

Pandora's Box prised open

Studies in Comparative Mythology

This book presents van Binsbergen's contributions to Comparative Mythology since 2000, when this discipline (long considered compromised by association with arch-conservative scholars as Frazer, de Vries, Eliade, Dumézil, Jung, etc.) was revived by the Sanskrit scholar Michael Witzel (Harvard, USA). Having studied myth throughout his intellectual life, Wim van Binsbergen (*1947, Amsterdam, Netherlands) initially concentrated on the literary uses of myth by such novelists as Nabokov and Claus; later he extended his analyses to the socio-political use of myth in Africa, based on historical and ethnographic fieldwork data he collected since 1968. In mid-career his perspective shifted from Africanist to globalist, and from ethnography to long-range cultural history and intercultural philosophy. Strongly focussing on theory and method, this book testifies to the rich insights to be gathered at the intersection of these cross-fertilising fields of research and reflection. As a boon the reader acquires a revealing, state-of-the-art perspective on global cultural history.



<< Wim van Binsbergen (centre, flanked by Prof. Boris Oguibénine, Strassburg, France) presenting his extensive argument on the surprising continuity between sub-Saharan African and Eurasian mythologies, at the 2nd Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology. Jointly with the Nijmegen (Netherlands) religious anthropologist Eric Venbrux, and largely with funding from

the Netherlands Royal Academy of Sciences KNAW and from Harvard University, van Binsbergen convened this international conference at Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 2008 and (with the copy-editorial assistance of Kirsten Seifika) edited its proceedings. Van Binsbergen was among the founders of this scholarly association (Beijing, China, 2006) and served on its Board of Directors until health reasons brought him to step down in 2020.

PIP-TraCS – Papers in Intercultural Philosophy and Transcontinental Comparative Studies No. 26



26

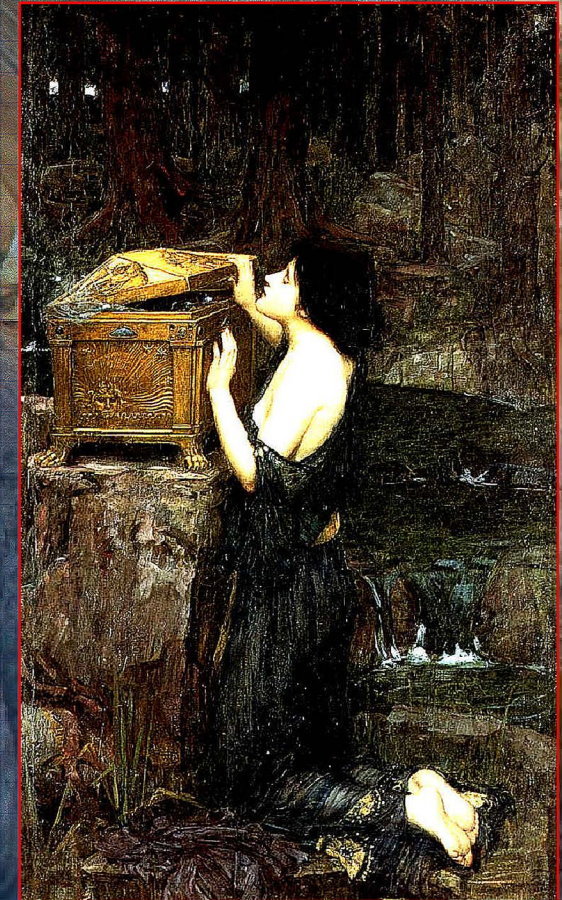


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Wim van Binsbergen — *Studies in Comparative Mythology*

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Studies in Comparative Mythology

Wim van Binsbergen



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BOOKS / INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS BY WIM VAN BINSBERGEN

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WIM VAN BINSBERGEN (*1947) was trained in sociology, anthropology, and general linguistics, at Amsterdam University (Municipal). He held professorships in the social sciences at Leiden, Manchester, Durban, Berlin, and Amsterdam (Free University). At the latter institution he took his *cum laude* doctorate (1979) and was the incumbent of the chair of ethnic studies (1990-1998), prior to acceding to the chair of Foundations of Intercultural Philosophy, Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Simultaneously, he held senior appointments at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. Over the decades, he has established himself internationally as a specialist on African ethnicity, African religion, ethnohistory, globalisation, intercultural philosophy, comparative mythology, the Mediterranean Bronze Age, and transcontinental continuities between Africa and Asia in pre- and proto-history. He was President of the Netherlands Association of African Studies, 1990-1993, President of the Netherlands / Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy (1998-2022), and one of the Founding Members / Directors of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, 2006-2020. From 2002 he has been the Editor of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*. His many books include *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), *Tears of Rain* (1992), *Intercultural Encounters* (2003), *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (with Fred Woudhuizen, 2011), *Black Athena Comes of Age* (2011), *Before the Presocratics* (2012), *Vicarious Reflections* (2015), *Religion as a Social Construct* (2017), *Researching Power and Identity in African State Formation* (with Martin Doornbos, 2017), *Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated* (2018), *Rethinking Africa's Transcontinental Continuities in Pre- and Proto-history* (2019, ed.), *Sunda: Pre- and Proto-historical Continuities between Asia and Africa* (2020), *Sangoma Science: From ethnography to intercultural ontology: A poetics of African spiritualities* (2021), and *Joseph Karst: As a pioneer of long-range approaches to Mediterranean Bronze-Age ethnicity: A study in the History of Ideas* (2021). Wim van Binsbergen is married with the classical (European and Indian) singer and breathing therapist Patricia Saegerman, and has five adult children. Besides his scholarly work, he is a published poet, the adopted son of a Zambian king, and a certified and practising African traditional healer in the Southern African *Sangoma* tradition.

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by Wim M.J. van Binsbergen



PIP-TraCS: Papers in Intercultural Philosophy / Trans-
continental Comparative Studies, No. 26



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e-mail: shikandapress@gmail.com

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ISBN / EAN 978-90-78382-51-5

Nur = 694 –Cultuur- en mentaliteitsgeschiedenis

COVER ILLUSTRATIONS *front and back*: one of the oldest known mythical representations, a Middle Palaeolithic sculpture at Tsodilo Hills, North-western Botswana, considered to represent the Rainbow Snake; *front*: ‘Pandora [prides open her box]’, painting by the British artist James William Waterhouse, 1896; *back*: Wim van Binsbergen (flanked by Prof. Boris Oguibénine, Strassburg, France) presenting this book’s chapter 8 at the Second Annual Meetings of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 2008 (photo Eric Venbrux).

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version2; 6-2022)

This book was earlier announced under the title, now discarded: *Through a glass darkly: Collected papers in comparative mythology*

PART I. PRELIMINARIES

Table of contents

BOOKS / INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS BY WIM VAN BINSBERGEN	2
Authored books	
Edited collections	
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	4
PART I. PRELIMINARIES	7
TABLE OF CONTENTS	9
LIST OF FIGURES	20
LIST OF TABLES	27
LIST OF SPECIAL TOPICS	29
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION (2022).....	33
1.1. The New Comparative Mythology as an eye-opener	
1.2. Provenance of chapters chapters and other editorial matters	
PART II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES	55
CHAPTER 2. COMPARABILITY AS A PARADIGMATIC PROBLEM (2013)	57
2.0. My book <i>Before the Presocratics</i> as an extreme comparativist exercise	
2.1. Introduction	
2.2. Contrasting styles of comparison between cultures in space and time	
2.3. Comparative anthropology of the mid-20th century CE	
2.4. The structuralist-functionalist handicap	
2.5. Comparison in the hands of historians and philologists	

- 2.6. Comparability as a paradigmatic problem
 - 2.6.1. The problem of aggregation
- 2.7. Methodological and theoretical lessons to be learned from the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg
 - 2.7.1. The comparative variable as paradigm
 - 2.7.2. The unity or fragmentation of humankind as a paradigmatic position
- 2.8. Conclusion

CHAPTER 3. RUPTURE AND FUSION IN THE APPROACH TO MYTH (2003 / 2009): Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics, and long-range historical reconstruction, with an application to the ancient and world-wide mythical complex of Leopard-skin symbolism) 81

- 3.1. Philosophical approaches to myth
- 3.2. A provisional definition of myth
- 3.3. Discussion of the definition
- 3.4. Rupture and fusion
- 3.5. The scholar's adoption and celebration of myth
- 3.6. The scholar's critical battle against myth
- 3.7. A near-universal mytheme: 'hero fights monster'
- 3.8. Living with the tensions: Towards a specialised scholarship of myth
- 3.9. The Leopard's unchanging spots: Example of an interdisciplinary approach to an African mythical complex

CHAPTER 4. THE SPIKED-WHEEL TRAP AS A CULTURAL INDEX FOSSIL IN AFRICAN PREHISTORY (2010): An exercise in global distribution analysis based on Lindblom's 1935 data 119

- 4.1. Introduction
- 4.2. Introducing the spiked-wheel trap
 - 4.2.1. Lindblom's original illustrations
 - 4.2.2. Lindblom's distributional analysis
- 4.3. Discussion
- 4.4. Towards alternative models of historical reconstruction explaining the geographic distribution of the spiked-wheel trap
 - 4.4.1. From Pandora's Box (the Pre-Out of Africa cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans)
 - 4.4.2. Eurasian origins
- 4.5. Formal cultural systems whose distribution is similar to that of the spiked-wheel trap: Mankala, geomantic divination, and belief in a unilateral mythical being
- 4.6. Conclusion

CHAPTER 5. MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (2005 / 2006):
 situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range
 intercontinental comparative perspective149

5.1. Introduction

 5.1.1. The problem

 5.1.2. The method to be followed in this argument

5.2. The empirical data

 5.2.1. Construction of a corpus

 5.2.2. Identification of individual mythemes relating to cosmogony
 in Africa

 5.2.3. Combining the over two hundred individual mythemes in
 our data set of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic
 mythology, into twenty Narrative Complexes

 5.2.4. Reducing the number of cosmogonic Narrative Complexes:
 Which Narrative Complexes may be considered
 transformations of other Narrative Complexes in the
 sub-Saharan African mythological material?

5.3. Situating each of the remaining Narrative Complexes in time
 and place

 5.3.1. Preliminary remark: The rate of cultural change

 5.3.2. Defining methodologies for dating the cosmogonic mythical
 material

 5.3.3. Modes of production as a clue to dating

 5.3.3.1. A Narrative Complex's geographic distribution as a clue to dating

 5.3.3.2. Hermeneutics as a clue to dating

 5.3.4. After periodisation, the problem of localisation in space

5.4. Situating the Narrative Complexes in time and place

5.5. Conclusions: Interpreting the emerging overall pattern in
 long-range comparative terms

 5.5.1. African mythology is world mythology *par excellence*

 5.5.2. Witzel's Out-of-Africa proposal *grosso modo* confirmed:
 Overall match between the genetic, linguistic and
 mythical trajectory of Anatomically Modern Humans

 5.5.3. Humankind's oldest discourse philosophically sound

 5.5.4. From modes of production to worldview, but also the other
 way around

 5.5.5. The spasmodic process of extensive continuity punctuated
 by specific moments of great conceptual change,
 presumably coinciding with the rise of new modes of
 production

5.6. Postscript: Can the above be dismissed as 'merely
 Afrocentrist ideology'?

CHAPTER 6. FURTHER STEPS TOWARDS AN AGGREGATIVE
DIACHRONIC MODEL OF WORLD MYTHOLOGY,
STARTING FROM THE AFRICAN CONTINENT (2006)183

6.1. Introduction

6.2. Some of the theoretical issues raised by my model:

Universals of culture, the dynamics of NarComs, and
background assumptions

6.2.1. Why (near-)universals in human culture?

6.2.2. The dynamics of NarComs

6.2.3. Background assumptions

6.3. Possible corroboration from 'iconographic archaeology' (the
interpretation of rock art and other prehistoric images) for
selected NarComs claimed in 2005

6.3.1. Not just Anatomically Modern Humans?

6.3.2. Iconographic evidence for NarComs?

6.3.3. African rock art as attestation of NarComs: NarCom2:

Separation of Heaven and Earth, and their subsequent

Re-connection, and of NarCom3 'What is in Heaven'

6.3.4. A string figure in historical times, the Blombos block, and
the Janmart plaque, as possible expressions of NarCom4:
The Lightning Bird

6.3.5. Further corroboration from Australia?

6.3.6. Further iconographic suggestions of ancient NarComs

6.4. Situating my original model (as set out in chapter 5 above)
more firmly within genetics

6.4.1. Reconstruction of the rise and spread of Anatomically
Modern Humans: Evolution, expansion and migration of
human MtDNA Types across the world on the following
seven maps (based on Forster 2004)

6.4.2. Some remaining questions

6.4.3. 'Windows of opportunity'?

6.5. The Neanderthal connection

6.6. Links between specific genetic types arising in the course of
the global spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, on
the one hand, and the rise and spread of specific
NarComs, on the other.

6.6.1. NarCom11 (the Primal Waters and the Flood), and MtDNA
Type B (out of type N); type B emerged in northern
Central Asia, c. 35 ka BP: Model A.

6.6.2. Attempted reconstruction of the genetic association and
global history of selected other NarComs

6.6.3. The association of NarCom2 (The Re-connection of Heaven
and Earth) with MtDNA Types R and M1 in the context
of the Extended Fertile Crescent and the 'Back-into-

Africa' movement	
6.6.4. The association of NarCom15 ('The Spider [and Feminine Arts]') with MtDNA Type L (L1, L2, L3): Pandora's Box, subsequently transformed in the (Proto-)Neolithic context of the Extended Fertile Crescent	
6.6.5. Rescue from the Ogre (NarCom6)	
6.6.6. Concluding on Narrative Complexes	
6.7. Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITIs)	
6.8. Revision of the theory as compared to earlier versions	
6.9. The dilemma of Africa in recent millennia: relatively ancient genes, but (due to the Back-into-Africa migration from 15 ka BP onward) largely 'recent' mythologies	
6.10. Conclusions: Implications of my model for comparative mythology	
6.10.1. Suggested merits of the proposed theory	
CHAPTER 7. AN AFRICANIST'S ITINERARY OF LONG-RANGE RESEARCH, 1968-2007 (2007).....	239
CHAPTER 8. THE CONTINUITY OF AFRICAN AND EURASIAN MYTHOLOGIES (2010): General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa.....	249
8.1. African transcontinental mythological continuities as a problem	
8.2. Recent interpretative schemas that claim mythological continuity, instead of separation, of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa	
8.2.1. A selective review of older transcontinental hypotheses relevant for comparative mythology	
8.2.1.1. Frobenius's (1931) model of the South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red ('Erythraean') Sea to East Africa and South West Asia	
8.2.1.2. Cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument)	
8.2.1.3. 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 Egyptocentric Black Athena position)	
8.2.2. Linguistic indications for transcontinental continuities	
8.2.2.1. Bantu as Borean	
8.2.2.2. Cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument)	
8.2.2.3. 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 Egyptocentric Black Athena position)	
8.2.3. Genetic indications for transcontinental continuities, and	

their elaboration in the field of comparative mythology

8.2.3.1. Out of Africa

8.2.3.2. Towards an Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology

8.2.3.3. Back into Africa

8.2.4. The Pelasgian Hypothesis

8.2.5. Good old Aarne-Thompson

8.3. From myth to proto-history and back, in tears / Tears

8.4. The problem of contamination

8.5. Major mythological themes among the Nkoya, with a discussion of their salient transcontinental correspondences

8.5.1. The Reed-and-Bee complex

8.5.2. Lord Death

8.5.3. Kings herding pigs

8.5.4. Stranger hunter seizes the kingship; menstruation considered to be disqualifying for the kingship

8.5.5. Regicide as socio-political renewal

8.5.6. Stealing the Moon

8.5.7. A Flood and Tower complex; 1. the Tower into Heaven

8.5.8. A Flood and Tower complex 2. the Flood

8.5.9. The Bird-Like Nature of Gods

8.5.10. The Annual Extinction and Rekindling of Fire

8.5.11. Spider-like elements of the Creator god

8.5.12. The Creator god associated with speaking

8.5.13. Aetiological myths of circumcision

8.5.14. The Cauldron of Kingship

8.5.15. Female royal prowess

8.5.16. Royal sibling complementarity / rivalry

8.5.17. Serpent, child [or mother] of Drought

8.5.18. Artificial woman wreaks doom

8.5.19. Building with Skulls

8.5.20. Creation from Tears of the Divinity

8.5.21. The Rain god has junior / filial status in the pantheon

8.5.22. The Unilateral Mythical Being

8.5.23. The king 'with only one hair'

8.5.24. The frog as a cosmogonic evocation

8.5.25. The goddess as a crone testing generosity and punishing with the Flood

8.5.26. The mytheme of matriarchy

8.6. Conclusion

CHAPTER 9. IDEAS THAT ARE IN THE AIR, AND AN IDEA THAT

CRIES TO HEAVEN (2010): The 2010 Radcliffe Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology at Harvard University..... 311

9.1. Introduction

9.2. Three ideas 'in the air'

9.2.1. 'It was probably geographic blockage by Neanderthals which

prevented Anatomically Modern Humans to leave Africa (c. 80-60 ka BP) and to diffuse into Eurasia beyond the Levant'

9.2.2. 'It was primarily in Asia that the crucial transformations and innovations took place producing the main mythologies attested in historical times on the basis of the Pre-Out-of-Africa mythological inheritance of Anatomically Modern Humans'

9.2.3. 'Once we have a theoretical model of the development of global mythology in prehistory, we can use it to systematically read / interpret prehistoric iconography, while the latter, in turn, can be used to corroborate our theoretical model'

9.3. An idea that cries to Heaven: The precarious distinction between Northern and Southern mythologies, and their true relationship

9.4. Conclusion

CHAPTER 10. EXTENSIVE TABLE OF OLD-WORLD MYTHOLOGICAL CONTINUITIES (2007): 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..... 321

PART III. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF SPECIFIC GLOBAL MYTHOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTIONS..... 329

CHAPTER 11. THE OGRE IN GLOBAL CULTURAL HISTORY (2020) 331

11.1. The ogre

Appendix 11.A. Digression from the Ogre discussion: The lexical near- equivalence of 'Earth' and 'Snake' in Indo-European as listed in the *Tower of Babel* etymological database

