeded in destroying humankind.²⁸ There are extensive further Near Eastern parallels,²⁹ and I suspect a search of the Eurasian mythical material would reveal more.

²⁵ The epithet *Mange* means ‘wizard’; cf. *wanga*, ‘medicine’.

²⁶ It is this species of tree which lends its name to the kingship of Kabulwebulwe.

²⁷ *nankishi*: ‘spirit image’ or ‘medicine container’.

²⁸ Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 560-612 and *Opera et Dies* 60-105.

²⁹ In this connection it is noteworthy that Bernal could find no Anatolian or Mesopotamian parallel to the Pandora motif (‘A Reply to John Baines’, which after circulating in various unofficial versions was finally published as Bernal, M. Gardiner, 2001, ‘1. Can We Be Fair? A Reply to John Baines’, in: Bernal, M. Gardiner (D. Chioni Moore, ed.), *Black Athena writes back: Martin Bernal responds to his critics*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 25-43). Bernal could only find an ancient Egyptian one, from the New Kingdom period; cf. Walcot, P., 1966, *Hesiod and the Near*

3.6.3. Mwene Shishopa Kayambila

Whereas the myth of Shihoka and Likambi is told in considerable detail, the comparative mythological peculiarities of most Nkoya mythical kings are limited to mere passing remarks, or to miniature emblems such as cryptically retained in praise names. An important example is the praise name of Mwene Shishopa Mikende, claimed to be the son of Queen Manenga. Present-day Nkoya consider Manenga³⁰ a historical figure from around 1800 CE. Manenga also appears as a formidable and vindictive flood causer in a Flood story [**add refs**] ; however, a compromise is possible in assuming that the ancient and mythical name Manenga was in fact assumed by a historical Nkoya Queen c. 1800.³¹ Shishopa's praise name revolves on the word *Kayambila*, 'Thatcher':

2 Nohobene bayatile ngayi

'Owe mukonzo wendi Shishopa niye wukuhinga ha wene.'

Oho ashwanineho niye wa litangile ngayi,

'Ami Mwene Kayambila ka Matunga wa Yambila Mitwe ya Bantu, Mwana Manenga Shishopa Mikende.'

2 The Nkoya elected his younger brother Shishopa, with the words:

'You are his younger brother Shishopa, who is to take over the kingship.'

2 When Shishopa acceded to the kingship he adopted the following praise-name:

'I am Kayambila of the Lands,
The Thatcher who Takes Care of the Skulls of
People

East, Cardiff: University of Wales Press. However, the Pandora motif has been convincingly identified in Mesopotamia by Penglas, C., 1997, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia; Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod*, London/New York: Routledge, paperback edition, first published 1997, ch. 10, pp. 197f. As has often been remarked in the context of the *Black Athena* debate, Bernal's knowledge of Mesopotamia is much more limited than his Egyptological knowledge (Martin Bernal prides himself that Alan Gardiner was his grandfather, whose library he inherited. This one-sidedness has brought Martin Bernal to overemphasise Egyptian-Aegean relations.

³⁰ Meanwhile, an extensive Egyptological parallel suggests otherwise. Like Manenga's name, many Nkoya names begin with a prefix *Ma-* whose semantic contents varies and is sometimes zero. In Nkoya, *ma-* marks the plural of various noun classes for non-human living beings, abstractions, and foreign humans. *Manda*, as form of address *mawa*, but not *ma*, is the word for mother – which like in most African systems of kinship terminology is used in a classificatory manner, in other words, not only for the one biological mother M and one or several social mothers M', but in fact for all sisters and classificatory sisters of any person qualifying as M or M' (her cousins, distant cousins, co-wives etc.), and for all wives of all classificatory fathers. The root *-neng(a)* means 'begin saturated', and Manenga may be interpreted as 'Mother (or Primal Source) of Saturation' – which is the exact equivalent of the Egyptian goddess Mḥ-wrt, 'Great Inundation', 'Emanation of Greatness', 'Mighty Fullness', or 'Watery Abyss' representing the primeval female creative principle. Budge, E.A. Wallis, 1969, *The Gods of the Egyptians: Or studies in Egyptian mythology*, 2 vols, New York: Dover, 1969, republication of the first edition, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company & London: Methuen & Co., 1904. , p. i: 422f. Present-day Egyptologists have rightly discarded Budge, whose work reflects the state of knowledge in Egyptology a century ago, and less than a century after its inception. Yet despite Budge's many errors of fact and interpretation, his books continue to be cited, for their accessibility – as Dover reprints –, affordability – in contrast to most other Egyptological publications –, comprehensive treatment, and their lavish quotations from primary sources. This may justify my own reliance on his work, here.

³¹ Just like the name of Sargon was assumed by the historical Assyrian King Sargon II (ruled 722 BC - 705 BC). in emulation of his predecessors one and two millennia earlier (Sargon of Akkad (ruled 2334 BC - 2279 BC) and Sargon I (ruled 1920 BC - 1881 BC).

Like the Thatcher Takes Care of the Roofs of
Houses —
The Son of Manenga,
Shishopa Mikende.’

The cruel practice attributed to Kayambila has, in the first place, regional resonances. It is part of a violent skull complex that was quite central to Nkoya culture before modern times. Still in the late 19th century CE, the Nkoya courtiers are reported to drink their mead and sorghum beer from the skulls (in fact, occiputs) of their slain enemies. (Sampson 1972). Moreover, especially at the annual royal Kazanga harvest festival the king would conclude his royal dance pouring a libation, and drinking part of it himself, for his royal ancestors at an arboreal shrine – slaves would be immolated for the occasion, and the occiput of a slain slave buried to the rim into the ground in front of the shrine would serve as drinking vessel (Stanford Mayowe, conversation, Kaoma, July 1994); in the present-day revival of the Kazanga festival, from 1983 onward, the occiput has been replaced by a cheap enamel bowl imported from China.³² The Nkoya custom of drinking from the occiput of slain enemies is also attested for their northern neighbours the Kaonde.³³ Among the neighbouring Ila, whose culture and language overlaps with that of the Nkoya, still in the early 20th century the practice prevailed that a suitor was only eligible for marriage if he could show the skull of a slain enemy (Shimwaayi Muntamba, personal communication, 1973). These data had to be largely gleaned from external sources, because present-day Nkoya seek to present their historic culture as morally impeccable, highly aesthetic, and up to the standards of the modern state, its penal code, and Christianity, so the memory of headhunting is repressed from consciousness and public circulation.

Meanwhile it is the wider transcontinental parallels in the Kayambila’s ‘thatching with skulls’, and in the Nkoya skull complex in general, that interest us most from a comparative mythological perspective. In fact, I began to open up to the possibility of long-range cultural affinities between the Nkoya and Eurasia, and hence of the mythical and not factual nature of Nkoya traditions concerning Kayambila and other kings of the past, once I realised that the *locus classicus* for people drinking out of the skulls of their slain enemies was in Herodotus’ description of the Scythians (Herod. Hist. XXX: XXX).

A clear-cut parallel from the European Iron Age (Gallia Cisalpina, Northern Italy) is described by Livy:³⁴ the skull of a slain Roman general was solemnly used as a libation vessel by Gallic priests. A related example from Eastern Europe is the sixteenth century CE tradition concerning a drinking vessel of the ninth century Kiev ruler Svyatoslav: made out of a human skull. It bore an inscription which every anthropologist engaging in prolonged participant observation should heed:

³² In its original form the Kazanga festival had considerable parallels with the Egyptian king’s *heb sed* festival: although this would ideally only be held at 30 years intervals it also involved the erection of royal pavilions and the immolation of captives, cf. Wilkinson 2001.

³³ Jaeger, D., 1974, ed., ‘Kaonde Histories (Part II)’, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, mimeo, p. 22.

³⁴ Livy, 23: 24.

‘Looking for the exotic he lost that which was eminently his own’.³⁵

Skull cults are a widespread feature of Neolithic cultures in the Near East.³⁶ Like heads conserved in honey, human skulls were widely used in divination,³⁷ which may have extended to libation or drinking from such skulls. Ultimately, the skull cult is likely to go back to Palaeolithic times. Binford has argued that what has been construed as evidence of cultic and cannibalistic practices of Palaeolithic man may very well be attributed to the known actions of predatory animals.³⁸ Yet the cult of the cave-bear and the practice of skull offerings continue to be more or less accepted themes in the study of prehistoric religion.³⁹

Nkoya traditions⁴⁰ emphatically present Mwene Kayambila as a contemporary of the Luyana (Barotse, Lozi) king Mulambwa Notulu, who features prominently in Lozi traditions⁴¹ and is usually dated to the early decades of the nineteenth century CE. Specifically, Kayambila is remembered as the king who graciously (as if he had much of an option) honoured Mulambwa’s request to be given a royal orchestra and royal medicine, the two regal prerogatives on which Kayambila’s court thrived as do the courts of his present-day successors, the Nkoya kings. The story is profoundly ironic and subversive, since for the past century and a half the Nkoya kings have been subservient to the Lozi kings, Mulambwa’s successors; and for much of that period the latter have denied the Nkoya kings the royal privilege of the most important instruments of the royal orchestra, the *mawoma* kettle drums. A kettle drum was only re-installed – complete with at least two cases of human sacrifice – at the court of Mwene Mutondo in 1994.⁴²

³⁵ Schreiber, H., n.d. [c. 1970] , *Kooplui veroveren de wereld*, Den Haag/Brussel: Van Goor/Van Hoeve/Manteau, p. 304; my translation.

³⁶ Cf. Mellaart, J., 1967, *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic town in Anatolia*, New York: McGraw-Hill; Edwards, I.E.S., C.J. Gadd & N.G.L. Hammond, eds., 1986, *The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 1 part 1: Prolegomena and prehistory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed., first ed. 1970, index, s. v. skulls (painted, plastered, on floors, skull-burials and cult, Jericho), pp. 505-6

³⁷ Betz, H.D., 1986, *The Greek magical papyri in translation: Including the demotic spells*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, p. 75: PGM IV.2125-39; Montgomery, J.A., 1911, ‘A Magical Skull’, *The Museum Journal*, 2: 58-60.

³⁸ Binford, L.R., 1981, *Bones: Ancient men and modern myths*, New York: Academic Press.

³⁹ Maringer, J., 1952, *De godsdienst der praehistorie*, Roermond/Maaseik: Romen, 1952, pp. 75-82 and *passim*; English translation, 1960, *The gods of prehistoric man*, New York: Knopf. Maringer’s study contains a wealth of information of skull cults (see index of that book, s. v. ‘schedel’ / ‘skull’). Also cf. Gahs, A., 1928, ‘Kopf, Schädel- und Langknochenopfer bei Rentiervölkern’, in: Koppers, W., ed., *Festschrift/Publication d’hommage offerte au P.W. Schmidt*, Vienna: Mechitaristen-Congregations-Buchdruckerei, p. 231-269. A general study of the place of the human skull in cultural history was made by Henschen, F., 1966, *Der menschliche Schädel in der Kulturgeschichte*, Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.

⁴⁰ van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*

⁴¹ Mutumba Mainga, 1973, *Bulozi under the Luyana Kings*, London: Longman.

⁴² van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1994, ‘The Kazanga festival: Ethnicity as cultural mediation and transformation in central western Zambia’, *African Studies*, 53, 2, 1994, pp 92-125.