CHAPTER 12. SPIDER MYTHOLOGY WORLD-WIDE AS A WINDOW ON POSSIBLE SUNDA EFFECTS, RESULTING IN EAST-WEST PARALLELS (2020).....355

12.1. Introduction

12.2. Available data on Spider mythemes world-wide

12.3. Mapping

12.4. Discussion

12.5. Conclusion

12.6. Afterthought: The enigmatic wagtail myths: Again no

Sunda explanation to be preferred	
12.7. Spider iconographies in present-day Cameroon	
CHAPTER 13. THE LEG CHILD IN GLOBAL CULTURAL HISTORY	
(2011 / 2020).....	385
CHAPTER 14. THE COSMIC EGG (2011 / 2020).....	395
14.1. The Cosmic Egg: Introduction	
14.2. Referenced distributional data	
14.3. Discussion of the global distribution of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg	
14.4. From distribution map to tentative historical reconstruction: Pelasgian and Sunda Model contrasted	
14.5. The Cosmic Egg mytheme: Conclusion	
PART IV. A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH TO GLOBAL COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY	405
CHAPTER 15. THE HEROES IN FLOOD MYTHS WORLDWIDE (2010): Seeking to capture prehistoric modes of thought by means of quantitative contents analysis	407
15.1. Introduction and main line of the argument	
15.1.1. Flood and hero – an intersection of central themes	
15.1.2. Via statistics to prehistory	
15.1.3. Postulating a series of consecutive and evolving modes of thought in prehistory	
15.1.4. Detectable changes in human thought operations in the relatively recent past (< 30 KA BP)? *Borean ‘range semantics’ and the excluded middle	
15.1.5. Introducing Noah as a Flood hero	
15.2. Data set, analysis and method	
15.2.1. Missing cases	
15.2.2. The handling of dichotomous variables	
15.2.3. The small number of cases for many cells in cross-tabulation	
15.2.4. Multicollinearity	
15.2.5. The distinction between empirical associations and logical implications	
15.2.6. Underlying variables	
15.3. Flood heroes within the total data set: Some aggregate results of multivariate analysis, and a new perspective on heroic combat	
15.3.1. Aggregate factors and their bearing on Flood heroism	
15.3.2. Heroism, combat, and the transformative cycle of elements	
15.4. Conclusion	

Appendix A15.1. Statistically significant associations found when, in our data base on Flood myths world-wide, each hero-related variable is cross-tabulated against all non-hero-related variables

Appendix A15.2. A glimpse of the raw data set (adapted after Isaak 2006)

Appendix A15.3. The data entry form (Filemaker Pro, precoded)

Appendix A15.4. Listing and definition of all variables in the statistical analysis of Flood myths worldwide

Appendix A15.5. The matrix of factor loadings of all variables in the statistical analysis of Flood myths worldwide

CHAPTER 16. THE PERIODISATION OF FLOOD MYTHS WORLD-WIDE (2022)..... 445

16.1. The long-range history of Flood myths: General themes

16.1.1. General

16.1.2. My engagement with Flood myths through the decades

16.1.3. The data set's evidence on NarComs

16.2. Which variables are in principle suggestive of the possibility of periodisation?

16.3. Discursive discussion of the statistical results

16.3.1. A note of caution

16.3.2. Origin of Flood myths: A possibly American provenance

16.3.3. HERORANK

16.3.4. MODES

16.3.5. FUDCROPS

16.3.6. RANK

16.3.7. SNDRSUP

16.3.8. SPNATSUP

16.4. Conclusion

PART V. MISCELLANEOUS STUDIES..... 477

CHAPTER 17. MATTHEW SCHOFFELEERS ON MALAWIAN SUITOR STORIES (2011): A perspective from comparative mythology..... 479

17.1. Introduction

17.2. Wider theoretical issues

17.3. Towards a deep-structure

17.4. Additional and alternative readings

17.5. The historical dimension

17.6. How to read Malawian suitor stories: As build around a genuinely (proto-)historical regional core, or as mythical narratives from distant provenances and without bearing on regional protohistory?

17.7. The transcontinental connection

CHAPTER 18. THE LEOPARD AND THE LION (2003): An exploration of Eurasiatic and Bantu lexical continuity in the light of Kammerzell's hypothesis	499
18.1. Introducing Kammerzell's allegedly ubiquitous roots <i>*pr/*prd</i> and <i>*lw</i> , and sketching our itinerary in this chapter	
18.2. Why names of animal species, and why a pair of such names?	
18.3. The Luwe complex and the limitations of von Sicard's work	
18.4. The Luwe complex as throwing light on Kammerzell's roots <i>*lw</i> and <i>*pr/prd</i>	
18.5. An exploration of the linguistic antecedents of <i>*lw</i> and <i>*pr/*prd</i> in the Bantu realm	
18.6. Conclusion	
Appendix 18.A: Leopard and horse	
CHAPTER 19. THE SOUTH AND EAST ASIAN <i>HOMA</i> FIRE RITUAL, AND THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN <i>SANGOMA</i> CULT (2010 / 2022)	529
19.1. Introduction	
19.2. How <i>Homa</i> touches on my own work over the years	
19.3. Glimpses of <i>Homa</i> at Harvard (2010)	
19.4. proposed <i>Homa</i> / <i>Sangoma</i> parallels	
19.4.1. The <i>Homa</i> priest's headdress and that of the senior <i>Sangoma</i>	
19.4.2. The carefully constructed wooden altar for the <i>Homa</i> ritual has a striking parallel in the <i>Sangoma</i> cult	
19.5. Conclusion	
CHAPTER 20. 'FORTUNATELY HE HAD STEPPED ASIDE JUST IN TIME' (2016): Mythical time, historical time: And trans continental echoes in the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa.....	555
CHAPTER 21. MICHAEL WITZEL'S 2112 MAGNUM OPUS ON THE HISTORY OF WORLD MYTHOLOGY – TEN YEARS AFTER (2007 / 2022): My farewell to the New Comparative Mythology as a collective undertaking	559
21.1. Introduction	
21.2. 'Rationale, purpose or thesis of the work'	
21.3. 'Assessment of scholarship'	
21.4. 'Assessment of writing style'	
21.5. 'Assessment of organization'	
21.6. 'Does the work make a significant contribution to the field?'	

21.7. 'Suggestions for improvement'	
21.8. 'The probable market for this book'	
21.9. 'Does the referee recommend that Oxford University Press should publish this manuscript?'	
21.10. 'Further remarks'	
21.11. Conclusion	
21.12. My farewell to the New Comparative Mythology as a collective undertaking	
CHAPTER 22. ENVOY	583
PART VI. REFERENCE MATERIALS	587
BIBLIOGRAPHY	589
INDEX OF PROPER NAMES OTHER THAN THOSE OF AUTHORS CITED	647
INDEX OF AUTHORS CITED	681
LITERARY WORKS BY WIM VAN BINSBERGEN	689

List of figures

Figures are numbered consecutively per chapter, and thus are so easy to locate that there is no need to list their page numbers here

Fig. 1.1. Pages from the Peterborough Bestiary, early 14th c. CE

Fig. 1.2. A selection of comparative mythologists photographed during the First Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Pollock Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, 2007

Fig. 1.3. A selection of comparative mythologists photographed after the Second Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 2008

Fig. 1.4. Three modes of seeing and representing a religious landscape.

Fig. 1.5. A field stereoscope.

Fig. 2.1. The global distribution of the Atalanta type version of Magic Flight (© Berezkin)

Fig. 2.2. My rendering of Michael Witzel's proposal for absolute discontinuity in comparative world mythology

Fig. 2.3. The Cosmic Egg in World mythology: Distribution and proposed historical transmission

Fig. 2.4. The Cosmic Egg in the rendering by the Zulu Lightning wizard Madela (© Schlosser 1992)

Fig. 3.1. A model of multi-tiered demic diffusion.

Fig. 3.2. The five prominent instances of pardivesture in Africa during the second millennium CE.

Fig. 4.1. Chariots depicted in Saharan rock art

Fig. 4.2. The origin and diffusion of the chariot, from Kazakhstan, 2000 BCE

Fig. 4.3. Some of Lindblom's original illustrations

Fig. 4.4. Detail of the rock engraving shown in Fig. 4.3d

Fig. 4.5. An alleged spiked-wheel trap depicted on the fresco of Hierakonpolis Tomb 100 (a), with detail (b); Naqada IIC (c. 3500 BCE)

- Fig. 4.6. Modern spiked-wheel trap from Nalut, modern Libya (© Matkhandoush Natural Museum, Libya, 2006-2009)
- Fig. 4.7. Modern spiked-wheel trap from the Western Nilotic (Nilosaharan) speaking Acholi people, Southern Sudan (© Sparks 2006)
- Fig. 4.8. Lindblom's original distribution map for Africa
- Fig. 4.9. African distribution of spiked-wheel trap redrawn
- Fig. 4.10. 'Tectiform' motifs from the Franco-Cantabrian Upper Palaeolithic suggested to depict traps (© Leroi-Gourhan 1968 via Carr 1995)
- Fig. 4.11. World distribution (data largely Lindblom, mapping and additional data by the present author).
- Fig. 4.12. Rock art from Northern California
- Fig. 4.13. Solar or web-like pattern in prehistoric Australian rock art (after (Stubbs 1978)
- Fig. 4.14. Dotted spirals and, on the reverse, snake-like lines on a centrally perforated tablet from the Mal'ta site, Lake Baikal, ca. 21 ka BP (Irkutsk museum, Siberia, Russian Federation).
- Fig. 4.15. Proposed historical reconstruction (a) African origin.
- Fig. 4.16. Proposed historical reconstruction: (b) *Borean
- Fig. 4.17. Proposed historical reconstruction: (c) Mediterranean-Pelasgian origin, then into Asia and Africa
- Fig. 4.18. Proposed historical reconstruction (favoured): (d) Primary Pelasgian origin in Central Asia, then to secondary, Mediterranean Pelasgian Realm, then on into Africa
- Fig. 4.19. Mankala: Distribution of the various types
- Fig. 4.20. World distribution of geomantic divination
- Fig. 4.21. World distribution of the belief in a unilateral mythical being
- Fig. 4.22. An African drum constructed, essentially, as a spiked-wheel trap tautly covered with skin
- Fig. 4.23. Transcontinental continuities in the 'Back-into-Africa' movement (© Underhill 2004)
- Fig. 5.1. Simplified model of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80-60 ka BP) and the Back-to-Africa return migration (from c. 15 ka BP)
- Fig. 5.2. Michael Witzel's recent proposal for absolute discontinuity in comparative world mythology, projected onto a simplified model of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80-60 ka BP) and the Into-Africa return migration (from c. 20,000 BP).
- Fig. 5.3. Graphic summary of the frequency distribution of the most frequent key words in our data set of African cosmogonic myths.
- Fig. 5.4. An example of distributional analysis as a clue to dating a Narrative Complex: (1) Tower myths (a form of Narrative Complex II: the connection between Heaven and Earth) and (2) Flood myths ('Primal Waters' Narrative Complex) in Africa in historical times: not absent (*pace* Frazer and Witzel)
- Fig. 5.5. West Africa as relatively pristine: Map rendering Frobenius' ideas concerning the in-roads of named shamanistic cults (arrows) and the main regions of representative art in (later second millennium CE) Africa

Fig. 5.6. Summary of results: Preliminary situation in space and time of major Old World mythical complexes, in relation to the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 140,000 BP) and the Into-Africa return migration (from c. 20,000 BP)

Fig. 6.1. The model I used in the first tentative formulation of the present theory (repetition of Fig. 5.1, above)

Fig. 6.2. Summary of 2005 results, showing the CITLs (I to V) on a one-dimensional geographic path also taken to be a time axis (repetition of Fig. 5.6, above) .

Fig. 6.3. Iconographic evidence suggestive of symbolic activity before Anatomically Modern Humans

Fig. 6.4. Rock painting from Marondera (Marandellas), Zimbabwe as evidence of NarCom₂ 'The connection of Heaven and Earth'; with parallels from Mesolithic Spain and contemporary Nepal.

Fig. 6.5. The Blombos block, and string figures in Africa and Australia, as evidence of NarCom₄: 'The Lightning Bird'.

Fig. 6.6. A Middle Palaeolithic schist stone plaque found in Angola, as evidence of NarCom₃ 'The Lightning Bird'; and compared with Leroi-Gourhan on the European Palaeolithic

Fig. 6.7. Upper Palaeolithic mobile art from Mal'ta (Lake Baikal, Siberia), suggestive of NarComs 10 (The Earth), and 11 (The Primal Waters, and the Flood)

Fig. 6.8. Dioscorea vegetal symbolism from Australia as obliquely referring the NarCom₄ 'The Lightning Bird'

Fig. 6.9. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.

Fig. 6.10. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.

Fig. 6.11. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.

Fig. 6.12. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (a) 200-100 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig.6.13. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (b) 80-60 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig.6.14. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (c) 60-30 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004).

Fig. 6.15. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (d) 30-20 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig. 6.16. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (e) 20-15 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig.6. 17. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (f) 15-2 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig. 6.18. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (g) <2 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Fig. 6.19. Recent geophysics research (Vostok ice core analysis on the Antarctic, going to the depth indicated) has yielded fairly consensual and reliable information on the global rise and fall of glaciation over the last few 100 Ka.

- Fig. 6.20. Genetic associations of the Earth Diver motif according to Villemis (© 2005)
- Fig. 6.21. Distribution data on NarCom1 (Primal Waters and the Flood)
- Fig. 6.22. Historical interpretation of the previous Figure.
- Fig. 6.23. Distribution of NarCom2: The Re-connection between Heaven and Earth.
- Fig. 6.24. Historical reconstruction of NarCom2 highlighting MtDNA Types R and M1
- Fig. 6.25. Distribution of variants of NarCom15 (The Spider – and feminine arts)
- Fig. 6.26. Historical reconstruction of NarCom15, highlighting MtDNA Types L1, L2, L3, as well as those dominating the Neolithic context of the Extended Fertile Crescent.
- Fig. 6.27. Distribution of various types of NarCom6: Rescue from the Ogre.
- Fig. 6.28. Historical reconstruction of NarCom6: Rescue from the Ogre.
- Fig. 6.29. Depiction of the Japanese cosmogonic featuring Izanami and Izanagi.
- Fig. 6.30. Synthesis: Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation in the history of mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans
- Fig. 6.31.a, b, c. Discarded (2005, left and centre, see ch. 5 above) and presently proposed model (right, see Fig. 6.30)
- Fig. 7.1. Three books as steps in my itinerary
- Fig. 8.1. Cavalli-Sforza's © well-know array of the populations and language groups of the world
- Fig. 8.2. Proposed Urheimats (original cradles) of *Borean and most of the (macro-) phyla into which it has disintegrated
- Fig. 8.3. Provisional situation in space and time of 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs), as crucial stages in the global history of the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans
- Fig. 8.4. Diagrammatic representation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis
- Fig. 8.4a. Ornate Buddhist poles at the Museum of Thai / Lanna Folklore, downtown Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020
- Fig. 8.5. Major attestations of the annual communal extinction and rekindling of Fire
- Fig. 8.6. Global distribution of the spiked-wheel trap (as typical of Pelasgian distributions)
- Fig. 8.7. Attestations of Spider-related mythemes
- Fig. 8.8. Global distribution of male genital mutilation
- Fig. 8.9. Heracles*keramúntēs* and a *kēr* on a *pelikē* from Thisbe — and its continuity with the Archaic Egyptian wooden Abydos label, suggestive of Heracles impersonating the Early Dynastic king ^cAha.
- Fig. 8.10. Global distribution of Rain gods with junior status in the pantheon
- Fig. 8.11. Global distribution of the mytheme of the Unilateral Mythical Being
- Fig. 9.1. Neanderthal distribution in Europe
- Fig. 9.2. Neanderthals blocking the Out-of-Africa Exodus of Anatomically Modern Humans
- Fig. 9.3. Affluent elegance: The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA (2010)

- Fig. 9.4. Diagrammatic comparison of Witzel's (1) and van Binsbergen's (2) model of global mythological history
- Fig. 9.5. The 4th Annual Conference of the IACM is brilliantly (and strategically) opened by, what in Witzel's ill-taken perspective, would yet have to be considered as a representative of the historically and culturally challenged Gondwana half of humankind
- Fig. 11.1. Distribution of various types of NarCom6: 'Rescue from the Ogre' (now discarded)
- Fig. 11.2. Historical reconstruction of NarCom5: Rescue from the Ogre (now discarded)
- Fig. 11.3. Attestations of NarCom6 = Ogre, all categories lumped together
- Fig. 11.4. Proposed historical reconstruction of the spread of NarCom6, 'Rescue from the Ogre'
- Fig. 12.1. A spider's web in a summer's garden
- Fig. 12.2. Some of the rare prehistoric depictions of the spider from three continents
- Fig. 12.3. Global distribution of the mytheme narCom 15: The Spider
- Fig. 12.4. Spider mythemes : The global distribution of Fig. 3 reconsidered while omitting female deities of spinning and weaving
- Fig. 12.5. Spider mythology before the Bronze Age; secondary applications (divination, decoration, etc.) omitted
- Fig. 12.6. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme NarCom15: The Spider, taking into account the reconstructed history of the desintegration of *Borean, from c. 25 ka BP onward
- Fig. 12.7. A royal spider pot for divination, from Western Cameroon, now at the Tandeng Muna Museum, Yaounde, Cameroon, 2015
- Fig. 12.8. The wagtail in sub-Saharan Africa and in Japan
- Fig. 12.9. A selection of Spider motifs in the recent representative arts of Cameroon
- Fig. 13.1. The birth of Dionysus from his father's thigh
- Fig. 13.2 Global distributions of the mytheme of the leg child (NarCom12b)
- Fig. 13.3. Global distributions of the mytheme of the leg child (NarCom12b) from an epicentre situated at CITI VII or VIII
- Fig. 13.4. Global distributions of the mytheme of the leg child (NarCom12b) from a Sunda epicentre
- Fig. 13.5. Explanation of the global distribution of the mytheme of the leg child (NarCom12b) in Sunda terms, as if emanating from CITI IX – despite the paucity of recent attestations of this NarCom in South East Asia / the Indo-Pacific.
- Fig. 14.1. Global distribution map of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg
- Fig. 14.2. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (Y) Pelasgian Model
- Fig. 14.3. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (X) Sunda Model
- Fig. 14.4. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (X) Sunda Model as primary and subsequently (Y) Pelasgian model as secondary, with combined, intertwined diffusion effects
- Fig. 15.1. Flood myths attested (=1) in historical times (all types and sources aggregated)
- Fig. 15.2. The Taoist / Chinese five-element model of the cyclical transformation of elements,

complete with catalytic function

Fig. 15.3. The semantic field of the cluster of *Borean words *KV_{n...n+10}LV_{n...n+10}

Fig. 15.4. Global distribution of attestations of the White God of Creation or Second Creation

Fig. 15.5. Bill Reid, 'Raven meets the first humans' (commissioned by, and now on display at, the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver)

Fig. 16.1. (a) A red herring; (b) Proposed Sunda dynamics in my earlier analysis of Flood myths (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008)

Fig. 16.2. The Ancient Mesopotamian / Phoenician god Dagon

Fig. 17.1. Two pictures of Matthew Schoffeleers in his last years.

Fig. 17.2. A Malawian suitor story: The principal spirit medium of the Southern Malawian land spirit M'bona, ca. 1960

Fig. 17.3. African stories that have travelled: Proposed directions of borrowing according to Werner

Fig. 18.0. A typical leopard: An Amur panther in its then obsolete housing at Artis (Natura Artis Magistra) Zoo, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2014

Fig. 18.1. A leopard as Nubian tribute, Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt

Fig. 18.2. Two leopards from Çatal Hüyük; © Mellaart 1966.

Fig. 18.3. The geographic distribution of the leopard today, and historical Leopard-skin references.

Fig. 18.4. The geographic distribution of the Lion and the Leopard species, and von Sicard's attestations of the Luwe complex outside Africa.

Fig. 18.5. Two leopards flanking the tree of life in an Etruscan tomb painting

Fig. 18.6. The geographic distribution of possible manifestations of the roots *pr/*prd and *lw in a corpus comprising more than 200 languages of the Bantu family.

Fig. 18.7. The Cosmology of the Lion and the Leopard at work in the landscape of the confluence of the Zambezi and Chobe rivers, Southern Africa

Fig. 18.8. Fu Xi and the river horse

Fig. 18.9. Fu Xi and the tortoise

Fig. 19.1. The syncretistic spirit medium Kirti in trance manipulates a live cock and a firebrand, Unawatuna, Sri Lanka, 2011

Fig. 19.2. Michael Witzel at the Harvard Square recording a performance of the *Homa* Fire ritual at the onset of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Cambridge MA, USA, 2010

Fig. 19.3. *Homa* at Harvard 2010

Fig. 19.4. Parallel headdresses in *Sangoma* and *Homa*

Fig. 19.5. A donkey cart such as commonly used for firewood delivery in Botswana townships

Fig. 19.6. The male ancestors' shrine at the *Sangoma* lodge in the outlying village of Mashelegabedi, 20 km from Francistown, Botswana, 1991.

Fig. 19.7. Linguistic and comparative-ethnographic reconstruction of the emergence of the ritual use of leopard skins (pardivesture) as an aspect of shamanism.

Fig. 19.7. Main annual Hindu ritual at a family temple at Sanda, West Bali, 2010

Fig 19.8. Proposed selective reconstruction of the history of ecstatic religion from the Upper Palaeolithic onward

Fig. 19.9. Main annual Hindu ritual at a family temple at Sanda, West Bali, 2010

Fig. 19.10. The chorus during the *kecak* dance (left) and the Fire dance (right) in Bali, 2009 CE.

Fig. 19.11. Global distribution and reconstructed history of the thumb piano

Fig. 19.12. Tourist-market thumb piano from Indonesia

Fig. 19.13. White cloth marking the steps to the holy of holies, in the community temple of the desa of Nyuh Kuning, near Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 2010

Fig. 19.14. Uncanny parallels between West Africa and South East Asia, interpreted from a Buddhist perspective.

Fig. 19.15. Display of the typical contents of a Buddhist shrine at the Museum of Lanna / Thai Folklore, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020

Fig. 20.1. A mythical and a ritual Tower from sub-Saharan Africa

Fig. 20.2. The originally Chola rock fortress of Sigiriya, Sri Lanka, 2011

Fig. 21.1. Two glimpses of Michael Witzel as the leading comparative mythologist

Fig. 21.2. Cover of Michael Witzel, *The Origins Of The World's Mythologies* (2012)

Fig. 21.3. World regions associated with the Continental and the Peripheral Cluster of disintegrated *Borean

Fig. 21.4. A present-day village scene in Havelock Island, Andaman Isl., India, 2012.

Fig. 21.5. Three continents at the table: A glimpse of the lunch meeting of the Board of Directors of the IACM during the 4th Annual Meeting of that organisation, in the Harvard Senior Staff Club, Cambridge MA, USA, 2010.

List of tables

Tables are numbered consecutively per chapter, and thus are so easy to locate that there is no need to list their page numbers here

Table 2.1. An example of a cross-cultural entry

Table 3.1. A near-universal theme of systems of mythological knowledge: 'hero fights monster'

Table 3.2. The Graeco-Roman myth of Aristaeus interpreted in the light of Ancient Egyptian religion: Evidence of Egyptian-Greek continuities

Table 4.1. Detailed data on world distribution of the spiked-wheel trap, compiled by the present author on the basis of Lindblom 1935

Table 5.1. Overview of a set of twenty cosmogonic Narrative Complexes as constructed on the basis of the set of over two hundred individual mythemes

Table 5.2. Postulated/reasoned relations between the Narrative Complexes, with proposed dating (extremely provisional) and proposed original location of emergence (likewise extremely provisional)

Table 5.3. Proposed contexts of mythological innovation and transformation (CITIs) from the Middle Palaeolithic onward

Table 6.1. The 20 Narrative Complexes as found in a corpus of African cosmogonic myths recorded in historic times

Table 6.2. The divinatory significance of the reconstructed mythological contents of Pandora's Box, Africa, 80 ka BP

Table 6.3. Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITIs) in the history of world mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH): Their tentative situation in space and time, the Narrative Complexes emerging in each CITI, the Mitochondrial DNA Types associated with each CITI, possible trigger mechanisms for each CITI, and possible association between each CITI and major linguistic families

Table 8.1. Glottochronological analysis of the disintegration of *Borean

Table 8.2. Narrative Complexes identified in sub-Saharan African cosmogonies as collected in historical times

Table 8.3. 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs) in the global history of Anatomically Modern Humans' mythology

Table 8.4. Selected Aarne-Thompson (AT) traits relevant to the combat theme (Fontenrose 1980) in Nkoya mythology and cosmology

Table 10.1. Extensive table of Old-World mythological continuities

Table 11.1. The Ogre motif in the Grimm's tales

Table 11.2. Referenced attestations of Ogre mythologies world-wide

Table 11.3. Long-range etymology of the reflexes of *Borean TVKV, 'Earth'

Table 11.4. Semantics 'snake, worm' in Indo-European

Table 12.1. Attestations of Spider mythemes worldwide, with references

Table 13.1. Referenced attestations of the leg-child mytheme

Table 13.2. Possible *Borean background of the leg child concept

Table 14.1. Attestations of the myth of the Cosmic Egg world-wide

Table 15.1. *Borean reconstructed words of dryness and wetness as examples of 'range semantics'

Table 15.2. Table 15.2. Regional provenances of Flood myths in our data set '

Table 15.3. The Earth Diver and the Flood Hero sending out a bird to find out if the Flood had ended

Table 15.4. Detailed discussion of the factors identified in the multivariate analysis of Heroes in Flood Myths

Table 15.5. The variables in the quantitative analysis of Flood myths worldwide, and their definition

Table 15.6. Matrix of factors and factor loadings, contents analysis Flood myths worldwide

Table 16.1. Variables in our data set on Flood myths that may be considered relevant for periodisation

Table 16.2. Cross-tabulation of 'animal Flood survivors' against 'the supernatural agent in the Flood myth is the Supreme God'

Table 17.1. Proposed Indo-European etymology of the name Glaucus

Table 17.2. Proposed Austric etymology of the name Glaucus

Table 17.3. Werner on obvious transcontinental connections of selected African stories

Table 18.1. The words for Lion and Leopard in contemporary Common Bantu

Table 18.2. Lion, Leopard and other felines in Proto-Bantu

Table 18.3. Possible manifestations of the roots *pr/*prd and *lw in a corpus comprising more than 200 languages of the Bantu family

Table 18.4. The semantics underlying most of the Leopard's names in Proto-Bantu and Common Bantu

List of special topics

The arguments in this book have been pieced together out of numerous specific fragments of scholarship, which have been separately identified in order to assist the reader. They are identified by a caption in UPPER CASE, preceded by the sign # and the chapter number, and each have a unique number within the chapter in question. In this way they are easily to be found, so there is no need to list their page numbers below. Special topics that would normally be capitalised, may also be found in the Indexes at the end of this book

#1.1. MODALITIES OF THE WORD 'MODERN'

#2.1. CYCLICAL ELEMENT TRANSFORMATION

#2.2. TOTEMISTIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SAINTS AND SPECIES IN NORTH AFRICA

#2.3. NORTH AFRICA AS A REGION WHERE APPARENTLY VERY ANCIENT MYTHOLOGICAL MATERIAL COMES TO THE SURFACE

#2.4. THE HISTORY OF IDEAS HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE GENERATION OF COMPARATIVISTS THAT CAME OF AGE IN THE MID- 20TH CENTURY NEEDED TO FALL BACK ON SUCH A RESTRICTED, SCIENTISTIC CONCEPTION OF THEIR FIELD OF RESEARCH

#2.5. EMIC AND ETIC

#2.6. THE BACK-INTO-AFRICA MOVEMENT

#2.7. LEDA AND ZEUS: THE MYTHEME OF THE COSMIC EGG IN WESTERN EURASIA

#2.8. WITCHCRAFT BELIEFS AND CRIMINAL LAW

#2.9. PARADIGMS

#2.10. PLATO'S PHAEDRUS FRAGMENT ON THAMUS AND THOT. '

#3.1. ON CLIFFORD GEERTZ'S DEFINITION OF RELIGION

#3.2. ON TRANSCENDENCE: A FIRST INTRODUCTION

#3.3. A VIABLE DEFINITION OF MYTH

- #3.4. INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM OF MYTHS'S INERTIA IN LONG-RANGE TIME
- #3.5. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A PRIVILEGED POSITION IN POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY
- #3.6. 'FIELD OF TENSION' AS A USEFUL BLANKET TERM
- #3.7. THE APPLICATION OF ANCIENT MYTHICAL MATERIAL IN CONCRETE PRESENT-DAY CONTEXTS OF LITERARY AND PICTORIAL PRODUCTION, POLITICAL ORATORY, *ETC*
- #3.8. ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN BEE SYMBOLISM
- #3.9. IMMANENTALISM AND TRANSCENDENTALISM
- #4.1. NILOSAHARAN AND NIGERCONGO AS BRANCHES OF 'SUPER-NOSTRATIC'
- #4.2. IT IS PROBLEMATIC TO SPEAK OF A PROTO-BANTU CORPUS
- #4.3. INTRODUCING THE PERNICIOUS HAMITIC THESIS
- #4.4. INTRODUCING THE PELASGIAN HYPOTHESIS
- #4.5. A DILEMMA IN THE FACE OF AFROCENTRIST IDEOLOGY: FROM AFRICA OR ENDING UP IN AFRICA?
- #5.1. ON THE POLYSEMY OF THE TERM 'EXODUS'. '
- #5.2. THE AARNE-THOMPSON NUMERICAL MOTIF INDEX AND AFRICA
- #5.3. INTRODUCING MODES OF PRODUCTION ANALYSIS
- #5.4. THE CONCEPT OF 'RECURSION'
- #5.5. ON STUDYING A CULTURE AS A WHOLE
- #5.6. TIMELESSNESS AND THE MYTHICAL TOWER INTO HEAVEN IN PRESENT-DAY ZAMBIAN MYTH
- #5.7. SAINTS AS MYTHICAL PROTAGONISTS PROJECTED ONTO THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE IN NORTH AFRICA
- #5.8. 'STRONG' AND 'MODERATE' AS TERMS FOR VARIETIES IN POSITIONING IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS
- #5.9. THE DILEMMA OF SOPHISTICATED TYPOLOGY VERSUS SOPHISTICATED HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION
- #6.1. WHY (NEAR-)UNIVERSALS IN HUMAN CULTURE?
- #6.2. THE NEANDERTHAL CONNECTION
- #6.3. DISCLOSING WOMEN'S SECRET INITIATORY KNOWLEDGE?
- #6.4. PARALLELLISM BETWEEN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, AND THE NEW WORLD
- #6.5. SECONDARY DIFFUSION AS CONTAMINATION
- #7.1. STUMBLING ON TRANS-AFRICAN CONTINUITIES IN FIELDWORK
- #7.2. WHAT I HAVE OWED TO BONNO THODEN VAN VELZEN, ROLE MODEL AND CAREER PATRON

- #7.3. A GLOBAL BEE FLIGHT ENDING IN DRONES CRASHING ON THE HIVE'S ENTRANCE PLATFORM
- #8.1. ON TRANSCONTINENTAL CONTINUITIES BETWEEN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST, AND WEST AFRICA
- #8.2. MERITS AND DEMERITS OF MARTIN BERNAL IN THE BLACK ATHENA DEBATE BANTU AS *BOREAN
- #8.4. EXAMPLE OF A GLOBAL ETYMOLOGY: THE COMPLEX 'EARTH / BOTTOM / HUMAN'
- #8.5. INTRODUCING THE BACK-INTO-AFRICA MOVEMENT FROM ASIA, FROM C. 15 KA BP ONWARD
- #8.6. ONCE MORE: THE PELASGIAN HYPOTHESIS
- #8.7. INTRODUCING THE SUNDA HYPOTHESIS
- #8.8. A BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD'S DIVINATION SYSTEMS
- #8.9. THE NKOYA KING AS DEATH DEMON
- #8.10. RECYCLING IN RECENT AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH PROBLEM
- #8.11. THE INCESTUOUS IMPLICATIONS OF 'JOINING WITH A SIBLING' IN KAPESH'S NAME.
- #9.1. ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF 'AIR'
- #9.2. SOME DISCOVERIES THAT APPARENTLY WERE 'IN THE AIR' IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS
- #11.1. IMMANUEL KANT'S WORK CONVENTIONALLY TAKEN TO MARK THE BEGINNING OF MODERN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY
- #11.2. THE SECRET LIFE OF ANCIENT HEROINES
- #11.3. JUNG, CULTURAL / MYTHOLOGICAL INERTIA, AND PANDORA'S BOX
- #11.4. THE COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY OF THE FLY
- #12.1. IS THERE A CASE FOR TRANS-ATLANTIC EXCHANGES IN CULTURAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL HISTORY?
- #13.1. INTRODUCING THE LEG CHILD
- #13.2. TABOOED WORDS IN LONG-RANGE *BOREAN RECONSTRUCTION?
- #13.3. A NEWBORN CHILD'S DEDICATION TO THE MORNING SUN
- #14.1. 'CULTURALLY RECEPTIVE' A POTENTIALLY HEGEMONIC TERM, WHEN APPLIED TO AFRICA AND TO EUROPE?
- #15.1. COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY IS PREDICATED ON AN UNLIKELY TACIT ASSUMPTION: THAT THE THOUGHT FACULTIES OF ANATOMICALLY MODERN HUMANS HAVE UNDERGONE NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE 200 KA OF THEIR EXISTENCE, AND ARE IDENTICAL TO THOSE OF MODERN SCHOLARS
- #15.2. POST-FLOOD EXTRA-ORDINARY REPRODUCTION
- #15.3. MULTICOLLINEARITY AS A PROBLEM IN MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS
- #16.1. THE UNEXPECTED PRICE OF COSMOGONY

- #16.2. AFRICAN CONVERSION AND THE WIDENING SCOPE OF EXPERIENCE
- #16.3. THE PRESOCRATICS'S ACHIEVEMENT: NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE COSMOLOGY OF CYCLICAL ELEMENT TRANSFORMATION
- #16.4. LANGUAGE AND TRANSCENDENCE
- #17.1. COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY IS NOT ABOUT 'ULTIMATE LESSONS'
- #17.2. ROMANTIC LOVE IS NOT A UNIVERSAL CATEGORY OF CULTURE
- #17.3. AGAIN THE UNILATERAL MYTHICAL BEING
- #17.4. THE NKOYA KING KAYAMBILA AS DEATH DEMON
- #17.5. DEDICATING A NEWBORN CHILD TO THE MORNING SUN
- #17.6. CINDERELLA AS A PELASGIAN THEME
- #19.1 DEFINING CULTS OF AFFLICTION
- #19.2. ECSTATIC RELIGION
- #19.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHITE CLOTH
- #19.4. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLOUR WHITE
- #19.5. A STUNNING CASE OF WEST AFRICAN / SOUTH EAST ASIAN CONTINUITY

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The New Comparative Mythology as an eye-opener

1.1. 1. The New Comparative Mythology

This book brings together some of my contributions to the emerging field of the New Comparative Mythology since the early years 2000.

The circumstances under which most of these contributions were engendered, are briefly sketched in chapter 7 ('An Africanist's itinerary...'), and in the introductory section to chapter 21 below: the intercontinental seething of description and debate through which the prominent Harvard (formerly Leiden) Sanskritist Michael Witzel has sought to create a context of enthusiastic and competent colleagues, so as to bring his own tremendously ambitious and innovative (as well as lavishly funded) research project on comparative mythology to a good end. In 2003 I participated, in Leiden, in a conference entitled 'Myth: Theory and the Disciplines', organised by my long-standing colleague and friend the Africanist literature scholar Mineke Schipper, and her Mediterraneanist colleague Daniela Merolla. Michael Witzel was one of the participants, presenting a paper 'Comparing myths, comparing mythologies: A Laurasian approach' (Witzel 2003), which summarised the core of his emerging synthesis, and immediately had me captivated. It was the beginning of a close scholarly association and a stimulating friendship, which was renewed at least once a year at a conference somewhere in North America, Europe, or East Asia. In 2006, during a Witzel conference at Beijing, People's Republic of China, I was among the handful of founding members of the International Association for Comparative Mythology (IACM), and I have subsequently served on its Board of Directors until I stepped down for health reasons in 2020. In 2008 I was one of the convenors, together with my colleague and friend the Dutch anthropologist of religion Eric Venbrux (Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands), of the Second Annual Conference of the IACM at Ravenstein, the Netherlands, we found major funding for this event both from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, from Harvard, and some minor contributions from the journal *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, from Nijmegen (Radboud), and from Rotterdam (Erasmus University); and the massive volume of proceedings we published two years later (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010, with the editorial collaboration of my then PhD student

Kirsten Seifkar, and dedicated to Michael Witzel; also cf. van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2009) has remained one of the principal statements of the New Comparative Mythology.