Is Kayambila only an a-historical epiphany of an underworld demon, or could he yet have been historical? In the 1820s, the Zambezi flood plain and surrounding regions were conquered by the Kololo people from South Africa, who brought a superior military technique and their Sotho Southern Bantu language; even after the restoration of Barotse rule a few decades later, people from the flood plain (now speaking Lozi i.e. Kololo) continued their dominance over the forested areas inhabited by the Nkoya, and this Barotse overlordship was reinforced and enhanced by the colonial state since 1900. This makes us read as a counter-hegemonic claim, and hence as potentially mythical, the account of Kayambila graciously extending Nkoya regalia to his poor relatives the Barotse. However, some of the other traditions concerning Kayambila have a remarkable real-life flavour, for instance when he is depicted as naming his new-born grandson in the early morning light.⁴³ The grandson was explicitly claimed to be still alive in the early twentieth century CE, when Rev. Shimunika – his close kinsman – was in his teens. I was therefore persuaded, in *Tears of Rain*, to consider Kayambila as a historical figure, and to situate him shortly after 1800 CE. However, the skull theme makes him more than life-size. It suggests that he has taken on the features of a death demon or a king of the underworld. This already casts a different light on the Nkoya tradition according to which the founders of present-day royal dynasties came to their present homeland in western central Zambia in an attempt to escape from the humiliation they were suffering at the court of Mwaat Yaamv, the ‘Lord of Death’. Are we talking about historical migrations of small proto-dynastic groups from Southern Congo (formerly Zaire) in the second half of the second millennium CE? Or about man’s eternal struggle with death? Must we reckon, here and in the other cases of extensive ancient parallels in modern Nkoya traditions and institutions, with the possibility that old themes were deliberately revived and enacted – by what were truly eighteenth and nineteenth century CE political actors in Nkoyaland – in an atavistic bid to create continuity with the very remote past of several millennia ago? Or does the Nkoya skull complex have genuine Eurasian parallels, to be explained by Nkoya and Western Eurasia sharing a common cultural source?

On a purely formal level, and without going into the question of historical relatedness and origin, the parallels to the Kayambila theme in Greek mythology are unmistakable. Kuknos / Cycnus⁴⁴ (‘Swan’) was reported to be in the habit of ambushing travellers and piling up their skulls, from which he intended to build a temple for Ares⁴⁵ (according to Apollodorus *Bibliotheca*)⁴⁶ or for Apollo (according to Stesicho-

⁴³ van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d., ‘Muhumpu wa byambo bya mwaka – Nkoya’, s.l. [Luampa, Mankoya]: s.n. [South African General Mission], typescript in my possession. Egyptologists will recognise that the same custom existed in Ancient Egypt, cf. Stricker, B. H., 1963-1989, *De geboorte van Horus, I-V*, Leiden: Brill, *Ex Oriente Lux*).

⁴⁴ Fontenrose, J., 1980, *Python: A study of Delphic myth and its origins*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press; paperback edition, reprint of the 1959 first edition, p. 29.

⁴⁵ We are surprised to find Ares, rather than Apollo, associated with this Greek Thatcher, whose name means Swan (the Swan’s Indo-European etymology of the word swan makes this animal another ‘speaker’ and thus as an epiphany of the Creator Deity creating by the power of her or his word — the mute swan, however, was reputed to sound its call only in its dying moment; the white and

rus)⁴⁷; only Heracles' victory over him prevented this architectural feat. Considering the Nkoya and Barotse (Mainga 1972) veneration of the morning sun, and their belief that the king as an epiphany of the sun (as Bernal has stressed,⁴⁸ Apollo, like Horus and H̄pri – the probable etymon of the name Apollo –, is a sun-god), we seem justified to reinterpret the Nkoya legend of the dedication of his newborn infant to the morning sun (which in Nkoya oral traditions is only specific to Kayambila) as indication of Apollo / Horus / H̄pri traits. Fontenrose argues that Cynus in reality is a manifestation of the underworld god Hades. Nor was the possession of a mound of skulls limited to Cynus: Diomedes son of Ares,⁴⁹ and Antaeus son of Poseidon⁵⁰, boasted similar collections.⁵¹ Like Cynus, Antaeus was reputedly killed by Heracles, notably in Libya, which in classical Antiquity was⁵² the generic name for the continent we now call Africa. Whereas in the Cynus myth the skulls serve as building bricks rather than as roofing-tiles, Antaeus corresponds even more closely with Kayambila in that it was his specific intention to use the collected skulls for roofing, in his case roofing a temple for his father Poseidon; Antaeus's link with the underworld is further accentuated by the fact that his mother was Gē, 'Earth', so that whenever he was exhausted from combat, he would only have to lie down in order to have his strength replenished – Heracles could only overcome him by preventing this contact with Earth – lifting him up as Šw (Heracles' ancient Egyptian counterpart in this respect) lifted Nt from out of her embrace with Gb. Robert Graves claims,⁵³ probably correctly, that the form of Šw presented by the priests of Egyptian Thebes⁵⁴ is identical to Heracles. Nor was this the end of the sinister skull collection in the Greek myths:⁵⁵

'...Oinomaos, Euenos, and Atalanta's father. Of all these kings it is said that they heaped up or hung up the skulls of those suitors [of their daughter, reminiscent of the *Golden bough* theme] who lost the race [whose winner would marry the daughter] ;

aquatic nature of the swan, moreover, made this animal eminently suitable as symbol of the Mother of the Waters, a primal Creatrix under the Separation of Water and Land cosmogony.

⁴⁶ Apollodorus, *Biblioth.*, 2.114.

⁴⁷ Fontenrose 1980: 29, referring to Stesichorus's Fragments.

⁴⁸ Bernal, *Black Athena II*, p. 587 n. 93.

⁴⁹ Diomedes was reputed to possess a mound of skulls, apparently a rudimentary shrine in the nature of the herm, and earth shrine found all over the Old World from Namibia to Tibet and even North America, typically located at through-roads and at crossroads and to which individual travellers are supposed to add a stone.

⁵⁰ Another masculine transformation of the Mother of the Primal Waters, Antaeus' temple was meant for Poseidon.

⁵¹ Fontenrose, *o.c.*, p. 330

⁵² In Graeco-Roman Antiquity, Libya referred to Africa, but not to Africa alone, there also being vast stretches of Asia also designated by that name.

⁵³ Graves, R., 1988, *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth*, London/Boston: Faber & Faber, reprint of 1961 edition, first published 1948.

⁵⁴ Also known as Luxor, Karnak, Diospolis Magna, No, Waset.

⁵⁵ Fontenrose, *o.c.*, p. 333,

and the first two are linked with Phorbas, Kyknos, and Antaeus.’

Even the name of Geryon, whom Heracles relieved of his cattle, may be etymologically linked to *karanos*, ‘cranium, skull’.⁵⁶ And also Hercules’s enemy Cacus, another death demon and cattle rustler (cf. the Nkoya tradition on Shihoka Nalinanga to which we will come shortly), had hung the entrance to his cave with the skulls of his slain victims. Finally, the statehouse of the mythical Phlegyan nation was a skull-hung oak tree.⁵⁷ Since that name derives from Indo-European *bhleg-*, ‘to burn black with smoke’,⁵⁸ and hence is a cognate of our word ‘black’, we may surmise that the Phlegyans, though mythical, were at one stage thought of as Black people.

Nor does this exhaust the evidence for an Eurasian skull complex. The Scythian and Celtic habit of drinking from enemy skulls as recorded in Antiquity, seems to form the western extension of a skull complex that extends across the steppe belt of Eurasia all the way to the Pacific coast. Glimpses of the Inner Eurasian skull cult can already be found with Herodotus (on the Issedones; cf. Baldick 2000: 17; also the Herodotus commentator Corcella elaborates on this point, cf. Corcella 1984; Asheri & Corcella 2007), and by the 10th c. Iranian geographer Ibn Rusta (Baldick 2000: 29). General skull ownership is reported for the Avars (Baldick 2000: 36). Drinking from enemy skulls has been reported from the Bulgars of the Danube (Baldick 2000: 31); Mongols (the Hsiung-nu king in 202 BCE – Baldick 2000: 23; such drinking vessels are indispensable for Hsiung-nu when sealing a treaty, Baldick 2000: 36); Korea (Hulbert 1905; Serruys 1958; Yetts 1926 as a practice associated with Chinese in Korea). Head-hunting practices in Taiwan are well attested (Watson Andaya 2004; Shepherd 1994). In Japan the custom appears to be transformed into drinking from an animal skull (Blacker 1967; Seki 1966), although the skull is reported as a witchcraft item there (Casal 1959). Throughout Central and East Asia, the ancestral practice of drinking from a human skull appears to have been incorporated, transformed and sanctioned in Buddhist ritual (Park & Song 2005). The practice of skull drinking is also reported from Native (North) Americans (Chacon & Dye 2007).

In order to explain these parallels and continuities, we could invoke some innate tendency, among Anatomically Modern Humans, to engage in head-hunting and drinking from skulls. We would also look at very long-range connections that modern population genetics have brought out and that are supported by long-range linguistics research notably on the Nostratic, Borean and Dene-Sino-Caucasian hypotheses – tracing communalities reaching back to the Upper Palaeolithic, when Borean (as a putative reconstructed parent of most of the language families spoken today including Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, Sino-Caucasian, Khoi-San, and even – although there the Borean connection accounts for less than 20% of the basic proto-vocabulary – Austric and Niger-Congo / Bantu) seems to have emerged somewhere in the Lake Baikal region. These connections are extremely important and we will have to come

⁵⁶ Fontenrose, *o.c.*, p. 333, where also other etymological associations are cited, with ample bibliography.

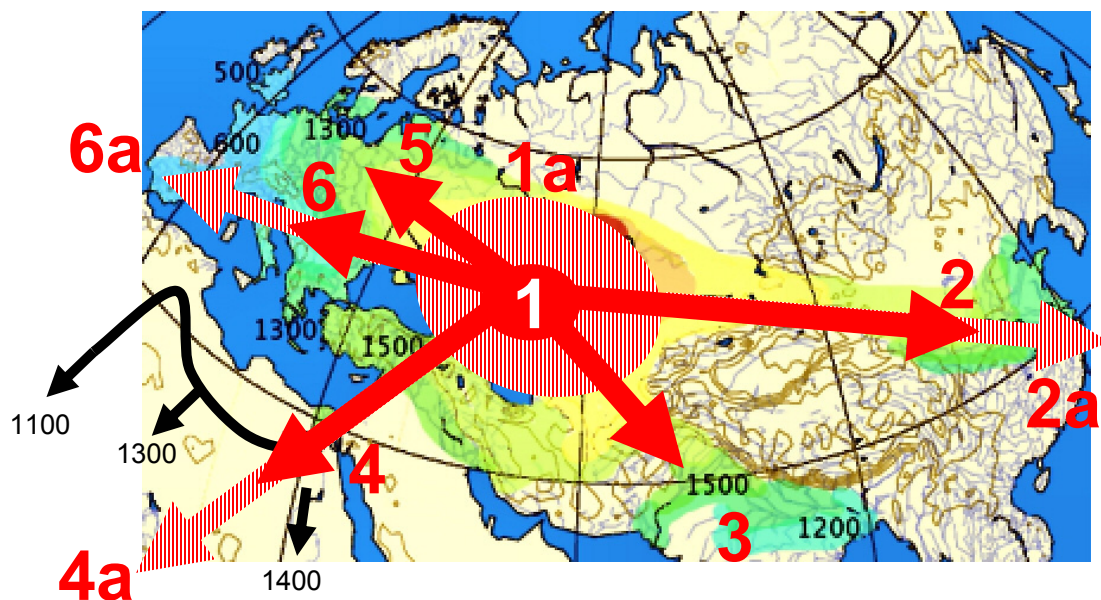
⁵⁷ Fontenrose, *o.c.*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ Partridge, E., 1979, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, first published 1958; s.v. ‘black’.

back to them in the final sections of this paper. However, they are too general to be of use to us in the present connection of the skull complex, because they cannot explain why not all cultures speaking Borean-derived languages share in the skull complex, e.g. why Celts but not other Indo-European speakers. Apparently we need to take recourse to less general and therefore less ancient cultural connections.