The present book reflects most of the article-length products of my seminal encounter with the New Comparative Mythology. But the impact of my engagement with Witzel-centred comparative mythology went much further than the chapters of *Pandora's Box Prises Open*, and in fact extended to the majority of the books which I published over the past two decades:

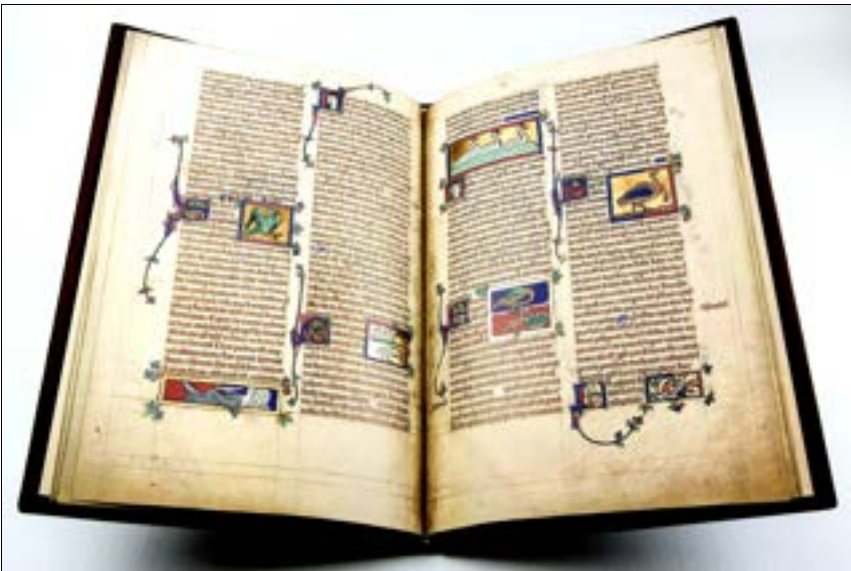
- 2009 *Expressions Of Traditional Wisdom From Africa And Beyond* – leaned heavily on an appreciation of African mythologies.
- 2011 *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory (with Fred Woudhuizen)* – essentially an archaeological, comparative-ethnographic and theoretical argument, which however was enriched at crucial points by the input of comparative mythological analysis, notably an attempt to draw up a list of recognisable Sea People's traits (including white aquatic animals as symbolic of the creatrix Mother of the Water); the recognition of White Gods of Creation or Secondary Creation as a major type in mythological analysis; the comparative mythology underlying the names and features of the Flood Hero Noah and his (principal) three sons Shem, Ham and Japhet; appreciation of the potentially mythical nature of the Ancient Graeco-Roman accounts of the Trojan War (North-western Anatolia ca. 1300 BCE); and recognition of the masculinisation process when, all over the Bronze-Age Old World, goddesses were dethroned by celestial male gods, the former to be relegated to the women's quarters and to be confined to low-prestige work such as spinning. In a bid to identify a socio-political context from which the communality of the apparently so diverse Sea Peoples might have sprung, I here formulated for the first time my Pelasgian Hypotheses, to be worked out in subsequent texts (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011a, 2012d, and in press (a), and also a recurrent reference in the present book.
- 2012 *Before The Presocratics: Cyclicity, Transformation, And Element Cosmology: The Case Of Transcontinental Pre- Or Protohistoric Cosmological Substrates Linking Africa, Eurasia And North America* – discusses the mythological patterns derived from the globally widespread cosmology of cyclical element transformation, which the book demonstrates to go back to the Upper Palaeolithic; reiterating my emerging Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology (as expounded in various articles now reprinted as chapters 5 and 6 of the present book), with further attention to selected topics such as the Nkoya clan system in South Central Africa, the Taoist cosmology, the Lascaux frescoes from the Upper Palaeolithic, and the rise of shamanism.
- 2015 *Vicarious Reflections: African Explorations In Empirically-Grounded Intercultural Philosophy* selectively uses comparative-mythological distributions (e.g. of the Spider mytheme), and makes major points concerning comparative mythology, divination, wisdom, knowledge systems (including mythology), and the mythology of goddesses
- 2017 *Religion As A Social Construct: African, Asian, Comparative And Theoretical Excursions In The Social Science Of Religion* – with extensive contributions on

- the West African mythology of the Land, and the Japanese mythology of Fire
- 2018 *Confronting The Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated Through Philosophical Analysis, Ethnography, Archaeology, Long-Range Linguistics, And Comparative Mythology* – investigates (mainly by theoretical analysis and by recourse to long-range linguistic and archaeological data) the historical conditions and forms under which the notions of the sacred, theistic religion, transcendence, and especially organised religion, may be considered to have arisen in the course of global cultural history, and in the process traces the distribution and reconstructed history of a number of important specific mythemes and religious forms
- 2020 *Sunda Pre- And Protohistorical Continuity Between Asia And Africa: The Oppenheimer–Dick-Read–Tauchmann Hypothesis As An Heuristic Device, With Special Emphasis On The Nkoya People Of Zambia, Africa* – discusses the global distributions of a considerable number of mythemes, and extensively pays particular attention (pp. 353-460) to the amazing and hitherto little noticed yet numerous East-West parallels (between South East Asia and the Western Old World) in comparative mythology; the book also offers – although in the analysis, not of a mytheme but of head-hunting (also cf. van Binsbergen 2020a for a similar analysis of the so-called Melanesian bow which however turns out, surprisingly, to have an unmistakable Palaeo-African origin) – a sophisticated method for interpreting global distributions as a key to a trait’s long-range cultural history
- 2021 *Joseph Karst: As A Pioneer Of Long-Range Approaches To Mediterranean Bronze-Age Ethnicity* – sketches how van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen (2011) was greatly indebted to Karst’s extensive though largely forgotten work on Mediterranean ethnicity, and interprets both the Late-Bronze-Age Sea Peoples, and the Biblical Table of Nations (Genesis 10) from a synthetic, mainly comparative-mythological perspective
- 2021 *Sangoma Science: From Ethnography To Intercultural Ontology: A Poetics Of African Spiritualities* – a controversial experimental argument at the intersection of empirical scholarship, epistemological philosophy, and literary fiction, greatly relying on detailed comparative-mythological distributional analyses (notably of the mytheme ‘the Stones’ and the mythology of Spirit), with – alas – devastating conclusions for any kind of systematic scientific endeavour.

In the meantime most of my work on comparative mythology took place in the context of research projects that so far have not reached final publication. These I will now briefly discuss.

Leopard-skin and Speckledness. Ever since the early 1990s I have engaged in a world-wide comparison of Leopard-skin symbolism, for reasons triggered by my fieldwork into ecstatic religion in Botswana, Southern Africa, from 1988 on, and set out in detail in some of my publications (van Binsbergen 1991, 2003, 2021). It was a very extensive paper on Leopard-skin symbolism that started off my activities within Witzel’s circle of comparative mythologists (van Binsbergen 2004), and other interim instalments were to follow (van Binsbergen 2004d, 2004e, 2003b), in anticipation of the final book now in the press (h)). Incidentally,

my analysis of Leopard-skin symbolism – my ticket to Witzel's circle – owed its inspiration not so much yet to the New Comparative Mythology which until then had been out of my sight, but to long-range comparative linguistics, one of the main fields in which I had been trained at Amsterdam University (1964-1971). This allowed me to appreciate the totally unexpected, not to say alarming, finding that Leopard-skin symbolism, narrowed down to a semantics of 'scattered, speckled, granulated', *was reflected, in unmistakably cognate lexical forms, throughout the macrophyla of all languages spoken today!* From a localising ethnographer accepting the dominant anthropological model of the world of humankind as constituting a patchwork quilt of separate, bounded ethnic groups / tribes / nations, each with its own, basically independent, conceptual and normative integration, I was already developing, reluctantly at first, into a globalist whose main stock-in-trade in the final decades of his career would be the retrieval of far-reaching patterns of transcontinental continuity mostly going back to prehistory, to the Upper Palaeolithic and before – and the inscription of Africa as a fully-fledged part of that synthesis.



held at the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, England, United Kingdom, as MS 053, fols. 189r–209v; source: <https://www.facsimilefinder.com/facsimiles/peterborough-bestiar-facsimile>, with thanks

Fig. 1.1. Pages from the Peterborough Bestiary, early 14th c. CE

Geomantic Divination. Another spinoff of my Botswana fieldwork has been a comprehensive comparative project on the worldwide distribution, internal organisation, and symbolism of *geomantic divination*, with major manifestations in sub-Saharan Africa (West African *Fa*, *Ifa*, and *Sixteen Cowries* – all with ramifications across the Atlantic Ocean, in the New World; Southern African *Hakata* / *Dithlaoa* four-tablet divination; Malagasy *Sikidy*); the World of Islam (with علم الرمل *ilm al-raml* / 'Sand Science'); Renaissance magic and its popular derivatives in Western Europe since Early Modern times; and especially classic Chinese 易經

vates in Western Europe since Early Modern times; and especially classic Chinese 易經 *yì jīng* ('*I Ching*').^{1,2}

An African Bestiary. Some of these geomantic systems had come to be saturated with astrology (a dominant worldview throughout the Old World), and this brought me, by the year 2000, to embark, under the working title *An African Bestiary*, on a global comparison of systems of animal symbolism as expressed in divine attributes, divination sets, and in the naming of clans, constellations, zodiacs, and lunar mansions – another project in comparative mythology (van Binsbergen 2021e).

Flood Myths. Exposure to the Witzel circle brought home to me the fact that, world-wide, and in addition to the mytheme of the ubiquitous mytheme of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, *Flood myths* have constituted one of humankind's most dominant repertoires of mythology. When I found that Mark Isaak had made available, on the Internet, an extensive corpus of detailed and well referenced Flood-myths from all over the world, I obtained his permission (in exchange for a mention of his junior co-authorship in my first publication based on his data) to submit his corpus to detailed multivariate and cross-tabulation statistical analysis – which, as a social scientist steeped in quantitative analysis would constitute an obvious new contribution I could make to the field. In the mid-2000s I devoted a very considerable amount of time to this project,³ and it led to interesting

¹ The term 'geomantic' ('divination by Earth') covers a wide and internally widely varying range of divination methods and systems whose link with the Earth is often merely nominal, but whose underlying mathematics and random-generators procedures converge sufficiently to recognise their systemic unity. The literature on the subject is enormous, and is extensively treated in my own publications on the subject, including van Binsbergen 1996c, 1997a / 2011, 2012a.

² #1.1. MODALITIES OF THE WORD 'MODERN'. As usual, the word 'modern' is potentially confusing since it may address several different registers, with varying degrees of specificity and scope. I use it in a loose general sense, without capitalisation, to denote the last few centuries in a non-technical, conversation manner. When I write 'Modern', I usually mean to refer to the specific culture of Modernity, which emerged as a dominant outcome of the European episode of the Enlightenment (late 17th-early 19th c. CE), its rationalist and individual-centred philosophy, and its science and technology normally stressing excessive control over Nature. Meanwhile, my 'Early Modern' usually refers to the period, and the thought systems, spanning the Late Middle Ages (1450 CE) to the onset of the Enlightenment – normally with reference to the North Atlantic region, but not exclusively so. Premodern is everything that preceded Early Modern. Since the mid-20th c. CE, this Modern culture was partly supplanted, especially in the globalised North Atlantic region and its global dependencies, by Postmodernity, in many respects the distorted mirror image of Modernity. Meanwhile, 'Anatomically Modern Humans' refers, not to the last few centuries but to the human type that emerged in Africa . 200 ka BP and that after being confined to Africa to c. 80 ka BP, subsequently conquered the world, and supplanted all other human types including Neanderthals.

³ For these few months of passionate concentration on one research project I paid disproportionately dearly, at the very institute (the African Studies Centre Leiden, ASCL) to which I had given my best research and managerial powers ever since 1977 and where I had always been among the most productive and conspicuous members anyway: in mid-2007 I was evicted from the research group I had established a decade earlier and to whose brand-new 2007 research programme I had admittedly greatly contributed, I was deprived from access to the institutional research and travel funds, and forbidden to henceforth collaborate with any of my institutional colleagues. Only after three full years, with the advent of a new director, Ton Dietz, was this punitive regime terminated; but when two years later, having been rehabilitated, I was formally retiring from the institute and in recognition was honoured with a large and expensive international conference on the transcontinental continuities between Africa and Asia since prehistory, the proceedings were – against all initial, written agreements – refused publication by the ASCL and I had to find a refuge for them elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2019). Although throughout this book I will acknowledge my indebtedness to the ASCL for as long as it lasted, since 2019 I have

publication instalments (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen 2010 – the latter included in the present volume as chapter 8) but the main research report, running into over 500 pages, is still in the press. As the sample of results included here in chapters 15 and 16 reveals, the great power of such a detailed statistical analysis is that it highlights hidden relationships between variables whose connectedness one would scarcely have suspected on purely theoretical grounds alone, and also (because of the demonstrable, statistically ‘significant’ – i.e. well above a quantifiable level of mere chance – , relationships with datable features such as modes of production, agriculture, animal husbandry, the emergence of organised religion) allows us an initial periodisation of the mythological complexes at hand.

Cross-hatching. Of lesser scope has been my attempt, in *Shimmerings of the Rainbow Serpent* (2014) to interpret, in comparative-mythological terms, iconographic patterns of cross-hatching such as are widespread in space and time, with the famous Blombos limestone block (South Africa, 70 ka BP)⁴ as the earliest known attestation.

Literary work. Clearly I was greatly inspired by my exposure to the New Comparative Mythology from the early 2000s onward, but this inspiration would have fallen on a barren rock (*Luke 8:6*) had I not already engaged in the study of myth throughout my career, both as a literary writer and as an anthropologist.

As a budding poet, I had been fascinated by the richly intricate patterns of intertextuality (including mythological intertextuality) that constitute the backbone of that stunning invitation to literary detective work, novel *Pale Fire* (1962), by the Russian-American writer and literary scholar Vladimir Nabokov. In order to detect, in that novel, at least the majority of oblique references to the world history of Western literature, I read voraciously in all literary languages of the North Atlantic region, I dabbled even in Russian studies in order to cover that glorious province of literature whence Nabokov (1899-1977) originated and to which he had made significant contributions before establishing himself as an American writer. However, the academic study of anthropology and general linguistics intervened, and it absorbed, for decades, my time, energy and even intellectual passion, so that the 100-pages draft of my analysis of *Pale Fire* was to remain a hidden, life-long inspiration to my work on myth and text, but in itself never saw the light of day as a publication so far.

A similar fate was to attend my work on the Dutch-language Belgian writer Hugo Claus (1929-2008), whose novel *Omtrent Deedee* (‘Around the Priest on Duty’, 1964) revolved around a country pastor as hub of a lower-middle-class Flemish family’s annual commemoration of grandmother’s death – but in the process the literary characters take on the shape of central figures in Graeco-Roman mythology, especially Cronus and Aphrodite; the research questions with which I addressed Claus’s extraordinary work, were: *how does he succeed in keeping his fictional characters alive and modern, and why do not they lifelessly succumb to the schematisation and immobilisation to be expected if they are merely illustrations of ancient myth?* My tentative answer has lain enshrined in several manuscripts

severed all ties with that institution and its staff. In a way, my dedication to the New Comparative Mythology went at the expense of the destruction of my main institutional affiliation over forty years. Now that I am also taking my distance from Comparative Mythology as a collective undertaking (this book, chapter 21), what little is to remain of my intellectual career will read as a picaresque novel: a loner who devoid of social ties lives by his wits alone.

⁴ ka = kilo year, one millennium, 1,000 years; BP = Before Present; CE = Common Era; BCE = Before the Common Era. If CE or BCE is not specified, CE is implied.

shelved for over half a century now.⁵



from left to right: H. Yamadah (Japan), Michel Razafiarivony (Madagascar), Stephen Oppenheimer (United Kingdom), Wim van Binsbergen (Netherlands), Michael Witzel (United States) and Shi Yang (People's Republic of China) (photo Kazuo Matsumura)

Fig. 1.2. A selection of comparative mythologists photographed during the First Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Pollock Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, 2007

North African saintly myths. Rather more conclusive was my grappling with Nord African saintly myths, such as formed the core of the rural popular forms of Islam I was to address in my first anthropological fieldwork, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (Ĥumiriyya), 1968 (with revisits in 1970, 1979, and 2002; van Binsbergen 1980b, 1985c, and in press (j)). Conventionalised saintly myths would attach to every major shrine in the region, and from one point of view these amounted to totemistic aetiologies, explaining the link between a specific saint and the animal or plant species with which he or she was particularly associated. In my analysis of such myths I drew mainly on the repertoire of anthropological myth analysis, then recently enriched with the insights of structuralist analysis with which the names of Lévi-Strauss, and his followers Edmund Leach and Rodney Needham, are particu-

⁵ As would be typical for a youngster's first self-chosen project, my work on Claus happened to be far from original; it was inspired by similar analysis of literature and myth in Claus's work, especially by the Belgian essayist Weverbergh (1965 / 1963), who however limited himself to identifying the mythological references without posing ulterior questions. A later converging analysis was by P. Claes 1981.

larly associated. This work, however successful (it was reprinted / anthologised several times), remained within the established anthropological tradition and did not spill over into *comparative* mythology, until the moment – less than a decade ago – when, having formulated my Pelasgian Hypothesis for quite different purposes, I came to realise that the peasant society of present-day Ĥumiriyya in many respects belongs to the Pelasgian complex, whose mythology I had explored in an attempt to identify the ethnic background of the Sea Peoples of the Late-Bronze-Age Mediterranean. But by then I had already been touched by the magic wand of the New Comparative Mythology.