Considering the trans-Eurasian extent of the skull complex, I would again take recourse to the chariot model, which I propose to work out in the following diagram, although admittedly much further research and reflection is needed before it can claim mainstream scholarly approval.

Fig. 6. Proposed systematic mythological (and other cultural) communalities resulting from the spread of chariots in the last two millennia before the Common Era



1. epicentre, whose cultural and linguistic identification requires further research and reflection; 1a (shaded) the wider region of intensive interaction between the heterogeneous prehistoric cultures of West to Central Asia
2. into Central and East Asia, subsequently (2a, with considerable delay, and partly resulting from later eastbound waves) to Korea, Japan, South East Asia; linguistic associations defy my competence, but in addition to Turkic and Uralic may have included Into-European: Tocharian, Scythian
3. into South Asia (probably associated with the southward expansion of Indo-Aryan / Indo-European)
4. into Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine and Egypt and (4a, with considerable delay) into Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa (linguistic associations heterogeneous but include southward expansion of Indo-Aryan and Hittite, and by a very far shot possibly even of Bantu)
5. wave into Eastern and Northern Europe (associations include the westward expansion of the Uralic language family)
6. Indo-European wave into Central en Southern Europe and (6a, with considerable delay) into Western Europe (linguistic associations include the Celtic branch of Indo-European, from Anatolia to the British Isles)

main phenomena: full colour; secondary phenomena: hatched

3.6.4. The cooking pot of kingship

If kingship is one of the central Nkoya institutions and the one most highlighted in publicly circulating mythology, one expects a Nkoya myth of origin of kingship, and this is in fact available, in the following form

4₁

fuma wene wa Bankoya ha nyungu ya mundilo. Bantu babengi bakulwane bambilenga ngayi, Mwene Nyambi wenga kayoni. Mwanendi Mvula wenga kayoni kami bambilenga ngayi mikoka yibili hano hanci bawushinda wa Mvula. Kubatuyoni Shinkwehe, ku bantu boni Bakambunze.

2 Nohobene Shikalamo sha Mundemba niye wa wungile linyungu lyalinene ha liziko. Niho akungwile nkuni na kwibika litatamundilo, niho a punwine kayamana wa kaketwezelele mu nyungu ni mwako. Pele niho a yakile nyungu ha liziko wa telekele, ku fumisha ku lumenemene ku twala hakati ka mutwe, Mpungumushi sha Mundemba wambile ku bantu nimwabo ngayi,

‘Munayuvuko muntu nimwendi wa ku twesha kutewula elye linyungu ha litatamundilo pele niye uka mikoma nimwenu na kumilela nimwenu.’

Nohobene mikoka nimwayo oho bayuvwile noho bezekele shikuma kuma kutewula oyo nyungu haliziko. 3 Niho bakatukile kuya na kutema zinkobo za kutewisha nyungu ha litatamundilo ngoboni batinine mundilo ku lasheka shikuma na kuhoka. 4 Niho Bakambunze, Bakalavwe, Bakantabi, Bakankomba, na Bakashungu, Banyembo. Bakwangile kutewula nyungu ha litatamundilo. Niho muntu umo mwana Shikalamo Shamundemba niye wakatukile wayile mu kutekula mema ha lulonga, wa yitililenga kunkumo ya mundilo ha zinguluka nakuyitila mema kunkumo ya mundilo pele hi ukuzima. Nohobene niye niho a tendelenga shikuma na ngovu pele wa kumine kwakwipi na nyungu niho akwatile nyungu na nkobo, wayitewileho ha liziko. 5 Nohobene oho amanishile kuyupula nyama mu nyungu wehanine bawushinda wendi ngayi,

‘Yekenu tulyenga.’

Oho bamanishile kulya kwakatukile wamina na bawushinda wendi ngayi,

‘Yekenu tubakonzele ha zindonga Bakasheta banelishete ku nyungu ya mundilo.’

6 Nohobene Shikalamo sha Mundemba wa tongwezele bantu nimwabo ngayi,

‘Enu nimwenu munakwanga kutewula nyungu ha litatamundilo. Niho ou mwanami Shilayi Mashiku

Ha 4₁

The king-ship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large cooking-pot full of game meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that Mwene Nyambi is a bird; and that Mwene Nyambi has a child, Rain (Mvula), also a bird; and that two clans in this world are the relatives of Rain: the Nkwehe [Hawks] on the part of the birds, and the Mbunze [Buzzards] on the part of the people.

2 Shikalamo sha Mundemba was therefore the one who prepared the large pot with game meat he had bagged; he put the pot on the fire and started cooking the meat. The meat had been cooking from the early morning till midday, and when the pot of meat was still on the fire Mpungumushi⁵⁹ sha Mundemba called all the people. He said to them:

‘Anyone who can take the large pot of game meat off the fire will become Mwene of all the people in this area.’

All clans in that area tried very hard to take the pot of meat off the fire. 3 Some went to cut poles long and strong enough to take the pot of meat off the fire, but they could not go near, for the fire was very large and could burn them: it was very dangerous for them to go near. 4 All the clans: Mbunze, Lavwe, Ntabi, Nkomba, Shungu and Nyembo, tried to the best of their ability but they failed to take the pot of meat off the fire. Then the daughter of Shikalamo sha Mundemba fetched water in a tight basket; with the aid of this basket she managed to go around the fire, pouring water and extinguishing the fire. 5 With great efforts she got near the pot of meat and using her pole she managed to take the pot off the fire. Then she called her relatives and all the people, saying:

‘Let us eat.’

After they had eaten one of her relatives shouted:

‘Come so that you can lick the plates of the Sheta⁶⁰ who have gone around the pot of meat which was on the fire.’

Then Shikalamo sha Mundemba told all the people:

‘You have all failed to take the pot of meat off the fire, but my daughter Shilayi Mashiku has managed to do so. She has eaten the meat with her

⁵⁹ A name or title which is evidently not modern Nkoya, and in which the Luba words mpungu (‘buzzard’, perhaps ‘fish eagle’) and mushi (‘village’) can be detected; their present-day Nkoya equivalents are chipungu and munzi.

⁶⁰ ‘The Dizzy Ones’, affected by the circling around the pot of meat.

niye una yitewuluho na kulyamo nyama, na bawushinda wendi, niye “liyoni lya mulela bana” niye ukwinga Mwene, a mikome nimwenu. Pele kami nenu munakonzo ha zindonga muli Bamyene bakawukonzo munakonzo ha zindonga za wene. Bakasheta na Bankonze bantu bamo, Bamyene nimwabo.’

7 Nohobene oho mikoka nimwayo ya naha tu natoyo ya Bankoya bayuvwile noho batumbile baka Shilayi ngayi,

‘Enu haya muli Bakasheta munalishete kunyungu ya mundilo.’

Pele kami niho batumbile bamina ngayi

‘Enu kami muli Bankonze munakonzele Bakasheta ha zindonga zabo.’

Hakukotoka mvula walokele na kuzima mundilo. Pele haya niho ngayi,

‘Wene wetu wa Limata lya Mvula.’

relatives. She is “the bird⁶¹ that takes good care of its young ones” and she is to be your Mwene. You who have licked the plates are the junior Myene henceforth known as Nkonze⁶². The Sheta and the Nkonze are the same people, all Myene.’

7 When all the clans heard this they said to the people of Shilayi:

‘You are from now to be called Sheta, for you have gone around and around the pot of meat when it was on the fire.’

To the others they said:

‘You are from now to be called Nkonze for you have licked the plates of the Sheta.’

At the end of the ceremony it rained so heavily that the fire was extinguished. The people said :

‘Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop.’

We need not enter here into a discussion of the Cooking-Pot of Kingship as an aetiological myth explaining the rank of the various clans constitutive of Nkoya society (cf. van Binsbergen 1992). From a comparative mythological point of view, the important thing to stress is that the Cooking-Pot of Kingship is another mytheme that links the Nkoya to widespread Eurasian mythological themes, and even further a field. The Gundestrup Cauldron (a richly decorated silver vessel, 2nd-1st c. BCE, was found in 1891 in a peat bog near the hamlet of Gundestrup, Denmark) was provisionally selected as the emblem of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, because as a ceremonial, aristocratic container adorned with images of divinities and animals it would seem to convey many of the themes of world mythology. Celtic kings are reported to be nearly cooked in a cooking-pot full of horse meat, as part of the rite of intronisation. Bronze vessels were the major regalia in Shang China, and no doubt further Eurasian parallels can be found (e.g. Zournatzi 2000). Even from North America, references to a ritual apparently similar to that described in the Nkoya myth can be found in the Heyoka Society’s ritual of pulling off the boiling kettle (Swann 1994: 437f).

3.6.5. *The Two Ladies: How an Egyptological reading of Likota lya Bankoya seems to tilt the scale again a proto-historical, regional reading and in favour of a reading in terms of long-range formal parallels tending towards historical continuities*

The more one explores Nkoya / Eurasian parallels, the more one is caught in a game of which it is less and less clear whether one is engaging in a delusion of

⁶¹ Here the bird theme with which this passage began, comes back. It would look as if calling rain was predominantly a female affair (even the gender of Mwene Nyambi and of Mvula is left sufficiently unspecific to allow it to be interpreted as female), and one which evoked (through the bird theme) major representations of the supernatural.

⁶² ‘Lickers’.

(pseudo-)scholarship, or is on the track of a true revelation of long-range connections.

In the *Likota* passage directly following the makwasha song (whose Egyptian parallels we have already pointed out), the ruling queen is associated with two other ladies of similar status:

Niye niho azikile lukena lwendi munciza ya Lalafuta muyo. 3 Ku litoya lya Kalimbata. Oku litoya lya Kalimbata oku litoya lya Mulalila mukati kati, nimo mwekalile lukena. Niko afwila bene nimo muli shizino shendi nihano. Ha shikati sha wene wendi bampanzendi ba Nahonge na Kabandala, Bamyene ba bakazi nibo balelele litunga hamo nendi ha wene.

Mwene Mutondo lived in her capital on the other side of the Lalafuta river, 3 in the valley of Kalimbata; between Kalimbata and Mulalila, that is where she had her capital. There she died and there her grave has been to this day. In the time of her kingship her sisters Nahonge and Kabandala were residing with her; the [Two] Ladies Myene shared with her in the ruling of the land.⁶³

A similar passage occurs elsewhere in *Likota lya Bankoya*:

Kabongo II niye wa hingile ha wene wa mandi yendi. Niho akatukile na Lipepo na Nkulo Bamyene ba bakazi niho bayile. Mate Shinkisha niye wengile Nkomba wakombele mu livumo lya Mashiku; kami tatiyabo Mukwetunga Mulyata wa Mukashungu niye bene ou wabelekele aba bana nimwabo na Mwene Manenga. Oho afwile Mwene Manenga Kabongo II niye wahingile ha wene.