1.2.2. Overview of the present book

After the preliminaries, of which also the present Introduction forms part, Part II presents nine chapters with theoretical approaches.

Chapter 2 investigates the preconditions for any comparison under the title ‘Comparison as a paradigmatic problem’. Emphasis is on anthropology, mythology and philology as fields within which comparison plays an important role. Aggregation and the unity of humankind are highlighted as special topics. In search of methodological and theoretical lessons, I make selective reference to my own work of the last decade, especially my book *Before the Presocratics* (2012) as an extreme comparativist exercise, and a global analysis of the distribution of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg. But in fact this this first substantive chapter of the present book does much more – it amounts to a proud and confident statement of the lasting value of the anthropological perspective, even though that has undergone severe erosion and rejection in recent decades *cf.* van Binsbergen 2022c: Introduction.

Chapter 3 specifically addresses Comparative Mythology, and (after inspecting the philosophical literature on myth, and attempting to give a definition of myth) sketches how in this field the comparativist is torn between the rupture that forces her to distance herself from the myth, and the fusion that seduces her to adopt and identify with myth. My recent book *Sangoma Science* (2021) demonstrates that, for me at least, this chapter and its central dilemma have lost none of their relevance.

Chapter 4 deals not so much with myth, but seeks to establish an analytical framework within which the transcontinental comparative study of (particularly) African myth may be conducted with some confidence. For this purpose I restudy, nearly a century after the Swedish museum ethnologist Lindblom, the global distribution of such an abstruse utilitarian object as the *spiked-wheel trap*, miles removed, apparently, from all mythical imagination. The relevant transcontinental hypotheses are brought in position:

- The Out-of-Africa Hypothesis;
- the Back-into-Africa Hypothesis;
- the Pelasgian Hypothesis (concerning a West Asian Neolithic package which subsequently spread to the Mediterranean and from there, in the Late Bronze Age, in all four directions) which I formulated over a decade ago (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) in a bid to make sense of the few scraps of information we have on the culture and world view of the Sea Peoples of the Mediterranean Late Bronze Age;
- and Oppenheimer / Dick-Read / Tauchmann’s Sunda Hypothesis, to whose potential for transcontinental long-range cultural history, especially with a focus on Africa, I devoted two voluminous recent tomes (2019, 2020).

I demonstrate the spiked-wheel trap's potential to act as an index fossil of transcontinental continuities, illustrating this claim with the global distributions and historical reconstructions of three more cultural items:

- the Mankala board game,
- geomantic divination (both of them topics to which I have devoted much work in the past few decades; see this book's end bibliography), and – as only conspicuous mythical item –
- the belief in the unilateral mythical being.

The lessons of chapter's 4 argument will resonate throughout the later chapters of the present book.

Chapter 5 presents my first, extremely ambitious but provisional and conjectural, attempt at contributing to the New Comparative Mythology, by designing a model for Global Mythological history based on the reconstruction of (part of) the contents of Pandora's Box, *i.e.* the Pre-Out-of-Africa shared cultural package which, with Anatomically Modern Humans's Exodus out of Africa, ca. 80 ka BP. spread all over the globe and became a principal condition for the (widely attested) long list of human cultural universals (*cf.* Brown 1991, 2000). Perusal of a corpus of African cosmogonic myths suggested to me a score of basic mythemes (I call them Narrative Complexes, NarCom), about one third of which could already be reconstructed to have been part of Pandora's Box, while the complex history of global mythology ever since could be postulated to consist in the subsequent transmission, transformation and innovation (particularly in the context of over half a dozen *Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI)* scattered along the temporal and spatial transcontinental path of this initial package, mainly in the Asian continent between 60 ka and 15 ka BP, prior to the partial re-transmission of this transformed set *back into Africa*.

Chapter 6 builds on the previous chapter, tries to outline some of its merits and demerits, links the mythological process more closely to the genetic history of Anatomically Modern Humans, seeks to identify specific prehistoric iconographic material that seems to corroborate the nature of the NarComs provisionally identified, dwells on the reconstructed long-range history of such basic mythemes as the Primal Waters and the Flood; the Separation and Re-connection of Heaven and Earth; the Spider; and the Ogre; and defends the emerging synthesis against the allegation (leveled against it by various East and South Asian learned audiences) of being myiologically Africanist, African, even Afrocentrist.

Chapter 7, written in 2007, *i.e.* halfway my personal trajectory into Comparative Mythology, summarises some of these steps and situates them again my further ongoing research across the decades.

Chapter 8, building upon the insights and methods developed in the preceding chapters, argues with detailed reference to regional and global mythological data what is perhaps the most important claim of the present book: *pace* Michael Witzel's inveterate insistence upon the mythological dichotomy between Laurasian and Gondwana basic types) *there is not a separate Comparative Mythology for the Northern Hemisphere and one for the Southern Hemisphere*,⁶ but both are closely related developments in the same overall process of world

⁶ In the History of Ideas, such sweeping, universalising dichotomous claims have a long and largely detrimental,

mythology. I make this claim, on the basis of principle (my conviction that humanity has fundamental unity; 2015, 2020f), but also on the basis of my continued research on, and personal intensive participation in the life of, the Nkoya people of Western Zambia, South Central Africa, and their mythology, studied and published by me in their original Central Bantu language. After discussing a number of available paradigms seeking to situate Africa within world mythology (Frobenius, Egyptocentrism, the *Black-Athena* debate, Afrocentrism), and the attending linguistic and genetic syntheses, my discussion of the Nkoya material begins with a radical autocritical reflection. In my Nkoya research during previous decades, culminating in two major and widely acclaimed books (*Religious Change in Zambia* – 1981; and *Tears of Rain* – 1992) I had taken Nkoya oral traditions (the main repository of Nkoya mythology) to obliquely reflect genuine historical events and processes taking place in South Central Africa from the middle of the 2nd mill. CE on. However, extensive exposure, at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NIAS, then situated at Wassenaar, the Netherlands), 1994-1995, to current specialist research by Assyriologists, Bible scholars, and Egyptologists, convinced me that my earlier mythological position⁷ – with all its emphasis on the South Central African region and on the then current second millennium CE – had to be faulted because it had failed to recognise and acknowledge the very many fragmentary references, in the Nkoya mythological corpus, to themes and mythical personages unmistakably at home in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt, four or five millennia BP – and to a lesser extent South Asian and South East Asian, rather more recent mythology. In chapter 8's argument, I identify these apparent ancient transcontinental elements and trace their ramifications in world mythology, parceling them up into twenty-six specific mythical themes. Situated smack in the heart of the African continent, nearly equidistant between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, the Nkoya far from nicely follow the divisive, essentialising, and potentially racist, Gondwana model stipulated for African cultures by Witzel, but show themselves largely part and parcel of the entire realm of world mythology.

Chapter 9 continues the previous chapter's exercise of identifying and evaluating seminal ideas as reflected in much of the comparative research undertaken within the IACM. The membership and especially the leadership has formed a relatively closely knit community, in which ideas and data circulate freely and may pick up by anyone at any time. I single out three seminal ideas that may be mentioned in this connection:

- 'It was probably geographic blockage by Neanderthals which prevented Anatomic-

even murderous, past. Cases in point are the Ancient Israelites's distinction between their own people and the more original inhabitants of Palestine, who, although closely related in culture and language, yet were condemned (at least, in legendary accounts such as the *Old Testament*) to the ban (אָרֶר *herem*), i.e. divinely sanctioned total extermination (Noort 1998); or the Greek distinction between *Hellenoi* and *Barbaroi*; or the absolute distinction, ever since the Early Middle Ages, between Jews, Christians, and Muslims; or, closer to our era, the Early Modern conviction that there should be a different mechanics for terrestrial and for celestial phenomena – a contention exploded by Newton. However, in the latter achievement, Newton (for whom belief in astrology has been claimed but contested; Cohen 1941; Cowling 1977) could let himself be inspired by the ancient Hermetic adage 'So above, so below' – the principle on which all astrology since the Ancient Near East has been predicated.

⁷ Which had been in line with the *hausse* in studies in (especially precolonial) African religious and political history, with which especially the names of Terence Ranger, Jan Vansina, Isariah Kimambo, and Matthew Schoffeleers have been associated (Ranger 1975, 1978; Ranger & Kimambo 1972; Schoffeleers 1979; Vansina 1965, 1966, 1985, 1990). In chapters 2 and 17 we touch on this approach.

cally Modern Humans to leave Africa (c. 60-50 ka BP) and to diffuse into Eurasia beyond the Levant'

- 'It was primarily in Asia that the crucial transformations and innovations took place producing the main mythologies attested in historical times on the basis of the Pre-Out-of-Africa mythological inheritance of Anatomically Modern Humans'
- 'Once we have a theoretical model of the development of global mythology in pre-history, we can use it to systematically read / interpret prehistoric iconography, while the latter, in turn, can be used to corroborate our theoretical model'.



from left to right: Stephanus Djunatan, Yuri Berezkin, Nick Allen†, Natalya Yanchevskaya, Kazuo Matsumura (seen from the back), Boris Oguibenine, and Wim van Binsbergen; photo Eric Venbrux

Fig. 1.3. A selection of comparative mythologists photographed after the Second Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 2008

Chapter 9's argument suggests that these three points were made, at quite an early stage, in my own contributions to the IACM debates. Besides, the argument continues the critique of Witzel's central conceptual tool, the Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy.

In chapter 10, many theoretical and comparative lines of the previous chapters come together. In that I present, on one broad canvas and in tabulated form, major mythemes that have played a role in comparative mythology. My contention is that these data bring out

transcontinental continuity and redress Africa's place as being at a par with the other continents, in stead of having to be relegated to the typological and historical murky corner of backwardness.

Of course I realise that, while occasionally stopping to defend myself from the allegation of being an arch-Afrocentrist who cannot be taken seriously in his partisan defence of Africa, it is not just academic interest, not the mere objective pursuit of scholarship that has brought me to adopt these positions and thus to contest such habitual North Atlantic (including Witzel's) essentialising and condescending claims to the opposite, as try to relegate Africa and Africans to a peripheral, retarded position in the world system. I have come to identify with Africa, not only intellectually as a leading Africanist, but also existentially – it is strands of Nkoya culture that inform my current personal conceptions of happiness, power, conflict, the continuity of generations, the responsibilities of kin. I have been incorporated in the Nkoya community, speak their language, know their culture, have a wide range of adoptive and affinal kin among the Nkoya, I have taken the ethnic, political and medical causes of the Nkoya people to heart, and I was rewarded, already in the late 1970s, by being adopted, as his son, by one of the Nkoya kings, Mwenekahare Kabambi of the Mashasha Nkoya; my eldest daughter daily played on his lap during our initial fieldwork in the early 1970s, and my middle daughter is considered the reincarnation of Mwenekahare Kabambi's great grandmother, *Mwene Shikanda ba kukandile baKaonde* 'Queen Shikanda who shook (or forcibly circumcised) the Kaonde people', our neighbours to the north.⁸ And in another branch of the Kahare-related family network, my actually closest Nkoya kin are those of Shumbayama village on the Kazo stream, who constitute the descent group originally owning the Kahare royal title (which until the late 19th c. CE belonged not to Kabambi's descent group but to Kambotwe and his kin, associated with the Kamakokwa stream some thirty kilometres North of the Njonjolo stream, where the royal court of Mwenekahare has been situated since the early 20th c. CE). And if this re-incarnation on African soil is not enough, during more recent fieldwork in Botswana, Southern Africa, 700 km. South of Nkoyaland and in a strikingly different cultural and linguistic domain, I became a fully-fledged diviner-healer, a development that has had an enormous impact on my scientific outlook and production and in fact was my stepping-stone to comparative mythology. All this may be taken to imply that I would blindly object to any condescending marginalising of Africa and Africans even beyond the limits of my academic authority – but that does not mean that I do not possess such authority, or that my arguments are inherently unscholarly.

After thus pegging out a claim area for my own brand of Comparative Mythology, in Part III I discuss (on the basis of extensive listings of areas and bibliographic references) the global distribution of several important mythemes, and try to base a provisional historical reconstruction upon these distributions, using the methodology developed in the preceding chapters and in my study of headhunting. In consecutive chapters I discuss the Ogre, the Spider, the Leg Child (*i.e.* a human or god born by other means than the usual birth channel), and

⁸ This is all very well as an expression of closeness and identification, yet I cannot dissimulate the slight embarrassment and irritation which I have felt when my old friend the late lamented René Devisch, once the leading Africanist at Louvain, Belgium, throughout his career used to treat his collocutors to a similar personal myth, now painted on a large literary canvas in the thinly disguised protagonist of Koen Peeters's novel *De mensengenezer* (2017); cf. van Binsbergen 2020i and 2021f. More on my personal myths in my *Sangoma Science* (2021).

the Cosmic Egg.

The next part, IV, proposes, in chapter 15, a different methodology for myth analysis: quantifying a large number of traits in the constituent specimens in a corpus of similar myths (e.g. Flood stories), and trace the underlying patterns of affinity and dissociation by multivariate analysis and cross-tabulation. Such an analysis was already extensively undertaken by me on Marc Isaak's corpus of Flood myths worldwide, and is now in the press as a separate monograph; a first instalment has been an article I published (with the collaboration of Isaak) in *Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society* in 2008, based on a special session on Stephen Oppenheimer's work at the 2nd Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 2007. In the present book a first instalment of the results is included: a quantitative analysis of the heroes in Flood myth, which offers a rather unique perception of time depth, modes of thought, an appreciation (beyond Fontenrose's classic analysis of mythical combat in his book *Python, 1959 / 1980*) of the symbolic and cosmological dimensions of heroic combat in the mythical domain (in the light, particularly, of the cosmology of cyclical element transformation – the combat may refer to the violent transformative impact of one element upon another, e.g. Water annihilating Fire).

In Chapter 16 this quantitative, statistical approach is specifically applied to the problem of *periodisation*. After an general, qualitative summary on Flood myths worldwide and the major themes arisen in their analysis, I select some eight variables in the data set that may be considered particularly sensitive to the time dimension; subsequently tracing the statistically significant relationships between these selected variables and all others in our sample, I

- not only demonstrate that the quantitative approach as advocated in this Part may be particularly illuminating towards answering questions of long-range perspectives in space and time –
- but I also offer an extensive argument why Flood myths, far from belonging in Pandora's Box (where Witzel situates them), and even though they may be argued to have emerged, in their earliest form, in Upper Palaeolithic Central to East Asia among the humans carrying MtDNA Type B, typologically and ideologically are much more at home in the Early Neolithic, and in fact highlight the principal contradictions that from the onset of the Neolithic on begin to dominate human global cultural history: male-female, transcendent-immanent, and human-animal.

In Part V, a number of miscellaneous studies are collected, with no other unifying feature than that they are difficult to accommodate in any of the preceding Parts.

Chapter 17 looks, from the perspective of today's (New) Comparative Mythology, at Matthew Schoffeleers's historical interpretation of a corpus of suitor stories collected in 20th c. CE Malawi, South Central Africa. His approach turns out to be informed by two somewhat conflicting influences: the oral-history school (Vansina, Ranger) which seeks to identify kernels of fragmentary historical truth in ancient narratives (also see chapter 2); and Lévi-Strauss's abstract structuralism, which suggests that underlying such narratives is basically an (otherwise meaningless) binary logical structure upholding a rational world view of opposites, and hence the quality of being human. For Schoffeleers, the Malawian stories invite interpretations in terms of the inroads of mercantile capitalism in the Malawian microcosm of half a millennium BP. My own re-analysis suggests a far more transcontinental context, where stories may travel from distant provenances in space and time, and thus are less likely to contain decodable messages on local and regional events and developments.

Chapter 18 is, as a finished text (some of the other chapters go back to much older drafts), the oldest piece in the present volume, written before I had made contact with the New Comparative Mythology. Compelled, by the vicissitudes of my Botswana fieldwork (under circumstances as described at length elsewhere: van Binsbergen 2003: chs 5-8, 2021c, to make a detailed, world-wide study of Leopard-skin symbolism, I initially leaned heavily on the work of the German linguist Kammerzell (1994) in the field of Afroasiatic and Indo-European languages in the region where Africa and Asia meet; and on the analysis of the globally distributed mytheme of the *unilateral mythical being*, by the Swedish historian of religion Harald von Sicard (1968-1969). Extending these approaches into the vast realm of the Bantu languages (a linguistic phylum comprising several hundred languages throughout much of Africa South of the equator), my argument in this chapter arrives at truly amazing, far-reaching continuities in the lexical designation and symbolic perception of the Leopard skin and other forms of *scatteredness* – thus constituting a background for the claim that long-range transcontinentality is one of the principal features of mythologies worldwide.

Chapter 19 consists of a superficial, impromptu record of the performance, on the premises of Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, in 2010, of the South Asian, Hindu and Buddhist Fire ritual known as *Homa*, and my inkling of an arguable link with the *Sangoma* ecstatic cult of Southern Africa – of which I became a senior member during fieldwork there. In the process, transcontinental aspects of ecstatic cults are suggested in regard of such cults at Bali, Indonesia, and the Bori cult of West Africa.

Chapter 20 is the least accomplished of the chapters in this book. It is merely an illustrated paper proposal, for my contribution to the IACM Annual Meeting of 2016, at Brno, Czech Republic, convened by my old friend and fellow-director of the ACM, the leading historical linguist Vaclav Blažek. Having in the past repeatedly addressed the anthropology and philosophy of time (e.g. van Binsbergen 1996b, and in the context of local genealogical knowledge and manipulation in North Africa: van Binsbergen 1970 / 2022a), my Brno paper was to express my concern that the set conference topic, i.e. the mythology of time, took too much for granted that our contributing scholars would have the same conception of time as the historical actors as authors of the myths considered in our comparative mythology. The paper thus echoes a point made repeatedly throughout the present book: the lack (that is, in my opinion) of genuine historical awareness and anti-ethnocentric self-criticism among many exponents of the New Comparative Mythology. However, since the majority of the Brno participants were text-based philologists without the slightest experience with the lived time perception of actual actors outside their own time-punctuated classrooms, time-honoured libraries, and time-obsessed North Atlantic middle-class society still in the throes of Hegel's discovery of the time dimension as the principal determinant factor in identity in Modern times, the point of the paper did scarcely register with my audience at the time.