‘Kabongo II took over the kingship from his mother [Mwene Manenga]. She left with the Ladies Myene Lipepo and Nkulo. Mate Shinkisha belonged to the Nkomba [‘Mushroom’] clan, going back to the matrilineage of Mashiku. Their father however, Mukwetunga [Royal Escort] Mulyata, was a member of the Shungu clan, and it was this man who begot all the children of Mwene Manenga. When Mwene Manenga died, Kabongo II inherited the kingship.’⁶⁴

There is always the possibility that the Two Ladies Nahonge and Kabandala were historical figures, and that so were the Two Ladies Lipepo and Nkulo. However, our suspicion of a mythical or emblematic meaning is aroused when we realise that tradition presents Mwene Lipepo as a sibling to the twins Luhamba and Katete, whom we have already encountered as ‘Royal Going from Branch to Branch’ and ‘Reed Person’, in other words, as equivalents of the ‘Reed and the Bee’ of the ancient Egyptian royal title. Moreover, Lipepo’s traditional epithet is:

Lipepo mwenda na Nkuli,



‘Lipepo Who Has as Characteristic Attribute the Tribute Gourd’,


as befits a ruler ‘Who Lives on Tribute Alone’⁶⁵ and does not personally engage in productive activities. The interpretations which my Nkoya interlocutors offer for *nkuli* in this phrase range from ‘tribute gourd’, via ‘heart’ (the normal Nkoya word however is *mutima*) and ‘strong wind, breeze’ – in acknowledgement of the fact that the name Lipepo itself means ‘Wind’. The same root also occurs in several hydronyms, such as Nkulo and Nkulashi, tributaries of the major Western Zambian rivers Lwena and Dongwe respectively; the Nkoya repetitive verb *ku nkulukila* means ‘to



⁶³ After: *Likota lya Bankoya*, 26: 1f; both the original Nkoya text, and the English version, are to be found in *Tears, o.c.*; there I also give a lengthy discussion of the literary imagery and its difficulties.

⁶⁴ *Likota lya Bankoya*, 17: 6:

⁶⁵ Lipepo’s praise-name as recorded in *Likota lya Bankoya* 9: 1; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*

trickle down’. Lipepo and Nkulo therefore echo the paired concepts of Wind and Moisture, which in ancient Egyptian mythology appear personified as the twin gods Šw  and Tfnt .

The names Nahonge, ‘Mother Red One’,⁶⁶ and Kabandala (‘Person Who Strikes’) are not at all out of place in Nkoya genealogies purporting to refer to royals who lived in the second half of the second millennium CE. Yet these names, too, are reminiscent of the Archaic Egyptian context. Kabandala reminds us of the first dynastic king ḥ3 (‘Fighter’, rendered with the hieroglyphic sign  which specifically depicts a shield and a battle mace as the main weapons); Nahonge evokes the ‘red’ complex around the goddess Neith and her high-priestess/ queen.

Then again, speaking of the Two Ladies: in Archaic Egyptian inscriptions queen Htp-Nt appears as habitually accompanied by two other high-ranking ladies who may have been her sisters, or co-wives, or both: Queen Zm3-nbwy and Lady , whose name we cannot transliterate on the basis of our present knowledge.⁶⁷ More systematically, one of the three throne names of the Egyptian ruler in the Archaic period was the Two Ladies (*nbtj*) name, , commemorating the ruler’s being protected by the vulture goddess Nḥbt of the ancient Egyptian town of Nḥb (which like most ancient Egyptian sites also has an ancient Greek name, Eileithyiaspolis, and a modern Arabic name, El-Kab) in Upper Egypt and the cobra goddess W3dyt of Pe (Greek Buto, modern Tell al-Fara’in) in Lower Egypt...



3.6.6. Nkoya kings as the Tears of Rain – Egyptian humans as the Tears of Re^c...

After the dazzling possibilities opened up by our Two Ladies in the previous section, I feel now confident to discuss one particularly intriguing set of parallels between modern Nkoya sources and ancient Egypt: those revolving on the Nkoya image – already encountered – of kings as the tears of Mvula, ‘Rain’, the demiurge who is considered the child of the High God Nyambi. I am afraid this involves a rather detailed discussion of Egyptological material, which makes this sub-section a paper within a paper. So be it. The point I will make is the following and clinches much of the above steps in the paper’s argument: *the parallel between the Nkoya expression ‘Our kingship is from the Drops (or Tears) of [the Demiurge] Rain’, and the Egyptian imagery of humankind as emerging from the tears of Re^c, is so close, and the Egyptian imagery can be argued to have emerged in such a specific, and fairly identifiable, context in time and space, that here we are tempted to give up our prudence, and conclude to downright continuity between the Bronze Age Egyptian expression, and the present-day Nkoya one.* But that argument is not so quickly made:

⁶⁶ Cf. the larger reed-buck, *Redunca redunca*, known as the ‘red antelope’ among the Nkoya because of the reddish colour of its dorsal coat of hair.

⁶⁷ Kaplony, *Inschriften*, o.c., p. 612f.

For Ancient Egypt, the ‘tears of the divinity’ image is ascertained to emerge only in the Middle Kingdom,⁶⁸ i.e. a time when the Egyptian unified state and its religion had been in existence for a thousand years. Meanwhile, in another version humankind did not directly issue from Rē’s tears, but Rē’s tears fertilised the earth so that it could bring forth mankind:

‘Re is sometimes called the “weeper” which refers to his creation of mankind, explained by means of a play on words: the sun-god wept and from the tear (Egyptian *remy* []) that fell on earth, there sprang man (Egyptian *remet* [])’⁶⁹

This is probably a late version. It is alien to the dominant orientation of Ancient Egyptian religion, where earth is male, partner to the female sky. On the other hand there is a remarkable parallel here with the Erichthonius myth of Greek Antiquity. That apical ancestor of Attica was supposed to have sprung from Hephaestus’ seed, spent when the latter was aroused by the presence of the virgin goddess Athena. The male god ejaculated against her thigh and she, in disgust, wiped off the issue with a tuft of wool and cast it onto the Earth; the latter immediately conceived and produced Erichthonius, and Athena knew no better than adopting the babe on the spot – perhaps by the very act squeamishly admitting that her role in the child’s production had even extended beyond her somewhat hypocritical preservation of virginity while catalytically acting as ejaculation-stimulating pin-up at the same time. I earlier discussed this theme in the context of the *Black Athena* thesis.⁷⁰ At the time I reluctantly admitted the possibility of a link with Egyptian mythology on the general basis that the latter corpus contains several instances of irregular sexual and procreative behaviour; however, when I wrote I was not yet in a position to make the obvious connection with the ‘tears of the divinity’ theme, and I preferred an Anatolian or Tyrrhenian reading. Now the Egyptian parallels to the Erichthonius myth seem obvious,⁷¹ al-

⁶⁸ Anthes, R., ‘Mythology In Ancient Egypt’, in: Kramer, S.N., 1961, *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, Garden City (NY): Doubleday, pp. 15-92, p. 30.

⁶⁹ Hart, *o.c.*, p. 181 hieroglyphic text added. Speaking of transcontinental parallels and the *Black Athena* connection, genuine or spurious, one cannot help being reminded of Empedocles (Fragments, 6; cf. Leonard 1908):

Νῆστις θ’, ἡ δακρύοις τέγγει κρούνομα And Nestis whose tears bedew mortality.
βρότειον.

Although scholars have assumed, on the basis of this one attestation alone, that Nestis was a water goddess in Southern Italy, a more satisfactory general identification of Nestis is Egyptian Neith, which does not rule out a Neith cult in Southern Italy. Already Karst (1931a, 1931b) concluded to considerable Ancient Egyptian influence on the Capitoline cult of earliest Rome. Egyptian archaeological finds from Southern have been considerable (Lambrou-Phillipson 1990), but that was the case in many parts of the Early to Middle Iron Age Mediterranean.

⁷⁰ Van Binsbergen, W.M.J., ‘Alternative models of intercontinental interaction towards the earliest Cretan script’, in: *Black Athena, o.c.*, pp. 131-148.

⁷¹ Incidentally, this is more or less what Graves claimed half a century ago. Graves, R., 1988, *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth*, London/ Boston: Faber & Faber, reprint of

though I would prefer to derive both from a common source that remains to be identified.

The Erichthonius myth has another and perhaps more important lesson to teach us. In a perverted way the Attican myth of origin reminds us of the facts of life: it is (non-virgin) women who bear children, and it is men who by their sperm (*and not by their tears*) make women conceive so that the latter may give birth. In ordinary life, a male person's tears are often a sign that who sheds them has been *denied* love's privileges; hyperbolically, they can be considered the sign, not of male procreation, but of its frustration. This means that the 'tears of the divinity' theme involves at least two fundamental transformations in the official topography of the human body:

1. By a horizontal process of gender replacement, in other words through *masculinisation*, giving birth is transferred from woman to man, Rē^c undoubtedly⁷² being a male god.
2. Subsequently, by a process of vertical displacement from a lower region of the human body (the groin) to a higher level (the face), in other words through *sublimation*, the male usurpation of parturition is transferred from the male genitals (with sperm as the standard product) to the eyes (with tears as the standard product).

A schematic representation of this dual structural shift is presented in Figure 7, which shows from left to right: a female body giving birth; a male body in the act of masturbation; and an implicitly male body weeping.

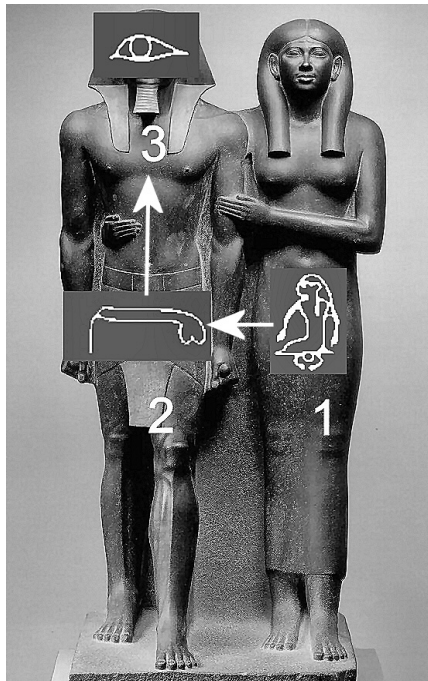
In passing we note that the same scheme can be applied to Greek mythology, with

1961 edition, first published 1948, pp. 140f, 436f. Graves preferred to call the myth Libyan rather than Egyptian for excellent reasons we shall come back to in the following chapters.

⁷² *Undoubtedly*, that is, ever since Rē^c's rise to exalted prominence, in the Fifth dynasty. However, there are indications that underneath the emphatic male nature of the sun god lurks a more original female identity, well in line with the sun's central nurturative role for all life on earth. Some of these indications derive from Ancient Egypt itself, e.g. the tradition according to which Rē^c is the son of a more primal Nt [Neith], whose female nature is never doubted. Other indications are comparative, e.g. the fact that the sun is female in the traditions of Ancient Crete (cf. Goodison, L., 1989, *Death, Women and the Sun: Symbolism and Regeneration in Early Aegean Religion*, London: Institute of Classical Studies), implicitly in the Germanic world (where 'die Sonne' has female gender), and also in the African Niger-Congo speaking world, where Anansi / Nzamb / Nyambi is a female spider / sun god. The suggestion that emanates from my comparative historical research over the years is that these various cultural areas, including Ancient Egypt, are considerably continuous. For an independent corroboration of this thesis from an accomplished Egyptologist, cf. Stricker, o.c., who argues with incredible display of an erudite referential apparatus that in the specific domain of the thinking about conception, pregnancy and birth – highly relevant in the present connexion –, Ancient Egypt, classical Graeco-Roman civilisation, Ancient Germanic civilisation, Ancient Iranian civilisation, and Ancient Indian civilisation, constitute, in fact, one continuous cultural and historical region. He could have added several post-Neolithic civilisations to which he had no intellectual access: Ancient Mesopotamia (cf. Stol, M., 1998, *Pregnancy and birth in ancient Mesopotamia*, Leiden: Brill, originally published in Dutch 1975), and two regions on which the relevant documentation stills needs to be compiled: Ancient China, and Niger-Congo speaking Africa in historic times.


Athena's birth from her father's skull as another application of the sublimation phase (3). Less complete transformations towards masculinisation can be seen Aphrodite's birth from Cronus' or Uranus' severed male genitals, and in Erichthonius' birth from the tuft of wool cast to the earth (Earth, female Gē) after a disgusted Athena had wiped Hephaestus' unwelcome and prematurely ejaculated seed from her thigh.

Figure 7. Schematic representation of the double shift (masculinisation i.e. 1 to 2; and sublimation i.e. 2 to 3) in the 'tears of the divinity' theme in Ancient Egyptian mythology



the hieroglyphic signs mean (1) woman giving birth; (2) ejaculating penis; (3) eye; the choice of this particular statue of Mycerinus is entirely arbitrary

After this formal, structural analysis, our next step is to search for historical indications that such a twofold process has actually taken place. This does not prove difficult. Budge gives a very late version of the myth according to which humans are the tears of the sun-god; it derives from a text entitled *The Book of knowing the Evolutions of Ra [Rē^c], and of Overthrowing Apepi [Apopi]*⁷³, written by Nesi-Amsu, c. 312 BCE. The text gives our Victorian Egyptologist considerable difficulty, because of its original yet logical solution to the problem of parthenogenetic creation in male hands...: masturbation. In ways which half a century later Anthes was still to circum-

⁷³ Apopi is the snake-like cosmic enemy; his hieroglyphic sign  shows a horizontal snake with undulating coils, with a knife stuck at the top of every coil and in the head; Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 245.

scribe as ‘unnatural though human’,⁷⁴ the first god (*Hpri*, ‘the sun-god at his rising’,⁷⁵ a form of Rē^c) says

‘I had union with my hand, and I embraced my shadow in a love embrace; I poured seed into my own mouth, and I sent forth from myself issue in the form of the gods Šw and Tfnt,’⁷⁶

Šw and Tfnt being the original sibling pair of Air (or Sunshine) and Moisture, out of whom the other major gods were subsequently born. Unable to hide his embarrassment, Budge shows himself to be truly a child of his racist, imperialist age,⁷⁷ and he is quite relieved when another late text, the *Book of Pylons*,⁷⁸ seems to offer reasons to relegate the masturbation motif, however physiologically and logically plausible, and however *universally* human, to what was from the standpoint of Victorian England a remote global periphery: sub-Saharan Africa, thus saving the moral purity of the ancient Egyptians.

The motif of creation through masturbation is a very ancient part of Egyptian cosmogony.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Anthes, ‘Mythology’, *o.c.*, p. 36

⁷⁵ Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, *o.c.*, p. 584.

⁷⁶ Budge, *Gods*, *o.c.*, p. i: 297.

⁷⁷ Budge, *Gods*, *o.c.*, pp. i: 297f.

⁷⁸ Original [but, as usual with Budge, imprecise] reference to: Bonomi, Joseph, & Sharpe, Samuel (ed.), 1864, *The Alabaster sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I., king of Egypt : now in sir John Soane’s Museum, Lincoln’s Inn Fields*, London : Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, plates 7 and 6b.

⁷⁹ For the Ancient Egyptians of dynastic times, male masturbation constituted the principal solution to the intellectual puzzle of how to account for the first birth, for cosmogony and anthropogony, if in common experience every birth springs from the coupling to two living human beings of complementary gender. Comparatively, this solution of the puzzle is far from standard, and already reflects the masculinisation process (the male usurpation and transformation of a woman-centred world view) on which I believe the Ancient Egyptian dynastic state was built. Two much more standard solutions are:

- the primal bird (usually the lightning bird, with cosmogonic connotations) lays the world egg – this solution can be argued to go back to pre-Out of Africa times (over 140,000 BP!), and it has left substantial traces throughout world mythology, including of course Ancient Egyptian mythology, where the cosmogonic Great Cackler is closely associated with the (male) earth god, Gb; also cf. Ndigi, *o.c.*
- female parthenogenesis: if all human life is known to spring from a female womb, the first offspring must have come from a woman who, in the absence of a male impregnator, must have given virgin birth; usually the first offspring is considered to be male, and it is immediately pressed into service as the lover of his mother; geographical distribution, and the reliance on knowledge of the fundamentals of procreative physiology, suggest this solution to be scarcely older than the Neolithic, where it is found all over the Extended Fertile Crescent. Also this second solution is attested in Ancient Egyptian traditions; e.g. it can be read into the relation between Isis and Osiris (on the assumption that Osiris was originally considered to be subservient to Isis), Isis and Horus, Nt [Neith] and Rē^c, etc. Its standard form in the Ancient Near East is the Ishtar / Thammuz myth.

‘The oldest legend about the origin of the gods is contained in the text of Pepi I [c. 2300 BCE] , wherein it is said (line 465) that once upon a time Tem [*Tm, itm*, i.e. ‘Atum’] went to the city of Annu and that he there produced from his own body by the irregular means of masturbation his two children Shu and Tefnut. In this crude form the myth is probably of Libyan origin, [again, Budge relegate the masturbation theme to non-Egyptian savagery, although the ancient Libyans were supposed to be light-skinned and Afro-Asiatic (Berber) speaking] and it suggests that its inventors were in a semi-savage, or perhaps wholly savage, state when it was first promulgated. In later times, as we have already seen, the Egyptians appear to have rejected certain of the details of the myth, or to have felt some difficulty in believing that Shu and Tefnut were begotten and conceived and brought forth by Tem, and they therefore assumed that his shadow, $\Delta\uparrow\text{I}$, *khaibit*,⁸⁰ acted the part of wife to him; another view was that the goddess Iusaaset was his wife. The old ideas about the origin of the twin gods, however, maintained their position in the minds of the Egyptians, and we find them categorically expressed in some of the hymns addressed to Amen-Ra, who under the New Empire was identified with Tem, just as at an earlier period Ra was identified with the same god. (...) The Twin Lion-gods [in two hymns quoted by Brugsch⁸¹] are, of course, Shu and Tefnut’.⁸²

The expression ‘Twin Lion Gods’ for our first divine siblings links them to the lion theme as a personification of the king, both among the ancient Egyptians and (*in a way not yet covered by my present argument*) the modern Nkoya.

Anthes⁸³ says that the complex as a whole – and his summary includes the masturbation motif –

‘originated in about the First Dynasty, is attested in the Third Dynasty, about 2700 B.C., and in the Pyramid Texts, and was the standard concept of Egyptian religion in all succeeding periods.’

The first attestation of the ‘men as *tears* of the divinity’ motif is almost a full millennium later, while until very late times a rival motif of human creation through direct masturbation persists. Therefore, and considering also the symbolic equivalence of transparent human fluids: tears, sperm, saliva, throughout the ancient Mediterranean and much of the Old World, I would interpret the masturbation theme not so much as an *alien* element but as the *original* element, as the first step in the symbolic operation of masculinisation, which was subsequently bowdlerised, literally sublimated from the groin upwards to the face and the eyes. Budge (*Gods, o.c.*, p. i: 304) also indicates the existence of an intermediate model, an ‘older version’, of imperfect sublimation but with the same male parthenogenetic delusion, where the tears fall on

⁸⁰ Gardiner (*Egyptian grammar, o.c.*, p. 508) gives in transliteration *h*, not *ḥ*, and in general makes clear that there is no connection here with the words *bit* or *3ḥ-bit*, which are to play such a prominent role in the next two chapters [of the *Global bee flight* draft].

⁸¹ Brugsch, [Heinrich, 1891/1969,] *Religion [und Mythologie der alten Ägypter: Nach den Denkmälern. Zweite Ausgabe mit Namenregister*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung 1891, Reprint Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Leipzig 1969] p. 422.

⁸² Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 88.

⁸³ Anthes, *o.c.*, p. 36

the male sexual organs and cause them to produce. The possibility of punning on the ancient Egyptian words for ‘weeping’ and for ‘mankind’ did help, but did not cause the theme ‘men as tears of the divinity’ motif to come into being in the first place. The latter is a simple transformation, along the lines illustrated in Fig 7, from the adult – possibly esoteric, secret – language domain to that of public everyday speech. We can only guess at the reasons for such a transformation. Had the masturbation motif become embarrassing in the light of later cultural conceptions of decency? Was it no longer properly understood? Did it need to be reformulated in terms of a later, more sophisticated concept of the sacred, where notions of power no longer primarily derived from human physiology and the tangible world in general, but in an increasingly logocentric manner from abstract symbolic concepts sublimated beyond their original materiality? Was this development a further stage in the masculinisation process that separated the First Dynasty queen from the more strongly (but still incompletely) masculine pharaonic state of the Old Kingdom and after? Or, alternatively (but this scarcely sounds convincing or in line with the historical evidence), did the masturbation theme have to be sublimated precisely for lack of success of the masculinisation process, in other words when, in the face of later feminine power, men could no longer get away with the open assertion of male parthenogenetic power as in the masturbation theme?

In passing we note that the masturbation motif offers a possible link between ancient Egyptian and classical Greek myths, not only the myth of Erichthonius but also e.g. the doubly parthenogenetic birth of Athena from Zeus’s head⁸⁴ (where as a sign of even more advanced sublimation towards logocentricity all reference to bodily fluids, even to tears, is suppressed, and a male god single-handedly produces a virgin goddess) and the birth of Aphrodite from foam or sperm when Uranus’s severed genitals were cast into the sea.

While we thus detect the theme of male masturbation as a pre-sublimation phase underneath that of ‘tears of the divinity’, masculinisation in the form of a gender shift in the production of offspring is also manifest. A parallel from elsewhere in the Ancient Near East may sensitise us to the fact it that we are *not* confronted here with merely the timeless and universal, innate capabilities of the human psyche for creating and transforming body-derived symbols at will, or of bringing supposedly universal archetypes to the surface of consciousness. Far more specifically, we operate here within a relatively well-defined and restricted cultural region. At this point we encounter *masculinisation as a fundamental dimension of the process of early state formation, probably to be situated at the transition from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age.*

The psychoanalyst Fromm perceives the same gender shift in procreation as it informs the founding myth of the Babylonian conception of patriarchal order, in heaven as on earth⁸⁵ Of course, as a psychoanalyst, Fromm is tempted to appropriate

⁸⁴ Pindar, *Odes*, 7, 35ff; Euripides, *Ion* 454ff.