Chapter 21, finally, turned out to be the most difficult paper to write in the entire collection, holding up the publication of this book by a full decade, and this simply for personal reasons. I have made no secret of my admiration for Michael Witzel's work nor of my many-faceted indebtedness to him – yet in the end my assessment of his *magnum opus*, *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* (2012) turns out to be far more critical, even to the point of rejection, than the utterly positive reader's report on that book's manuscript, which I wrote with total honesty at the request of Oxford University Press in 2007, and which chapter 21 pretends to present (reserving the devastating criticism for the footnotes that I added when editing the present volume in 2022). Normally I am quick, often too quick, in my judgment, but in this case the slow ripening of my judgment held

pace with my own ripening as a critical but passionate comparative mythologist myself. Especially a scholar as perceptive not to say visionary, innovative, hard-working, bold and well-informed as Michael Witzel, deserves (as reward for his own integrity and Herculean efforts towards furthering his field of research) to be judged by state-of-the-art standards of scholarship, and state-of-the-art standards of the epistemology and global politics of valid knowledge formation. Enough tactfulness, funding, friendship, and patronage, has been brought to bear upon Witzel's work so as to further his leadership and his achievements but at the same time so as to obscure his shortcomings – and therefore not enough to save him from gross methodological and theoretical errors. Tactfulness is, alas, not an entry in my personal dictionary, and I have been sufficiently punished for this defect. Still, facing the option of letting friendship prevail over what is required to make comparative mythology into a mature undertaking we can all be collectively proud of, I chose to oblige; even if it meant biting the hand that fed me; even if it was sure to expel me from the community of the New Comparative Mythology – but throughout my career I have grown used to that experience, and as chapter 21 makes clear, ominously that process had long started by 2012. Thus the final chapter sums up not only my arguments in the present book, but also puts paid to my endeavour to emulate Witzel, join his circle, and to be accepted there.



The present book is a collection of detached essays, not a fully integrated and sustained handbook of method and theory in comparative mythology. The emerging theory usually has no pretensions beyond the specific chapter's argument in which it appears. Exponents of the New Comparative Mythology tend to be fond of describing new varieties of patterns of myth, but they are usually loath to discuss theory, method, and epistemology, and tend to have little or no experience in quantitative methods. When my dear colleague Steve Farmer, at the Third Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology (IACM), at Tokyo, Japan, held a plea to the effect that we should be 'Turning comparative mythology and religion into a rigorous science' (Farmer 2009),⁹ he met with strikingly little support, as if his proposal was felt to be offensive.

⁹ There is an oblique reference here to a title by the phenomenological philosopher Husserl (1965), but I wonder if Farmer, as the 'comparative historian' which he claims to be, may be expected to refer to one of the pillars of Modern philosophy. Farmer is however unmistakably familiar with European *Renaissance* philosophy, and his PhD work was on the Italian thinker Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary of the pantheist heretical philosopher Giordano Bruno. Incidentally, as a close associate of Witzel's and most regular attendant of the latter's conferences, Farmer has often vented sobering, critical, extremely valuable views in the IACM context, for instance when pointing out (an observation which I took over in the present volume) that the huge error functions of modern molecular genetics (running into the tens of thousands of years) practically preclude the use of that ancillary discipline as providing a time scale for Comparative Mythology; or when he warned that the relatively recent nature of the actual historical sources of Comparative Mythology (going back a few millennia at best, but often just the 19th c. CE) practically precludes their use for reconstructions going back into remote prehistory. Emily Lyle, in a contribution to the *Festschrift* I received at my 70th birthday (Lyle 2018 in Mosima 2018) also notes the predilection for sweeping reconstructions in space and time which she finds to be a characteristic of my work – but Witzel and Berezkin have been bitten by the same bug, and that is why I like their work immensely. I am not indulging in this predilection without proper preparation – in fact, much of my recent work, in the present book as well in van Binsbergen 2012, 2018, 2020, 2021 (and even already 1981, 1992), has been a struggle to arrive at an explicit methodology for the retrieval of the remote past, by a combination of genetic, mythological, ethnographic-distributional, and linguistic data. But as far as philosophy is concerned, the impact of that field on the New Comparative Mythology has been remarkably limited, considering (see the present volume, ch. 3) that such philosophers as Plato, Cassirer and Kolakowski have had much to say about the nature and social workings of myth. Witzel (2012) does cite another pillar of Modern thought, Nicolai Hartmann, but

Philologists, linguists, and orientalists have made up the bulk of the membership of the IACM, and like most historians they feel that theory curtails the flight of their discovery. Needless to say I disagree – the present book is there to bear me out. The New Comparative Mythologists tend to plunder ancillary fields such as archaeology, genetics, comparative historical linguistics, history, anthropology, for readily consumable chunks of data, but rarely take the time to thoroughly familiarise themselves with these fields, to properly incorporate these fields's theories and methods, to apply these theories and methods under critical specialist supervision, hence have a tendency to blunder into what, in chapter 21 of this book, I will call *scientific science fiction*. Comparative mythology tends to impute concepts, propositions, meanings, into the minds of historical actors usually separated from us in time and space by thousands of years and thousands of kilometres. If we are not very prudent lest we smuggle into our analysis our own present-day specialist academic concepts and modes of thought, the exercise of comparative mythological analysis becomes futile, a mockery of scholarship and especially of the History of Ideas. Some of the chapters in this book explicitly grapple with this type of problem, but others more simply depart from a set of aggregated mythemes whose shaky foundation in remote historical practice remains to be ascertained.

Considering that this book covers only a relatively thin slice of my engagement with comparative mythology over the last two decades, the question is opportune as to *what makes that subject so irresistible to me?* One of the field's great attractions is the opportunity to rub shoulders with specialists of disciplines (such as comparative historical linguistics, palaeoanthropologists, geneticists) in which I never became a recognised specialist yet which I have diligently studied, or merely dabbled in, ever since my student days nearly sixty years ago (when I devoured the works, then popular, by the prehistorian Herbert Kuhn and especially Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and dreamed of becoming a palaeoanthropologist myself; cf. van Binsbergen 2021c: ch. 5). Yet there is a more compelling answer to my italicised question above, and I have given it already. Comparative mythology greatly helps me in my constant, irresistible drive to *make history where previously there was none*.

Michael Witzel plunged me into the deep when demanding, as a prerequisite for a free ticket to my second Harvard Round Table, in Kyoto, Japan, in 2005, that I produce a sustained argument on African cosmogonic myths. After all, as a leading Africanist, and from Leiden to boot, such an assignment ought to be a piece a cake for me. However, beyond the Nkoya people of Zambia with whom I have done research ever since 1972 and who have a rudimentary creation story independent from Christianity, I had never looked at African creation stories; and as a Manchester-associated social anthropologist cum ethnohistorian creation stories were certainly not at the centre of my research interest. Frantically I went hunting for a corpus of African cosmogonic myths, sufficiently broad and representative to allow me to fulfil what was for me then an impossible and unprecedented task. But the agony of those weeks was soon turned into bliss, when I realised what the comparative-mythology perspective had brought me: not only the great satisfaction of renewing my acquaintance with ancillary fields and their practitioners, but particularly, – *at long last!* – the awareness of a continental and even transcontinental coherence, and a time scale allowing me to look much deeper into the past than the millennium or so which had been the time measure of my previous explorations in

mainly because the latter's book *Anthropologie* (1960) also extends to mythology; and when he needs to state the fundamental questions that myth, in his mind, appears to be about (Witzel: 'who are we, where do we come from, where are we going'), he does not appreciate that these are also among the fundamental questions of all philosophy, but instead reaches for the same message as scribbled (as a piece of unartistic pedantry? as an uninteresting truism?) in a the corner of a painting by Gauguin (1848-1903), the French painter known for his deliberate exotism.

African religious or political history (van Binsbergen 1981, 1992).

The whole episode reminds me of one of my favourite science-fiction stories, Theodore Sturgeon’s ‘The Microcosmic God’ (1941). Inside a large garage, a relatively standard terrestrial human keeps numerous live miniature humans in a terrarium; enacting one of my own childhood dreams, they have developed their own miniature society, reproduce, engage in science and invention, *etc.* Their owner becomes increasingly tyrannical in his demands upon the little people, and under sanction of being instantly annihilated by him they produce astounding feats of invention within a few days even hours, *e.g.* an impenetrable electromagnetic shield ordered by their Microcosmic God when the garage is under outside attack. My Kyoto paper was such a feat, and inadvertently but under enormous pressure of time and bewilderment, I hit on a synthesis which after nearly two decades I still find useful and illuminating, and which is repeatedly discussed in the present volume.

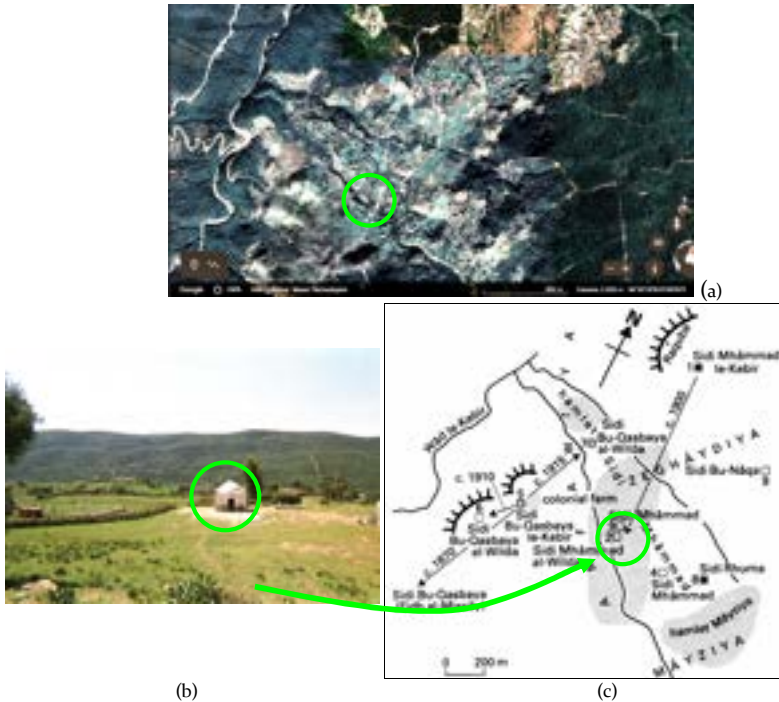


Fig. 1.4. Three modes of seeing and representing a religious landscape.



source: <https://www.3dworldshop.com/Pocket-Stereoscope-WW2-British-Army>, with thanks

Fig. 1.5. A field stereoscope.

In my 1988 novel on North African ethnographic fieldwork, *Een Buik Openen (Opening Up a Belly)*, the young protagonist's main research task is to make sense of the bewildering abundance of larger and lesser saintly shrines (some of them unmistakably of megalithic origin) distributed all over the 12 km² valley that is his fieldwork site. Because one of the members of his research team is a geologist, he can lay his hands on aerial photographs of the steep mountain slopes and ragged rocky tops that extend for many kilometres in every direction. With the aid of a field stereoscope that came with the prints, it would seem possible to add the illusion of optical depth to these photographs. He has never handled such material before, but as he awkwardly peers through the lenses and slightly shifts and readjusts the position of two matching photographs, suddenly a miracle strikes his eyes, ravines open up, treetops prick into his eyes, gullies and rivulets that he crosses every day in his wanderings through the villages on his way to interviewees take on a familiar shape, and the valley reveals its three-dimensional secrets in a way he would never have believed.¹⁰

This also describes, in a nutshell, my experience with comparative mythology, and explains my incessant fascination for the subject. As I was advancing in writing my first solicited contribution to the New Comparative Mythology (included in this book as chapter 5), I was practically moved to tears by the hitherto incredible temporal vistas that were opening up under my hands and eyes. I was constructing as careful a methodology as possible, for me to peep much deeper into the past than I had ever gazed, yet with systematic, methodologically warranted and empirically backed up confidence, and I was beginning to prise open and vaguely discern the contents of Pandora's Box – the sum total of collective cultural including mythological traits that we all share as Anatomically Modern Humans, prior to our global dispersal through the Out-of-Africa Exodus. (Hence the title of this book: *Pandora's*

¹⁰ As an adolescent, reading the palaeontologist Teilhard de Chardin's main work *Le Phenomene Humain* (1955), I was impressed and puzzled that this scientist, used to base his research on the indirect evidence from markings and discolorations in the ground, in the opening pages of his book could sing the praises of *Seeing* as the fundamental act of human knowledge formation. I now understand what he meant. Nothing drives home to us the conviction of reality as seeing with our own eyes, however deceptive that often may be. Later I learned that having acquired 'field perceptiveness' was one of the hallmarks of the accomplished geologist, soil scientist, archaeologist, and even anthropological fieldworker

Box Prised Open).

The quest for origins is an inveterate affectation of the Age of Romanticism, which rears its head almost inevitably when we are dealing for reconstructions of the remote past. It was a stumbling-block of the *Black-Athena* discussion of the last decades of the 20th c. CE (Lefkowitz & McLean Rogers 1996; van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011), and again arose in the context of the New Comparative Mythology. As Thuillard *et al.*; cf. Bäcker 2017) put it:

‘The study of the narrative elements in tales and myths (motifs) belongs to a long tradition, initially aimed at finding the area of origin of early narratives (*Urtexts*). This objective, which has been much criticized, is generally abandoned today...’

‘Generally’, perhaps, but the title of Witzel’s mythological *magnum opus* *The Origins of the World’s Mythologies* (2012) demonstrates that he still embraces that old quest lock, stock and barrel, and also my own work *e.g.* as collected in the present volume shows that I believe it is theoretically and methodologically possible to reconstruct and capture origins in the mythical field, especially at the abstract level of models and theories, even if on the ground the very first specimens of a new phenomenon inevitably are obscured by their paucity and by the mists of time.

My Kyoto paper was only a beginning. I would never have reached even that relatively minor achievement without the inspiration from Michael Witzel, in the first place,¹¹ and from other core members of his circle – among whom I count, among others, Václav Blažek, Boris Oguibénine, Kazuo Matsumura, Emily Lyle, Steve Farmer, Yuri Berezkin, Nick Allen†, Eric Venbrux, John Colorusso, John Bengtson, James Harrod, and Natalya Yanchevskaya. I still had to explain how Pandora’s Box could have gotten its contents; and why, with the dispersal of Anatomically Modern Humans from 80-60 ka BP, these original traits had, mostly, *not* changed beyond recognition despite the expected processes of cultural drift and free variation, but, on the contrary, seem to have retained much of their basic shape and meaning. Most of the provisional answers are to be found in my series of books: from 2012 to 2018 to 2021, but that is not the point here. The point is that, with this book, I am proudly saluting one of the most exciting recent new developments in the world of scholarship, and one that has given me, over the best part of two decades, immense pleasure. And some pain.

Yet even so, I cannot pretend that my conception of comparative mythology is anything but one-sided and myopic. I realise that I am reducing the field to *a means to an end*: peeping into humankind’s remotest past, retrieving some of the central concerns and images that informed human and social life in the Palaeolithic, using an increased insight in the forms and connections of myth in order to reconstruct ancient modes of thought and transconti-

¹¹ In the course of this book, and especially in its final chapter, I say devastatingly critical things about Michael Witzel’s work, and I try to substantiate such negative statements so as to avoid the impression that they are merely made out of personal frustration and other even less scholarly sentiments. The cause of science thrives mainly through the critical interaction between scientists, and I have always considered grounded criticism as the highest praise one could accord a colleague. My background (in an Amsterdam popular neighbourhood) and erratic life history (ending up as both a distinguished professor, an African diviner-healer, and an African prince) have made me reject the kind of social pressures that usually govern peer consensus and peer sociability in academia. I greatly admire Michael Witzel, and I have frequently praised him as the indispensable innovator of comparative mythology. He taught me, already in middle age, to cherish that field and even to identify with it. This has given me the right to further and defend it, even in the face of Michael’s inevitable shortcomings as, merely, a philologist, a product of North-western Europe, and a privileged White male; I only do realise too well that similar shortcomings are overwhelmingly my own.

mental continuities. For many students of myth, especially from the humanities and literature sciences, such an approach may be dismissed as merely epiphenomenal, secondary, parasitical: as ignoring what they are inclined to take as the essence of myth, *i.e.* to constitute a statement on the human condition, to provide the core narratives around which *belles lettres* may be constructed, to offer particularly significant and potent vehicles for recognisable, profound, often cathartic, emotions, and thus to offer models for identity (*cf.* Doornbos & van Binsbergen 2017), moral judgment, and action. When Lévi-Strauss's structuralism seems to reduce myth to a rationalistic game of the mind celebrating (essentially empty, emotionless, and meaningless) scaffoldings of logic, it seems to miss the essence of myth as a prop for existential signification. My approach in the present book, although rather far removed from structuralism, seems to invite a similar objection; just as well that I am not the only passionate student of myth.

1.2. Provenance of chapters and other editorial matters

Nearly all chapters give, in their first footnote, the original context in which the text was first presented and / or published. These data overlap with the entries in this book's end bibliography, and (if included in books published under my name) with the listing of my books on the first pages of this volume. Entries of my publications in this listing and in the end bibliography are furnished with clickable hyperlinks, so that they may be consulted by the reader without effort nor cost.

Writing in a North Atlantic international language about social and cultural phenomena from largely outside that region, and often from very different periods than our time and age, I am keenly aware of the ethnocentric and hegemonic distortions and impositions such writing usually entails. I can scarcely render original orature in this book, but whenever the original expressions are available in their original script, I consider it my intercultural obligation to incorporate such script in my book text so as to remind the reader of the relatively independent status of the original myth in its own right, and of our potentially hegemonic appropriation. For reasons of practicality and personal ignorance such rendering is not always possible, and whenever I try to stick to my self-imposed rule, I risk philological blunders, as I very well know. However, my intention is not to boast a philological omniscience I (as a simple anthropologist / intercultural philosopher) cannot possibly possess, but to pay respect (as someone who has been greatly enriched by his exposure to transcontinental beliefs, myths and wisdom) to other cultural expressions than the North Atlantic ones of today.