⁸⁵ Fromm, E., 1976, *The forgotten language: An introduction to the understanding of dreams, fairy tales, and myths*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, first published 1951, p. 231f. Original reference to: Heidel, A., 1942, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago: Chicago University Press: ENUMA

the ancient Babylonian myth and use it to understand the male individual psyche in a general, even universal perspective. His important insight however becomes all the more illuminating when we realise that Marduk symbolises the moment of the historical emergence, in the Late Neolithic, of the state as a distinct institutional domain, whose internal conceptualisation and structure is no longer derived from the pre-existing domains of production, reproduction and sociability in the family, the village, the clan.⁸⁶ Marduk's fight against Tiāmat (whose maternal connotations sum up the nurturative, reciprocal, pacifist, gender-complementary orientation of many pre-state (proto-)Neolithic societies, often expressed in a balanced, gendered, dualist cosmology) means the disruption of reciprocity, gender complementarity and non-violence. Male Marduk's battle against Tiāmat at one level of analysis is the battle of the political domain to gain its independence from the pre-existing inclusive domain where kinship reigned supreme and violence therefore had to be mitigated or even banned from the domestic domain. Masculinisation (complete with male, especially priestly and royal, claims to control the fertility of the land and the human body) is merely an expression of state formation. When I encountered the same masculinisation process in Nkoya traditions, I was tempted to take these at face value and situate Nkoya state formation through masculinisation in the second half of the second millennium CE;⁸⁷ however, it is not impossible that all that was really involved was distant echoes from the earliest historical state formation in the Ancient Near East, both in Early Dynastic Egypt and in Mesopotamia. In the latter context the Enuma Elish myth, meanwhile, evokes two distinct historical processes at the same time:

- primordial state formation in the late fourth millennia BCE, and
- the installation of Marduk at the head of the pantheon in recognition of the hegemony established by Marduk's city state Babylon in the late third millennium BCE.

It is masturbation which logically enables the authors of the Egyptian myths to effect the gender shift towards procreation as a divine male prerogative, as an aspect of the installation of a distinct political domain – in other words, of state formation. Through a simple process of sublimation – which yet probably took centuries, perhaps a full millennium, to take effect – the 'tears' are direct transformations of the 'sperm'. At the end of the development stands the 'tears of the divinity' theme, and a fully-fledged pharaonic state; at the beginning, human procreation by women, a pre-statal domain of kinship and clanship, and presumably the first divine procreation by a female divinity. The abundance of female original creators in Egyptian mythology (in

ELISH (When Above), Tablet IV. Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. i: 305, refers to the same Babylonian story but misses the point about gender rivalry.

⁸⁶ Cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann, *o.c.*

⁸⁷ Incidentally, this passage is effectively my rejoinder to Vansina, who in an otherwise highly positive review of my *Tears of Rain* yet doubts whether the political formations I describe for the Nkoya, deserve to be called states. Vansina, J., 1993, [Review of : Binsbergen, W.M.J. van, 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in Central Western Zambia*, London/ Boston: Kegan Paul International], *Anthropos*, 88: 215-217.

the form of Nt [Neith], Ht-Hr [Hathor], and Mḥ-wrt, primarily) throughout the millennia makes it very likely that the postulated primary idea of ‘first divine procreation by a female divinity’ was truly the baseline of the earliest Egyptian ideas on creation – in line with the standard Neolithic conception of female parthenogenetic cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis as set out above. There is even a specific, albeit late, source which claims that the Great Goddess Nt produced the snake of chaos Apopi from her spittle;⁸⁸ this is highly significant in the light of the fact that there are several myths linking Nt closely to Rē^c, and that in certain version about the creation of Šw and Tfnt a distinction is made between the latter two: whereas Šw is created from Rē^c ejaculated sperm, Tfnt is alleged to have sprung from Rē^c’s spittle. Clearly underneath the dominant male version a female one lurks, which attributes to Nt the procreative role which Rē^c has apparently usurped. It is amazing that this theme was preserved into Late Antiquity, when Plutarch records:

‘In Saïs the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: “I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered”’⁸⁹

Even several centuries later again, Proclus⁹⁰ is to reveal another part of the inscription on this statue, making Nt the mother of Rē^c:

‘And the fruit I bore is the sun.’

The continued references to cosmogonic goddesses in general also shows that, in Ancient Egypt, the masculinisation process was never entirely completed and that even at the manifest surface of publicly mediated religious forms and expressions (let alone in the regional collective unconscious) strong female themes continued to resonate.

The transformation process involved must not be seen as simply unilineal, and without inner contradictions. Despite masculinisation, gender complementarity has remained an element in ancient Egyptian religion, politics and culture throughout three millennia.⁹¹ This is already obvious in the relationship between Šw and Tfnt as the first twin pair of created gods. Neither should we automatically assume the primacy of bodily physiological images, as if these are only self-referential, or non-referential, and in themselves could not be the symbol of relationships and expressions that are primarily not of a bodily (including sexual) but of a social and spiritual

⁸⁸ Hart, Dictionary, *o.c.*

⁸⁹ Plutarch, *De Iride et Osiride*, 9, in: *Moralia*, vol V, tr. Frank Cole Babitt, Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann, 1936; now, thanks to the Herculean labours of Bill Thayer, available at: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/home.html

⁹⁰ Proclus, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. Ernestus Diehl, Lipsiae, 1903.

⁹¹ Schultze, P.H., 1993, *Vrouwen in de Egyptische oudheid*, The Hague: BZZTôH, first published 1988; Dutch translation of: *Frauen im alten Ägypten*, Lübbe, 1987

nature.⁹²

Even in their earliest attestations the tears therefore issuing from Rē^c, and even the sperm, may therefore be read as more than mere physiological products. The following textual quotation already brings out such meta-physiological symbolism, in terms of light:

‘that which Tem, or Ra-Tem, has poured out [in order to produce Šw] is the light, and light was declared to be the prop of the sky.’⁹³

Meanwhile we must admit that the theme of ‘mankind as the tears of a male divinity’ involves yet another transformation in addition to masculinisation and sublimation: *anthropogenetic amplification*, from the original pair of twins Šw and Tfnt, ‘Air’ and ‘Moisture’, as the first gods beside the creator god, are generalised – to ultimately an extensive collectivity of beings, who moreover are no longer gods, but humans. It is the very same transformation (but working in the opposite direction) which characterises the Nkoya version as compared to the ancient Egyptian one: from ‘all of mankind as tears of Rē^c’ to ‘divine kings as tears of Mvula’.

Šw, god of the dry air and of sunshine,⁹⁴ has an exact counterpart in the Sumerian Enlil, ‘Lord Ether’. In evocation of the fundamental act by which he (technically their father) raised the sky goddess Nwt from out of her embrace on top of the male earth god Gb, Šw’s name includes the notion of: ‘to raise’.⁹⁵

As the link between heaven and earth, Šw has the ladder among his characteristic paraphernalia.⁹⁶ The vital instrument of honey hunters, the ladder is of very great antiquity and already features in prehistoric attestations of honey collecting – but in

⁹² The same problem comes up time and again when we wish to determine our position vis-à-vis the sexual reductionism that was characteristic of Freud’s work before *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Freud, S., *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, 13, 1, Frankfurt a/M.: Fischer, 1968-1977; Freud, S., n.d., *Het levensmysterie en de psycho-analyse*, Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek) and that is unfortunately still the hallmark of routinised psychoanalytical truisms schematised for popular consumption. As Jung has argued, (Jung, C.G., 1944, *Psychologie und Alchemie*, Zürich: Rascher; Jung, C.G., 1955, *Mysterium coniunctionis*, Zürich: Rascher) sexuality is far from the necessary and final end of a chain of symbolic associations; Hermetic, alchemistic and Christian mysticism, among others, demonstrates that sexuality in itself often functions as a mere metaphor of processes of amalgamation and union in the world of abstract concepts and religious symbols.

⁹³ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 90:

⁹⁴ Anthes, ‘Mythology’, *o.c.*, p. 37

⁹⁵ Viaud, J., 1975, ‘Egyptian mythology’, in: *New Larousse Encyclopedia of mythology*, introduction R. Graves, London/ New York/ Sidney/ Toronto: Larousse, 11th edition, pp. 9-48. The semantic field activated by the name Šw further comprises (cf. Faulkner, R.O., 1962, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford: Griffith Institute/ Ashmolean Museum, p. 262), ‘to be empty’, ‘sunlight’, ‘dryness’, ‘shade’ (both as absence of sunlight, as parasol, and as aspect of men’s personality), and ‘feather’.

⁹⁶ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 92, 241

Egyptian funerary magic Budge⁹⁷ identified this theme as a relatively late development, yet it is simply interpretable as a straightforward device to re-connect Heaven and Earth, in a cosmology hinging on their Separation (according to my Aggregative Diachronic Model already many thousands of years old when dynastic Egypt was established)

The Egyptologist Kees maintains that Tfnt is simply the semantically empty female complement of male Šw, produced solely by the formal compulsion in Egyptian mythology to have gendered pairs of all the primal divinities. Budge however cites etymological reasons (none too convincing, I suspect) to accord Tfnt an identity of her own as a goddess of gentle rain and soft wind.⁹⁸ According to Egyptian sacred genealogies Šw and Tfnt were Horus' grandparents, and it seems as if the little boy has usurped their sacred birth-place, *3ḥ-bit* / Chemmis. In the words of the prominent modern Egyptologist Helck:

‘Ch[emmis] hieß nach H[erodotus]⁹⁹ eine schwimmende Insel bei Buto im Westdelta, auf der Isis Apollon und Artemis geboren habe. Die Göttin Buto [i.e. W3dyt] habe als Amme des Horus die Insel zum Schwimmen gebracht, um ihn gegen Seth zu schützen. In äg[ypische] Texten versteckte Isis ihren Sohn Horus in einem *3ḥ-bit* genannten Dickicht. Eine ältere Sage von den ‘beiden Kindern des unter-äg[ypischen] Königs’ läßt diese als Sonne und Mond (später als Schu und Tfnt = Apollon und Artemis erklärt) im Papyrusumpfen von Buto geboren werden. H[erodotus]’ Bericht geht also auf eine altäg[ypischen] Mythe zurück.’¹⁰⁰


Helck translates here ‘the two children of the king of Lower Egypt’, presumably from *hrdwy bit*. When he stresses the aspect that Chemmis is a *floating* island, we are reminded of the Nkoya tradition that, as a people, they ‘originally’ lived on floating islands up in the north; my ‘de-mystifying attempt, in *Tears of Rain*, to interpret this as a reminiscence of an earlier historical stay in the swamps in Kasempa district, scarcely 100 km. north of the present-day Nkoya region, looks shamefully inadequate against this background of an ancient Egyptian myth, in which we can also trace prototypical parallels of Nkoya traditional royal figures such as Lipepo, Luhamba and Katete: forms of Šw and Tfnt hiding at Chemmis.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, pp. i: 167f.

⁹⁸ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 92

⁹⁹ Original reference to: Hist. 2, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Helck, W., ‘Chemmis’, in: K. Ziegler & W. Sontheimer, eds., *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, cols. i: 1143.

¹⁰¹ Gardiner, however, calls Chemmis a town instead of a floating island. Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar, o.c.*, p. 550, s. v. , and s.v. *i3ḥ*, p. 551; cf. *w3ḥy*, ‘hall of inundation in Palace’, Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar, o.c.* We are also reminded of the hypothetical ‘aquatic’ African societies that crop up time and again in reconstructions of African social and linguistic prehistory, cf. Sutton, J.E.G., 1974, ‘The aquatic civilization of Middle Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 15: 527-546; Sutton, J.E.G., 1977, ‘The African aqualithic’, *Antiquity*, 51: 25-34; Sanchez-Mazas, A., E.S. Poloni1, B. Kervaire, J-M Dugoujon, S. Tornay, F. Rodhain, L. Excoffier, Y. Naciri-Graven, J-M Tiercy, and A. Langaney, n.d., ‘A genetic view on Nilo-Saharan’, at:

3.7. Mwendanjangula

Fig. 8. *Mwendanjangula* in a sculptural representation from Angola¹⁰²



Whereas the readily available mythology among the present-day Nkoya largely revolves on kingship, there is an important mytheme that seems to lack all kingship connotations: that of Mwendanjangula, ‘The One Who Goes at the Topmost Level’. The name of this being is often interpreted as Tree-top Walker (van Binsbergen 1981), and it tends to be visualised as a giant or dwarf, a halfling i.e. with only one side to the body, carrying a mighty club or pole, and picking his or her way among the tree tops of the rather dense savannah that makes up the Nkoya habitat. However, *ngula* can also be ‘top’ in a figurative sense, e.g. a common expression for the High God is *Nyambi ya Ngula*, ‘the Supreme Lord’. Nkoya villages are small and short-lived islands of domestication carved out in the immense savannah forest, and since hunting and collecting have remained vital aspects of the regional economy, the forest is a frequently experienced environment. It is a place of danger, promise, and luck – elements embodied in the spirits of the wilds, corpses and spectres associated with deserted villages and burial grounds, but particularly concentrated in the conception of Mwendanjangula. Like usually in the Nkoya context, the gender of this being is undetermined, and is by implication usually taken to be male – which also tallies with Mwendanjangula’s connotations, all over Africa, not only with the weather, but

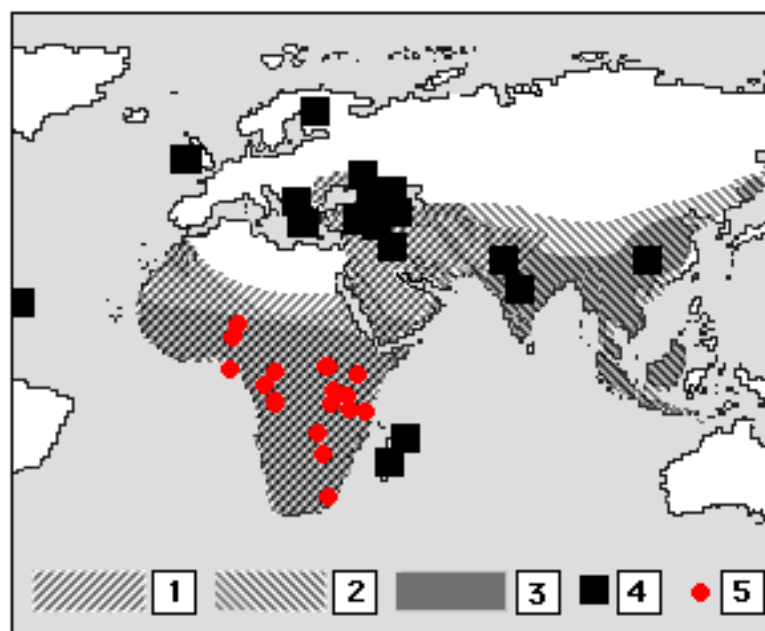
<http://www.santafe.edu/files/gems/ehlchronology/SanchezMazas.pdf>

¹⁰² I am indebted to NN [add detail] for making these images available to me.

also with herding, hunting (Mwendanjangula is a Master or Mistress of Animals), and metallurgy (von Sicard 1968-1969); yet the only statuette of Mwendanjangula known to me (Fig. 8), bought in Angola in the 1980s, clearly shows a female anatomy. If one hits upon Mwendanjangula and if one can summon the presence of mind to greet that being first, the latter will bestow great riches and healing powers upon one; but if Mwendanjangula is the first to greet, one will meet great misfortune and death before long.

This mythical character, for whom von Sicard has proposed the generic name Luwe, is widely attested, throughout Africa south of the Sahara. It turns out to have extensive ramifications into the rest of the Old World (von Sicard 1968-1969). Besides Luwe, its African name variants— several of which have leopard connotations – include Runda, Kube, Sumba, Gurub, Karumbi, Mutanga, Dara, Gale, Nape / Nyambe, etc. Although prominent in myth and everyday popular experiences of villagers, Mwendanjangula does not seem to have a cult. Neither does the traditionally recognised High God, except in the context of Christianity. Mwendanjangula in fact looks to me like a displaced ancient, Eurasian High God, lost in the African continent.

Fig. 9. Selected attestations of the 'halfling' mytheme as identified by von Sicard 1968-1969, against the distribution of lion and leopard in the background



1. Old World distribution of lion, 5000 BP
 2. distribution of leopard, 5000 BP
 3. present-day distribution of leopard
 4. selected attestations of the halfling mytheme outside Africa
 5. attestations of von Sicard's African halfling mytheme category VI ('Mwari' etc.)
- In all, von Sicard lists 65 attestations of the Luwe complex in sub-Saharan Africa alone; however, this number must be treated with caution given his intuitive methodology

While virtually ubiquitous in Africa (its African distribution is quite similar to that of the mankala board-game [**add refs**] , which may have a similar cultural

history), the Eurasian distribution of this halfling mytheme again suggest the pattern invoked in my discussion of the skull complex, and there suggested to be associated with the spread of the chariot: a central cluster in West Asia, and ramifications in the Celtic world (the mythical, evil Formorians of Irish traditions), the Uralic world, South and East Asia. Again a much longer time path, and then a more general, deeper layer of cultural affinity could be postulated (e.g. going back to Upper Palaeolithic Borean and then transmitted into Africa in the course of the Back-into-Africa movement), but again we run into the difficulty that such a less restrictive model with greater time depth would not explain the rather selective distribution of the Luwe mytheme in Eurasia.

Luwe could very well be a transformation of the Luwian / Hittite / Syro-Palestinian weather god (known as Pihassassa, Teshub etc.; his pole or club (a feature he shares with Heracles, incidentally) could be the celestial pole, one of the central concepts of naked-eye astronomy in the Ancient World. Again, a chariot based mechanism of distribution is suggested by the specific attestations in Eurasia, after which Luwe must then be supposed to have gained a new lease of life in the African continent. In principle the opposite movement, as an originally African god conquering Eurasia, could also be considered, but that would leave the specific Eurasian distribution unexplained – and would have no answer to the peculiar superimposition of very heterogeneous and historically disparate modes of production in Mwendan-jangula's productive associations:

1. *Lower Palaeolithic and South and Central Africa for hunting;*
2. *the Early Neolithic and the Extended Fertile Crescent (ranging from the Sahara to the Indus) for agriculture*
3. *the Early Neolithic and the Extended Fertile Crescent (ranging from the Sahara to the Indus) for pastoralism; and*
4. *the Late Neolithic and some still hotly contested origin between Anatolia and Central Africa for metallurgy.*

In his final four-fold package of connotations Luwe can only be Late Neolithic or even more recent than that. His metallurgical and meteorological connotations may well have the Northern, West Asian or Caucasian connotations so stressed by von Sicard. The pastoral connotations of Luwe / Mwari would well fit a context of early pastoralists spreading throughout Africa and facilitating the spread of specifically Khoi-San speakers (in Africa) and Cushitic elements (outside Africa – cf. Hercules' pastoral journey along the Mediterranean...); we are particularly reminded of the pastoralists of the fertile Sahara – who have greatly contributed both to the Pre-Dynastic peopling of the Nile valley, and to Southern African pastoralism by Khoi-San speakers. Luwe's hunting connotations, however, could be very much older, and to be remnants, in fact, of an earlier (Palaeolithic) cult (which may have been based in Africa or Asia, primarily).

4. Rival and complementary interpretative frameworks for making sense of the distribution pattern brought out in the previous section

In the face of the impressive array of transcontinental parallels and possible historical connections as discussed in the preceding section, one could always maintain that the Nkoya and their kings are exceptional and essentially un-African – although they hardly look exceptional in South Central Africa.

Certainly the divorce between the royal and the commoner modes of Nkoya society (although greatly overlapping in time, place and personnel) makes for an internal contradiction, which I have extensively discussed elsewhere (2003a) and which make the kings, recognised to be foreign, amenable to extensive discussions of intercontinental parallels and connections, whereas the non-royal population displays a regional continuity going back at least two millennia (as the archaeology of Western Zambian pottery suggests). Yet in one respect the Nkoya case, and the South Central African case in general, seems to be slight atypical for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole: kingship-related themes are so dominant there (due to the excessively violent grasp in which the kingship has held South Central African societies during the centuries of long-distance trade especially in slaves) that the mythological expressions suggestive of Eurasian mythologies (centring on the kingship and the Separation of Heaven and Earth) have left little room for Palaeo-African expressions, such as focussing on the Tree as the source of life and of humankind, on the emergence of humankind not from heaven but from the Earth, the Rainbow Snake, the origin of death, etc. Only a few fragments of these Palaeo-African mythologies (as well-known from other parts of Africa) became visible to me in the Nkoya case. They suggest that, while in the Nkoya case the element of Eurasian-African continuity is considerable and (to my mind) convincing, this may be far less so for some other parts of Africa.

Over the years (planning, drafting and rejecting more versions of *Global Bee Flight* than I care to count, and still leaving my publisher empty-handed) I have considered a number of possible explanations:

4.1. Frobenius' (1931) model of the South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to East Africa and South West Asia

This model (although somewhat reminiscent of the pan-Babylonism that haunted scholarship in the early 20th century) helped to pinpoint some of the main African-Eurasian parallels that are also brought out by our Nkoya case – in the fields of kingship, female puberty rites, divination, music, and metallurgy; moreover, considering the times, it displayed a refreshing recognition of the value and the power of African cultures. However Frobenius was at a loss as to the identification of the mechanisms that could be held accountable for these parallels. Also did he underestimate the wider extension of these communalities, beyond the 'South Erythraean complex', both on the African continent and in West Asia, Egypt, Southern Europe

and South Asia. No convincing and lasting explanation is to expect from this approach

4.2. Cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument)

One does not have to be an Egyptocentrist, and one can remain critical of the Egyptocentrism displayed by others from Elliot Smith to Bernal, Diop and other Afrocentrist, and yet admit that for three millennia Ancient Egypt was one of the worlds most powerful states and economies, exerting an enormous influence all over the Mediterranean and West Asia, and inevitably also in the Northern half of Africa. After decades of ideological infatuation with Egypt as – allegedly – the Africa par excellence, modern research (e.g. that of the African Egyptologist Ndigi) is now applying sound scholarly methods to the assessment of Egypt-Africa relations, and making good progress. Some of the specific Nkoya / Egypt parallels may be explain in this light, but other need to be explained by what is often the more powerful model: an appeal to common origins, in this case the fact that both Egypt, and (largely passing via Egypt, admittedly) the cultural inroads from West Asia into sub-Saharan Africa (partly chariot-facilitated, as I have suggested), drew from West Asian proto-Neolithic culture, in which much of the Asian innovations and transformations of the Out-of-Africa heritage had come to fruition. The same, incidentally, applies to Bernal's insistence on Ancient Greece's almost total dependence upon Egyptian (and, by a later Afrocentrist twist in his argument, African) cultural including mythical materials – this is a gross overstatement that does not take into account that both Egypt, and the Aegean, draw from the same West Asian proto-Neolithic source. This common source is, incidentally, also responsible for the considerable affinities between the Egyptian Delta on the one hand, and West Asia (including Sumer and Neolithic Anatolia) on the other hand – an affinity which is also manifest in the reed-and-bee complex, and which may well have managed, in this form, to have penetrated to South Central Africa.