The several indexes which appear at the end of this book, have been compiled on the basis of initial capitalisation of words as indicative of their constituting proper names in their own right. Such capitalisation is normally used only very sparingly in English, Dutch and most modern languages, whereas it is standard and mandatory in German prose, not even only for proper names but for nouns in general. Considering that the indexes lend much added value to this book, I have allowed rather more initial capitalisation than would be expected in an otherwise standard English text; I thank the reader for her understanding.

Similar understanding is needed, and probably less readily granted, in regard of the excessive self-referentiality that characterises this book as well as much of my other work of the last two decades. Lavish referencing is part of my style as a scholarly writer, and I insist on

long and full bibliographies, not as a form of window dressing but as one of the obvious means to claim and acquire scholarly authority for my arguments. That perhaps as much as one quarter of my references in this book is to my own work, is a regrettable, sometimes ridiculous, oddity which springs, not so much from my (admittedly unmistakable!) vanity and self-righteousness, but rather from the fact that over the decades I have been pioneering relatively uncharted grounds, and that my earlier explorations in the same *terra incognita* adduce often indispensable pieces of evidence and argument – my many recent texts in fact converge to a few common topics and there is no point in denying that they are parts of the same sustained research and writing project.

PART II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Chapter 2. Comparability as a paradigmatic problem (2013)¹²

2.0. My book Before the Presocratics as an extreme comparativist exercise

My motivation to participate in the Sofia 2013 'Conference for the Comparative Sciences' and to present this chapter as a key-note address on comparison as a method, derived from the fact that less than a year earlier I published a book entitled *Before The Presocratics: Cyclicity, Transformation, And Element Cosmology: The Case Of Transcontinental Pre- Or Protohistoric Cosmological Substrates Linking Africa, Eurasia And North America*. That work was the culmination of much of my research over a quarter of a century. It sought to contribute to the study of the global long-range history of human thought and philosophy. Written from an Attenuated Afrocentrist perspective, it revolved on state-of-the-art comparative methods and insights from linguistics, archaeology, ethnography, and mythology. It had a sound empirical basis (disclosed by full indexes) in its impressive bibliography and in its extensive case studies of board games, geomantic divination, a South Central African clan system, East Asian correlative cosmologies (e.g. 易經 / *I Ching*), cosmologies from Ancient Egypt, Africa, Native America and the Upper Palaeolithic, Greek philosophic texts (especially the few scraps of texts attributed to Empedocles), and linguistic continuities across Asia. It typologised modes of thought and traces their evolution since the Palaeolithic, claiming:

1. we can reconstruct modes of thought of the remote past, in detail and reliably;
2. such reconstruction is predicated on (and, in turn, *confirms*) two assumptions:
 - (a) the fundamental unity of (Anatomically Modern) humankind, and
 - (b) the porous nature, therefore, of geographic / political / identity / cultural boundaries;
3. this in particular means that sub-Saharan Africa has been part and parcel of

¹² van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2013b, 'Comparability as a paradigmatic problem: Key note address, International Conference for the Comparative Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria, October 2013 (organised by the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society)', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/orig_keynote_sofia_2013.pdf

global cultural history to a much greater extent than commonly admitted.

Applying this perspective to the Ancient Greek Presocratic philosophers who allegedly founded Western philosophy, I tested *Working Hypothesis (1)*: 'a transformative cycle of elements (as attested in East Asia and Central Africa) has constituted a global substrate since the Upper Palaeolithic (over 12,000 years ago), informing – from some West Asian, "Pelagian", proposedly Proto-African source – Eurasian, African and N. American cosmologies'. An *Alternative Working Hypothesis* posited (2): 'the transformative cycle of elements only dates from the West Asian Bronze Age' (5,000-3,000 years ago). I also examined (3) 'the possibility of this system's transcontinental transmission in *historical* times'. Painstakingly, (2) and (3) were empirically vindicated, while much evidence of Upper Palaeolithic *element* cosmologies was found (but without the features of cyclicity, transformation, and catalysis).¹³ This casts new light on Empedocles' originality. *Presocratic thought became a path to modern science because it constituted a backwater mutation away (especially in its reception) from the cyclic transformation dominating W.Asian / N.E. African Bronze Age cosmologies.*

In the present chapter my focus is not on that book's content but on the theoretical and methodological prerogatives of the excessive comparison through space and time, on which it hinges.

2.1. Introduction

As the Biblical book of *Proverbs* says (9:10):

'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...'

The Protestant Free University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (free in the sense of being allegedly free from state intervention in its internal affairs) derives its motto from this text, and I often came across it when, nearly ten years *after* I had relinquished the Christianity of my childhood, my Drs thesis was examined there by the Reader in Religious Anthropology Blau (1970), only to take a *cum laude* doctorate there a decade later (1979), and to become a full professor of anthropology there (1990-1998), charged with ethnic studies. Paraphrasing that text, and following the trend in Western culture over the past two millennia of secularising 'wisdom' into 'science', we might say:

'Comparison is the beginning of all science.'

Let us have a comparative (!) overture:

- when Mesopotamian science emerged – in the first place in the context of divination, now considered (because of its defective falsifiability; Popper 1935 / 1959) a mere pseudo-science but still on European university curricula in the 18th century CE – it was by (a) *the minute comparison* of phenomena and (b) binding them into the

¹³ #2.1. CYCLICAL ELEMENT TRANSFORMATION constitutes a cosmology in which the world consists of a limited number of elements, A, B, C, ... *etc.*, in such a way that under specific, identified conditions A brings forth (or annihilates, as the case may be) B, B brings forth / annihilates C, etc. A *catalytic* process means that, in regard of the pair A and B, A's producing / annihilating B presupposes the presence of another element, Z, that is *not in itself actively* involved in the action between A and B, even though Z forms part of the entire transformative cycle and features elsewhere in the cycle in its own right.

main instrument of proto-science, *lists*, that empirical generalisations however spurious could be formulated (Weidner 1941-1969; Bottéro 1974, 1992)

- when Aristotle (late 4th c. BCE / 1854-1883) and his successor Theophrastus (late 4th c. BCE / 1916) founded biology in the city of Athens in the late 4th c. BCE, it was by *detailed comparison* of the outer and inner phenomena of different types of plants, animals, and humans;
- when at the other end of Eurasia Chinese scholars were engaged in similar exercises at roughly the same time their approach was not *different and essentially comparative* (Needham c.s. 1986)
- when, a century later, Hellenist philologists in the city of Alexandria founded comparative literature, Homeric criticism, and comparative mythology, it was by seeing both the communalities and the differences between texts, in other words *by comparison*.

But these references to essentially literate situations from the last few millennia do very far from exhaust the attested range of comparison as a major faculty of human thought. Linguists have since long agreed that the human use of language hinges on the distinctive features (Jakobson 1941; Jakobson *et al.* 1952) of speech items – those by which (through *comparison*) they can be distinguished from other similar ones, so that classification as same, or at least as belonging to one underlying category, goes hand in hand with distinction as different. Nineteenth-century CE anthropologists were captivated by what Durkheim and Mauss were to call ‘primitive classifications’ (Durkheim & Mauss 1901), many of which were to be studied, for every part of the world and for every historical period, under the heading of ‘totemism’. The older literature on this topic is very extensive (*e.g.* Hartland 1915; Durkheim 1912), but we are fortunate in having, in the work of Mauss’s student Claude Lévi-Strauss, what even after half a century still looks as the more inspiring, perhaps definitive treatment of the topic – which complements his similarly orientated explorations into ‘undomesticated’ thought (*La Pensée Sauvage*).¹⁴ Intrigued by the ubiquitous association between human groups and selected items from the non-human world (animals, plants, other natural phenomena) with which these groups tend to have entered in a special relationship (naming, postulated descent, taboo on killing and eating), Lévi-Strauss (1962a, 1962b; *cf.* Needham 1967) argues (in typical rationalist / idealist, Durkheimian fashion; *cf.* Durkheim 1912) that there is nothing in the intrinsic qualities of each individual totem that predestines it to serve as a totem, they are not ‘good to eat’ – but that they are props for thought, ‘good to think’; the totemic association always comes in pairs, in such a way that the category which the totem pair share stresses the relationship between the two associated groups, with the specific difference between each totem bringing out the distinction between the associated groups. Sometimes this paired relation of difference and identity is transparent even across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

#2.2. *TOTEMISTIC CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SAINTS AND SPECIES IN NORTH AFRICA*. In North Africa local saints in their while, domed tombs have totemic associations, in such a way that Sidi Mhammad (of the valley of that name, *homdat* °Ain Draham, *gouvernorat* Jendouba, Tunisia), the principal object of veneration of the valley’s now sedentary population, is associated with the fig tree (*karmāt*),

¹⁴ Although the designation ‘savage’ was once part of the discourse of evolutionism and colonial racialism, it is clear that Lévi-Strauss does not intend to analyse the thinking of savages, but undomesticated modes of thought in which all humans engage unless disciplines by the formal procedures and language use of the sciences. As becomes a Jew after World War II, Lévi-Strauss was one of the vocal critics of the concept of ‘race’ (1952).

and Sidi Bu-Ḥarūba (of the neighbouring valley of Saydiyya) with the carob tree (*ḥarūba*)¹⁵ both totems belonging to the near-universal category ‘tree’, which is also enshrined in North Atlantic / universalising natural science. But often the connection is far from transparent from the standpoint of North Atlantic culture, language or science. *E.g.* Sidi Mḥammad in the above example is also associated with the *partridge* (*hajla*), Sidi Bu-Ḥarūba with the bull (*ghrmūl*). These are both animals, but by no stretch of the imagination or application of universalising scientific classification can a Westerner suspect the underlying nature of this opposition. A local myth throws some light on the matter: before being recognised for the saint that he was, Sidi Mḥammad was a herdsman with another saint; being under special divine protection, Sidi Mḥammad could afford to sleep at work while the beasts entrusted to him would roam the mountains unharmed, and partridges (normally very shy, semi-terrestrial bird) would light on his shoulders – they are still sacred at the deserted hill that carries Sidi Mḥammad’s tomb and cannot be hunted. The key appears to be that for Sidi Mḥammad the bird evokes the saint’s *divine election by a sign from undomesticated non-human nature*, while for Sidi Bu-Ḥarūba the bull evokes *divine protection in the context of domesticated non-human nature*. The difference is so slight that the several minor shrines in the valley of Sidi Mḥammad but named after Sidi Bu-Ḥarūba make me suspect that both saints are manifestations of one identical saint venerated by one unified population engaging in transhumance animal husbandry over both valleys only a few centuries ago.¹⁶

But agreeing (on the basis of this flimsy introduction, admittedly) that comparison is at the root of all human thought and language and *a fortiori* of all science, is only the first step towards identifying comparison as a scientific endeavour, spelling out the rules of that endeavour, and identifying its pitfalls. Setting such additional, necessary steps is what I intend to do in this chapter. My central focus will be on comparison in the fields of formal cultural systems (religion, myths, cosmologies, divination, games, writing systems, forms of social and political organisation), which also indicates the fields in which I have been active as a comparatist in the course of my career. However, it is my hope that against this background, some of the things I have to say will also resonate

¹⁵ Cf. Demeerseman 1938–39, 1964; Dermenghem 1978; Jacques-Meunié 1951; Montet 1909; van Binsbergen 1970, 1971a, 1980a, 1980b, 1985, in press (j). The analysis becomes more complicated and more interesting once we realise that Bu-Ḥarūba / *ḥarūba*, through the tree’s numerous minute seeds, also evokes a sense of *speckledness / dispersal* which in very many contexts in space and time has been expressed by reference to the speckled Leopard skin, the star-spangled sky, and Raindrops, – while most linguistic macrofamilies from all over the world use reflexes from a lexical root **garob* / **bVrVg* / **pVrVg* / **pVrVd* (here V = unspecified vowel) to denote these semantics. Cf. van Binsbergen 2004 (included in the present book as chapter ZZZ), and in preparation (c); Kammerzell 1994.

¹⁶ #2.3. NORTH AFRICA AS A REGION WHERE APPARENTLY VERY ANCIENT MYTHOLOGICAL MATERIAL COMES TO THE SURFACE. Thus Kabyl myths (Algeria) speak (Cotterell 1989: 109) of the primordial solitary buffalo bull Itherther, chased by his son Achimi who mated with his mother and sister. Moreover, from the very beginning, the celestial cow was a major theme throughout Ancient Egyptian iconography. Hercules’ journey with the Underworld cattle stolen from Geryon or Cacus takes him along both the Northern and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean. Throughout the Western part of the Old World (Africa, Europe and West Asia), underwater cattle characterises the world of death and the ancestors. In this light my analysis of the bull of Sidi Bu-Ḥarūba and of the cattle of Sidi Mḥammad could still be carried somewhat further. There is also the ambivalence of the partridge to consider: as a bird it is in principle a messenger from heaven, but an ambivalent one because it has difficulty flying.

with those colleagues in my audience who represent very different disciplines in the field of comparative sciences, e.g. biology, psychology, science of literature.

2.2. Contrasting styles of comparison between cultures in space and time¹⁷

Against the background of my Amsterdam-University teachers' almost obsessive pre-occupation with the micro socio-politics of group formation and group management – cast in a structural- functionalist or transactional framework – , the mainstays of my training in anthropology and development sociology at Amsterdam University (1964-1971) were:

- fieldwork ethnography within narrow horizons of space and time, and
- the methodology (more than the results) of cross-cultural comparison.¹⁸

To these assets, the late lamented Douwe Jongmans added, more or less extracurricularly, the perspective of a structural-functionalist-embedded oral history / ethnohistory, in the context of his supervision of my graduate fieldwork on popular Islam in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (cf. van Binsbergen 2019).

After half a century, I still feel greatly indebted to my teachers, even though inevitably I have critically moved far beyond the foundations they laid. In the decade after I left Amsterdam University, the intellectual and political milieus of

- a. the University of Zambia especially its Institute for African Studies,
- b. the Manchester School of social anthropology, and
- c. Terence Ranger's Ford-Foundation-sponsored network for the study of the history of African religious systems

brought me to reflect deeply on the ethical, knowledge-political and truth implications of the extremely objectifying and presentist stance on which the Amsterdam approaches hinged. I embarked on a life-long ethnohistorical and ethnographic project focusing on the Nkoya people of Western Zambia, of which the most recent product among many, a 700-page book '*Our Drums Are Always on My Mind*', is now in the press.¹⁹

But while thus deeply and daily inspired by my personal intensive fieldwork among one small ethnic community in town and countryside in South Central Africa, learning their language and culture as a major resource for the next decades, and positioning myself more and more firmly in Nkoya village life and traditional leadership, yet the lure of the broad

¹⁷ I am indebted to Prof. Nikolay Popov for inviting me to this important and timely conference, and for extending to me the honour of delivering this key note. I am indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands, for funding my participation in this conference, and for constituting a stimulating institutional base ever since 1977.

¹⁸ Köbben 1961, 1964a, 1964b, 1966, 1967a, 1967b, 1970; Jongmans & Gutkind 1967; Thoden van Velzen & Wetering 1960. As a 2nd-year student, I was particularly impressed when one of our teaching assistants, in the context of a seminar cycle on highland cultures of New Guinea, introduced us to Swanson's structural-functional cross-cultural analysis of variables in the field of religion (Swanson 1960; cf. Peregrine 1995).

¹⁹ It was in the press all right then, but the desire to add a few chapters has so far prevented the release .

historical (largely precolonial) and comparative orientation of Ranger's network brought me to engage, for my first major scholarly book *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), and with the aid of the rich ethnographic and ethnohistorical literature and of archival resources, in extensive ethnographic comparisons all over the several million km² of South Central Africa, and into a time depth of more than a millennium.

Although the Ranger network did include major anthropologists like Matthew Schoffeleers²⁰ and Michael Bourdillon, its core business was – to coin a phrase with which I have often characterised my own work of the subsequent decades – ‘to create history where previously there was none’: the hitherto unsung processes of state formation, forms of resistance, regional territorial cults, healing cults, and population movements all over South Central, Southern and East Africa especially during the last half millennium, *i.e.* mainly in the precolonial period, when most of Africa was under illiterate conditions. The scanty data derived from travelogues and reports from Christian missions; they were archival and oral-historical in nature, to be augmented by archaeological results, and (following admonitions by the nestor of South Central African history, Jan Vansina (Vansina 1968, 1981; Keyes Adenaike & 1996) by the *comparison of ethnographic distributions as a clue to regional historical processes.*

It is instructive to compare (!) the Ranger / Vansina style of comparison with that of the Amsterdam School. Both start out with ethnographic data, but these are constructed in a very different way, on the basis of very different assumptions, and with a very different conception as to what constitutes the comparison's *unit of study* or *unit of analysis*

2.3. Comparative anthropology of the mid-20th century CE

In line with cross-cultural approaches *en vogue* in the 1950s-1960s in the USA,²¹ focusing on the HRAF²² ethnographic data base, the Amsterdam School takes as its unit of study ‘cultures’, ‘ethnic groups’, ‘peoples’ or ‘nations’ – entirely fixed to a particular place on the world map and to a particular point in time – notably, when the principal available ethnography for that unit was written. By constructing data bases listing ‘cultures’ C₁...C_n against ethnographic traits conceived as variables V₁...V_n, the significance (*i.e.* a numerical value for the risk that a found association may be attributed to mere chance) of any correlations between the incidence of V_a and V_b, could be assessed statistically – usually with the aid of mathematically extremely simple tests such as chi-square. Reduced to a data point, the internal coherence and semantics of a historic culture were entirely lost sight of. The distinctions between ‘cultures’ had to be reified and raised to an unrealistic, total a-historical dogma – admittance of historical associations between cultures of the same culture area, and of common origin between various cultures thus entered into the data base, would upset the

²⁰ Who in 1979 accepted *Religious Change in Zambia* as my PhD work, with Ranger on the committee; cf. van Binsbergen 2011h.

²¹ Cf. Brislin *et al.* 1973; Ember & Ember 2001; Coult & Habenstein 1965; Levinson 1988; Moore 1961; Murdock 1949, 1963, 1967, 1981; Murdock & White 1969; Naroll 1961, 1964a, 1964b; Naroll, & Cohen 1970 Naroll & d'Andrade 1963; Textor 1967; Van De Vijver & Leung 1997.