4.3. Combined cultural and demic diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (the Afrocentrist position, and Bernal's Afrocentrist afterthought after his Egyptocentrist Black Athena position);

Whatever the deficiencies of Afrocentric and Bernallian scholarship (and I have suggested elsewhere – van Binsbergen 2000, 1997, 2005 – that these deficiencies have been somewhat exaggerated for reasons of hegemonic hegemony and mainstream paradigmatic power games) the main thrust of such studies has been a counter-hegemonic exercise in the politics of knowledge – which makes them, even to sympathetic observers or partisans like myself, unmistakably and unavoidably ideological. The same objection, inevitably, has been brought against my own work. However, in my quest for scholarly, methodologically and theoretically underpinned valid knowledge I have repeatedly been forced to appear disloyal to such counter-hegemonic causes, and reject the wholesale claim that everything of value in global cultural history has an African origin, not only in the remotest past of the Out-of-Africa Exo-

dus 80 – 60 ka ago (that claim is undeniable, but it is not central to the Afrocentrist and Bernallian argument), but also in Neolithic and Bronze Age times down to the present day. Thus my extensive empirical, comparative and theoretical research (even though partly informed by the post-modern position on local, multiple, manipulable and transient truths even in science), has forced me to admit an extra-African origin and subsequent transcontinental spread into Africa, for mankala board games ('the nation game of Africa', as Culin 1896 had it); for geomantic divination including Ifa, Sikidy and the Southern African Hakata; for many aspects of mythology (Late or Post-Palaeolithic) centring on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, shamanism, and the kingship; and – as my research in progress seems to indicate – even for the Niger-Congo / Bantu linguistic family. The primary aim of scholarship is not to vindicate African sensitivities in the face of historical misfortunes of the last few centuries. Thus also in my analysis, Africa's contribution to global mythology lies mainly in the beginning, in the initiating and refining the Palaeo-African pre-Out of-Africa mythological package that was subsequently innovated, transformed, and diversified, mainly in Asia, between 60 and 15 ka BP, and then returned to Africa as a major basis for the African / Eurasian communalities that form the subject matter of this paper. If such a model is misinterpreted as reducing Africa and Africans to global passivity and lack of cultural initiative, so be it – before the last millennium or so, Europe found itself in very much the same position. However, it should be clear that for an explanation of the Eurasian / African parallels identified above for Nkoya mythology, I hardly expect anything from an Afrocentrist or Bernallian position.

4.4. Van Binsbergen's Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology

This model claims that 'Pandora's Box' (my proposed term for the cultural heritage with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa in two sallies, 80 and 60 ka BP) contained a few basic mythological themes that were subsequently developed, transformed and innovation in Asia after which the results where fed back into Africa in the context of the recently discovered Back-into-Africa movement from 15 ka BP

Here I stick to the argument developed in my recent papers in comparative mythology: Pandora's Box contained a limited number of mythemes which can be more or less identified, first by ubiquity (for all present-day cultures, just like all present-day humans, go back to Pandora's Box), secondly by comparison with Australian, New Guinean and Andaman Island mythologies. These mythemes, including among others the mytheme of the Earth, the Tree, the Rainbow Serpent and the Lightning Bird, after the Exodus were engaged in a dazzling process of innovation, transformation and localisation, resulting in new mythemes (such as that of the Separation of Land and Water, and that of the Separation of Heaven and Earth) that, in continued innovation and transformation, were spread on the wings of the expansion and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans all over the earth. For c. 15 ka BP, this percolatory movement also began to curve back into Africa (as recent genetic research has established), and in that process the Asia-innovated mythemes began to be fed back into Africa, and to interact with the Palaeo-African, pre-Exodus themes that had meanwhile undergone a slow evolution in Africa.

that had meanwhile undergone a slow evolution in Africa. I have argued that (against a general background informed by the world archaeology of modes of production, long-range historical linguistics, state-of-the-art population genetics, and a hermeneutical approach to mythemes and their implications in space and time and productive processes) glimpses of this global process may be gained from an analysis of African cosmogonic myths as collected in historical times (van Binsbergen 2006, 2007). Much of Nkoya mythology especially the kingship-centred parts, but also the reed-and-bee complex, Mwendanjangula and the complex surrounding male genital mutilation) can be interpreted as Eurasian post-Palaeolithic, complex and advanced mythology ending up in South Central Africa as a result of the Back-into-Africa movement. Chariot-based expansion has been highlighted, in the present argument, as one of the important mechanisms of such back-into-Africa in recent millennia, but other, older forms must also be recognised (e.g. the inroads of West Asian hunters and early pastoralists mixing with the Palaeo-African populations on their way and ending up in Southern Africa as Khoi-San speakers (Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994).

Without specific focus on the Nkoya, and drawing on the list of mythemes identified in African cosmogonic myths as collected in historical times, and traced, in their reconstructed origins, innovations and transformations, from pre-Exodus Africa, via their 45 ka of innovation in Asia, finally back into Africa (where they were encountered in historical times), Appendix 1 complements and extends the present argument by offering an overview of the parallels of these African mythemes in literate Eurasian mythologies.

4.5. Oppenheimer's General Sunda Thesis

This model claims a general fertilising effect (implied to have been Austric/Austronesian based) of pre-insular South East Asia upon West Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Africa.

Only the last few years, steeped in intercontinental long-range research of ever widening scope, did I realise that we need not look at Nkoya kingship and society as one self-contained local package, and while the structural-functionalist model continued to be useful to explain the how Nkoya society has managed to juggle with these contradictions without being destroyed by them, I began to contemplate the possibility of explaining the discontinuity between Nkoya royal courts, and commoner segments of their society, as that between invaders, and a subjugated local population. The present argument suggest that Nkoya royals were largely of West or South West Asian extraction, having undergone a long incubation process of several millennia on West African or North East African soil, whence they arrived in South Central Africa with already a fully developed institutional cultural of kingship, with the attending mythology. However, Stephen Oppenheimer's (1998) argument on early Holocene westbound Sunda expansion into West Asia and by implication into Africa made me also look to South East Asia as a possible source of Nkoya royal mythology and institutions. When I explored the comparative mythological aspects of Oppenheimer's thesis, the results were largely negative (van Binsbergen 2008b); however, in the process I had to admit that the case for extensive social, musical and political influ-

ence from South East Asia on the East African coast but also into the interior, on the Nkoya, Lunda and Ila, was considerable. I cannot enter into details here – my book on this topic was recently completed and is hoped to appear next year. However, its conclusions, even if admitting considerable South East Asian inroads into Africa in the most recent millennia (a claim for which considerable cultural, genetic and linguistic grounds will be adduced), I found that I resolutely had to reject Oppenheimer’s claim as to Indonesia being the source of the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East, including the paradise, the flood, the tower, etc – and hence the source of much of world mythology. If, in fields of kingship and the Separation of Heaven and Earth (more than in the field of flood myths, for which South East Asia is rich but Indonesia proper, as well as Indonesia-populated Madagascar, is barren) Indonesia displays the general Late and Post-Palaeolithic mythical patterns, this is as a peripheral derivation and not as an origin and source. This means that, even if Sunda elements could be argued for aspects of Nkoya mythology, these would mainly have served to mediate general Eurasian traits, or specifically West Asian traits, as channelled via South and South East Asia. Admittedly, part of the Nkoya royal mythology could be elucidated in this light. After all, South Asian elements such as the *gabhasti*- might have travelled via Sunda long-distance trade and migration, Sunda- influenced kingdoms are recognised for Madagascar but have also been claimed for the East African mainland (Kent 1970 – with much controversy largely on paradigmatic grounds), and the Nkoya kingdoms, like others in South Central Africa, display many traits that have Sunda parallels: the *Conus* shells, xylophones and the royal orchestra in general, royal names like Skanda, Mangala and Kubama that could come straight out of the Mahabharata, etc.

5. Conclusion

Reviewing the Nkoya evidence in some detail, the present argument has shown that these various approaches (apparently incompatible, but possibly complementary) by and large have a partial truth on their side, and that none gives a full and convincing answer. This will make us all the more curious to elucidate the seething of linguistic, genetic and cultural innovation in West Asia in the Early Neolithic, to which many of the parallels and continuities spotted ultimately would seem to go back, and which were, many millennia later, also mediated all across Eurasia and a part of Africa by the mechanism of the chariot. However, that cannot be accommodated in this, already far too long, paper.

Against the background of topical developments in comparative mythology (especially the work of Michael Witzel), and concentrating on the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia (South Central Africa) my argument extensively offers the descriptive data on which to base a formal consideration of Nkoya –Eurasian parallels, gradually proceeding to a point where such formal consideration could begin to give way to the admission of factual historical continuity. Thus I argue that there is an empirically justified case for such continuity between African and Eurasian mythologies, as a way to open up new theoretical, historical and interpretative horizons. In the process, a number of possible explanatory models of such continuity are considered and evaluated both empirically and theoretically: Frobenius’ (1931) model of the

South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea to East Africa and South West Asia; cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument); combined cultural and demic diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (the Afrocentrist position, and Bernal's Afrocentrist afterthought after his Egyptocentric Black Athena position); my own Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, claiming that 'Pandora's Box' (my proposed term for the cultural heritage with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa in two sallies, 80 and 60 ka BP) contained a few basic mythological themes that were subsequently developed, transformed and innovation in Asia after which the results were fed back into Africa in the context of the recently discovered Back-into-Africa movement from 15 ka BP; and Oppenheimer's General Sunda Thesis, claiming a general fertilising effect (implied to have been Austric/ Austronesian based) of pre-insular South East Asia upon West Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Africa.

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6. Appendix I. Mythological continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and selected literate Eurasian cultures

[Extensive table of Old World mythological continuities, classified on the basis of 20 Narrative Complexes \(NCs\) as found in a corpus of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths collected in historic times: including mythologies from Ancient Egypt, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, the Bible, and selected other literate civilisations of the Old World, outside sub-Saharan Africa](#) (click on hyperlink)

available at:

http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/Mythological%20continuities%20def.pdf
(click on hyperlink)

Note: this table is not in portrait but in landscape format; your PDF reader has a button to rotate the page 90 degrees clockwise, so that you may read the table without difficulty; it is too large to print here