²² Human Relations Area Files; cf. Brown University Library, *n.d.*; Levinson 1988; Moore 1961; Textor 1967; Murdock 1963.

statistical apple car²³ and therefore had to be dissimulated. Each such ‘culture’ was to be conceived as a separate, independent unit. Moreover, it was not just the construction of the data points in space and time that was abstruse and devoid of contact with historical reality over time. Also the definition of the cultural variables to be compared had to come entirely from the comparing analyst, for the mechanical, numerical approach left no room for any of the intercultural fine points of translatability and untranslatability that yet are at the core of the anthropological fieldworker’s handwork. Whatever the complex, internally contradictory and varying practices the ethnographers might have rendered with great care in their ethnographies, on the basis of years of subtle participant observation, language learning, and participation, – yet for the purpose of entry into the comparative data base firm but artificial decisions had to be made:

regicide practiced?	yes (+) or no (-)
ancestor worship present?	yes (+) or no (-)
belief in incarnation?	yes (+) or no (-)
demographic shortage of permitted sexual / marital partners?	yes (+) or no (-)

Table 2.1. An example of a cross-cultural entry

Singled out for entry in the ethnographic data based were only relatively full ethnographic accounts, based preferably on the ethnographer’s prolonged stay in the area and command of the local language. Although this mode of cross-cultural comparison was a major industry in anthropology for nearly half a century, and although it did provide fuel for much internal theoretical and methodological debate (*e.g.* on the nature of kinship arrangements and their association with ‘cultures’ religious aspects, violence, *etc.*), in the end the extreme objectification inherent to this method had to be exposed as testifying to an obsolete, hegemonic, distancing form of transcultural (and transcontinental) knowledge formation, and although still studies are being published along this line, in fact it has virtually died out as a recognised path to valid knowledge.

The gross statistical errors resulting from multicollinearity are an important methodological objection against the ‘Amsterdam’ form of comparison: by ignoring the historical relations between ‘cultures’ the same correlation between two variables may be given a much greater weight if counted as occurring independently in several ‘cultures’, yet it is the same correlation and the same culture complex.

2.4. The structuralist-functionalst handicap

The principal shortcoming of the Amsterdam and American schools of cross-cultural com-

²³ In technical statistical language, *would create insurmountable problems of multicollinearity*: for if the association between ‘cultures’ $C_d \dots C_{d+i}$ was inherent to the entire culture area to which all of them belong, then that association would be spuriously counted in excess as many times as there were different ‘cultures’ $C_d \dots C_{d+i}$ in the sample.

parison lies in their naïve and presentist, utterly blinkered and a-historical assumption – in line with the structural-functionalist paradigm at the time – *to the effect that the details of specific institutions e.g. cross-cousin marriage, segmentary socio-political organisation, belief in vengeance spirits or in witchcraft, can only spring directly from the present-day interaction between the structural traits of just that one society.* Comparative anthropologists working along such lines strive towards the distributional or otherwise statistical, empirical underpinning of propositions of the following type (the examples are fictitious):

- where cross-cousin marriage there vengeance spirits
- where access to transregional markets is (increasingly) restricted there witchcraft beliefs exist and are on the increase
- where segmentary political organisation there the system of kinship terms is strongly classificatory.

Anthropologists in the generation above my own have invested hundreds of thousands of person years of serious work to pursue such daydreams, that had better been spend on an exploration of a less mechanical, more historical, regional, empathic and self-critical form of knowledge construction. Meanwhile the problem has sorted itself out in that the Postmodern Turn in the comparative sciences has exposed the Faustian, objectifying and othering implications of such an anthropology through timeless, placeless syllogisms as incredible, hegemonic, and – despite all its natural-science trappings – in the last analysis unscientific.

#2.4. THE HISTORY OF IDEAS HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE GENERATION OF COMPARATIVISTS THAT CAME OF AGE IN THE MID- 20TH CENTURY NEEDED TO FALL BACK ON SUCH A RESTRICTED, SCIENTIFIC CONCEPTION OF THEIR FIELD OF RESEARCH. Anthropology was still in the process of establishing itself as an academic field in its own right in many countries (including the Netherlands, where the first professorial chairs with an anthropological / ‘ethnological’ designation dated from around World War II); and in countries where it could boast a longer history, such as the USA, it was nonetheless involved in a hard struggle for professionalisation – erecting needlessly strong and high boundaries *vis-à-vis* the fields of knowledge that were closest to it and that in principle had most to offer to it, such as history, the classics, linguistics and philosophy – and, within anthropology, that generation was particularly keen to establish once for all a professional distance from older, now (with histrionic emphasis) bitterly rejected approaches such as evolutionism and diffusionism.²⁴ The latter shift is important for comparative studies, for especially diffusionism had concentrated (albeit, still without the aid of a structural- functionalist theory of integrated culture, or any other theory to speak of) on *the movement of people, artefacts and ideas across space and time* – whereas the new, soon classic anthropology came to concentrate on studying *the integration of local cultures* through

²⁴ As a result, diffusion has remained a dirty word in cultural and social anthropology until this day – with the exception, mainly, of the New Technology Studies that are part of the recent attention for globalisation. Dismissive accusation of diffusionism have also been leveled against the New Comparative Mythology, particularly against Witzel’s and my own work in that connection, e.g. Arvidsson 2012. Remarkably, in the adjacent field of archaeology, diffusion models have remained respectable and much in use. I have discussed the diffusionism debate, and defended the study of geographic transfer as relevant for long-range historical reconstruction, at great length, in the context of my recent work on the Sunda Hypothesis, particularly in relation to transcontinental continuity between Asia and Africa since the Upper Palaeolithic (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020).

personal fieldwork within extremely narrow confines of space and time. The people that, in the mid-20th c. CE, were launched on academic careers in social anthropology were (and to a considerable extent, still are) not in the first place scholars in the established sense, with overflowing libraries and classical Greek quotations pervading even their dreams, but rather exponents of European expansion caught in the thrill of remote otherness: traders, colonial civil servants and missionaries, or their children, or other close associates. By adopting a scientific model, such otherness could be apparently be captured and exploited without posing all the existential and ethical questions that would have been suggested by closer continuity with history, the classics, linguistics, literary science, and philosophy. Without the continued inspiration from those fields, comparative anthropology was destined to be moribund. But with such inspiration, the structural-functionalist presentist and localist orientation had to be given up, and new more flexible, historical, and emically (a term I shall explain shortly) sensitive approaches had to be developed.

2.5. Comparison in the hands of historians and philologists

By contrast, the construction of data, definition of the unit of analysis, and the handling of historical connections, were all totally different in the historicising Ranger approach. Cultures were not reduced to a data point in a fixed, a-historical grid, but as ramifying and meaning-saturated complexes, waxing and waning, over long periods of times, in which they would also coalesce or dissociate from one another, grow away from whatever common origins they may have had, and yet retaining, foremost in the repository of their languages and their overarching language families, fundamental repertoires of meaning and custom that would often prove to be fairly resistant to rapid change, but that on the other hand would be vital and adventurous enough to cross established social, political and economic boundaries, and that (despite processes of local adaptation, transformation and innovation) would still tend to retain some recognisable characteristics in space and time. Dealing with a largely or wholly illiterate pre- or protohistory, data would by definition be scarce and fragmentary, and the Faustian pretence of entering all data in a matrix and letting statistics do the actual creative work of analysis, never came up in this kind of comparison. Inevitably, such historical reconstruction would proceed from the painstaking discovery and thinking-through of similarity and difference, in other words still on *comparison*, but it would be a creative form of comparison, in which the social, political and religious imagination of the analyst (in close personal contact with present-day regional ethnography, language use, and patterns of ethnic self-definition and ethnic contestation) would carefully pick her way – against the background of constant critical feedback, not from a computer spitting out significance tests, but from peers specialising in the same region and the same topic – and ideally (my *Tears of Rain*, 1992, has been a case in point) also from literate and sophisticated members of the communities under study. The unit of study in this approach (cf. van Binsbergen 1981, 1985) would be

- not be some administratively or analytically defined artificial unit instrumentally operationalised – from a distance – by the availability of useful data or the imposition of colonial administrative boundaries,
- but a living social community which the analysts studies *in situ*, in collaboration and critical dialogue with its local members.

This does not allow for the imposition of some external handbook definition of institutions and other cultural features as if these could be meaningfully rendered in some neutral and empty analytical space. Instead, the available ethnographic, linguistic, archival and archaeological knowledge, however unavoidably fragmentary, has to be brought to life through a process of transcultural understanding (yes, the Weberian / Diltheyan *Verstehen*, in more recent approaches *a.k.a.* the *emic* approach as distinct from the distant analytical impositions of the *etic* approach; cf. Headland *et al.* 1990; van Binsbergen 2003: 22 *f.*). *Emic* analysis is an operation that takes as its point of departure the local participants's specific categories and language use, against the background of the local life world and cosmology. On such a basis, comparison within this historical school only secondarily proceeds to the formulation of more comprehensive, comparative concepts in which the local specificities may be carefully and reticently rendered without being violated by analytical reduction.

#2.5. EMIC AND ETIC. '*emic* and *etic* express the distinction between an internal structuring of a cultural orientation such as is found in the consciousness of its bearers, on the one hand, and, on the other, a structuring that is imposed from the outside. *Etic* has nothing to do with ethics in the sense of the philosophy of the judgement of human action in terms of good and evil. Pike's terminology is based on a linguistic analogy. In linguistics one approaches the description of speech sounds from two complementary perspectives: that of phonetics (hence *-etic*), which furnishes a purely external description, informed by anatomical and physical parameters, revolving on the air vibrations of which the speech sounds consist; and the perspective of phonology, whose basic unit of study is the phoneme (adjective: 'phonemic', hence *-emics*): the smallest unit of speech sound that is effectively distinguished by language users competent in a particular language, basing themselves on the distinctive features of that speech sound. (...) Pike thus codified the two-stage analytical stance (both *etic* and *emic*) of the classic anthropology that had emerged in the second quarter of the twentieth century with such proponents as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Griaule and Leiris.' (van Binsbergen 2003: 22 *f.*)

This is the main point of criticism of (a) the Amsterdam approach that emerges from a close look at (b) the Rangerian alternative: *while the former a) freezes institutions and the associated groups in space and time and therefore does nothing but hegemonically produce research artefacts within a closed academic discourse, the former (b) acknowledges that the nature and meaning of the products of human cultural and symbolic action (institutions, and the social relations and groups surrounding and carrying them in space and time) are not immutable and timeless, nor are the social relations and groups around them immutable and timeless, but all have their proper history even if we do not know that history yet – and the central purpose of comparison is to bring out that history, painstakingly and by methodologically sound reference to all the empirical data at our disposal.*

But while the Rangerian approach thus appears, not only much more difficult (apart from the much exaggerated problems of sample construction and the underlying mathematics of statistical testing) but also incomparably superior.

Yet, while it did manage (at least in the perception of those partial to it, like myself) to dramatically enrich and deepen our insight into historical processes and underlying continuities in South Central, Southern and Eastern sub-Saharan Africa, also that comparative approach is subject to severe limitations. Some of these may be overcome, *e.g.* in order to use literally all available data a researcher should become more conversant with comparative linguistics, archaeology, genetics, ecological science, astronomy, than most participants in the Ranger network were in the high time of its functioning. Meanwhile, the rise of the Internet has led to a dramatic increase of the interdisciplinary accessibility of academic knowledge, and has greatly intensified the rate and speed of communication between re-

searchers worldwide. Another series of shortcomings however is inherent to comparative research as such. This will take us, finally, to the matter of comparability as a paradigmatic problem.

2.6. Comparability as a paradigmatic problem

2.6.1. The problem of aggregation

The problem of aggregation may be illustrated by an example from state-of-the-art comparative mythology. One of the great recent assets of this field is the global mythological data base which the Leningrad (Russia) professor of African anthropology, Yuri Berezkin, compiled over the years on the basis of a painstaking perusal of all available published sources of myths *etc.* Berezkin works with a high-resolution classification system, where most known mythical motifs are cut up in several constituent parts before being entered into the database: a fictitious example just for illustration, 'the Ogre' would be cut up in such entries as 'the Ogre is human', 'the Ogre is defeated by the son of a virgin woman', 'the Ogre inhabits a confined subterranean space', 'the Ogre is given to shape-shifting', *etc.* As a result about 2000 motifs are discerned and entered into distribution analysis (yielding exquisite global maps, *e.g.* Berezkin 2010), and subjected to statistical analysis. In passing we note that this method owes much to the tradition of cross-cultural research in anthropology, discussed above by reference to the 'Amsterdam School'. By contrast, today's dean of comparative mythology, the prominent Sanskritist Michael Witzel (2001, 2012), in his path-breaking work of the past decade distinguishes a far smaller number of motifs (less than 100), and discusses their identity, similarity or difference not with the mechanical methods of the data base, but with the *Verstehen* methodology of philological and text-critical analysis. This brings Witzel close to the method described above for the Ranger network, but with substantial differences in Witzel's advantage: his scope is global instead of regional, he personally knows many of the languages and cultures that he deals with and as a result can bring to bear upon his analysis the intimate semantic analysis that comes with such intimate familiarity, and he makes extensive use of such ancillary fields of science as state-of-the-arts population genetics in order to ground his analysis in a solid scientific context of the prehistory of Anatomically Modern Humans.

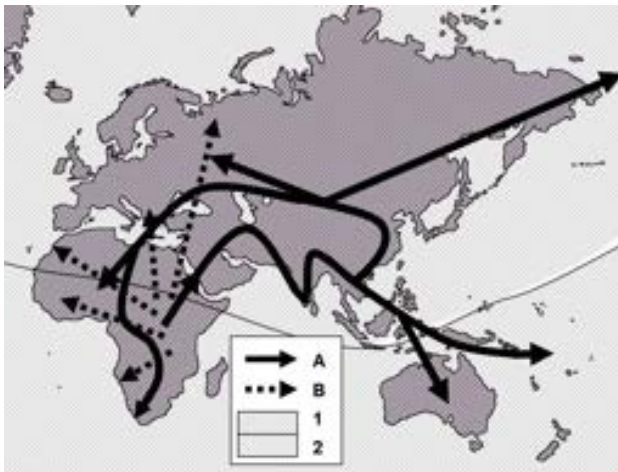
My own position has been even more restricted and low-resolution: brutally and tentatively reducing the corpus of world mythology to only a few dozen (say, 40) 'Narrative Complexes' of very wide scope, in other words at a high level of aggregation, I have presented (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010d; all included as chapters in this book) an argued if daring reconstruction (against the background of the reconstructed prehistory of linguistic macro-families and modes of production) of the emergence of most of these Narrative Complexes in the course of the last two score of ka mainly in the Asian continent, on which basis I have then proceeded, by various methods of close reading and triangulation, to reconstructed the small, original mythological package, 'Pandora's Box', which Anatomically Modern Humans developed inside the African continent prior to the 'Out-of-Africa' migration from 80–60 ka BP.²⁵

²⁵ At the Fourth Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Cambridge (MA, USA), 2010, a debate between Boris Oguibéne, Yuri Berezkin and myself specifically addressed the problem of aggregation, Oguibéne reproaching (seconded by me) Berezkin for the violent imposition of analytical categories that did not attempt to reflect the historical actors's own *emic* distinctions. Berezkin's unconvincing defence was that he was merely doing what was scientifically right, *i.e.* engaging in a job of compilation and comparison – as a scientist, as distinct from a scholar, he felt justified to leave the *emic* approach to others. This doggedly scientific response seems



© according to Berezkin (2010: 122, Fig. 7.7)

Fig. 2.1. The global distribution of the *Atalanta* type version of *Magic Flight*



1. 'Laurasia' mythologies (= A)

True cosmogony and anthropogony; Cosmic Egg; Father Heaven / Mother Earth; History as epic/linear; Flood myths; Kings and Heroes

2. 'Gondwana' mythologies (= B)

No true cosmogony or anthropogony; 'From the tree'; Other Laurasian traits may be absent, e.g. no Flood myths; History as cyclical

Fig. 2.2. My rendering of Michael Witzel's proposal for absolute discontinuity in comparative world mythology

While these examples deal with the problem of aggregation at the level of data definition and categorisation, aggregation of course is also a problem at the level of the definition of the historical population from which the data derive. We have seen that the cross-cultural school whose main tool is a systematic matrix of data with as few empty cells as possible, made for extreme fragmentation of the

typical of ex-Soviet scholarship; I met other instances of it in correspondence with Berezkin's Russian colleagues.

historical populations from which the data derive, and in principle ignored all historical and regional interrelations between such populations. Concentrating on real-life historical population and conversant with their political, cultural and linguistic interrelations and sensitivities (at least in Ranger's case), the populations handled in the emically-orientated Ranger and Witzel approaches largely escape the violence of such imposed fragmentation, and even in the comparative analysis continue to feature dynamically more or less as they are, or used to be, conceived by the historical actors, reflecting the changes in the latter's perceptions over time.

However, also in the emically-orientated approach the historical actors do not form the only, not even the principal, constituency to which the analyst is answerable. The analyst tends to be a representative of her or his gender, generation, profession, class, position within the world system, position within the global political economy of knowledge, and this also influences how the historical populations are conceived in the comparative exercise.

Witzel is not alone in his belief that 'South' cultures and languages are constituted on a radically different footing from their 'North' counterparts. Inspired by Trombetti's work of a century ago,²⁶ the prominent linguist Roger Blench (2006) seems to hold a similar belief.

However, the idea of such a fundamental and early bifurcation of Anatomically Modern Humans is offensive to me,

- not only in the light of the global politics of knowledge (where anti-hegemonic approaches such as Afrocentricity and Postcolonial Theory militate lest our academic work continues to replicate the White racist, colonial world image upheld in the North Atlantic a century ago; cf. Mudimbe 1988; Asante 1987, 1990; van Binsbergen 2003, 2011; Bernal 1987)
- but also in the light of the overwhelming genetic,²⁷ linguistic²⁸ and comparative mythological (see below) evidence to the effect that demic diffusion from Asia over the past 15 ka has massively fed back genes, as well as linguistic, mythological and other cultural elements (van Binsbergen 2010, 2013) back into Africa after they had developed, ramified and transformed, ever since the Out-of-Africa migration, inside Asia in the course of one or two dozens of ka.

Inspired by the mythology I encountered during half a century of association with the Nkoya people of South Central Africa, which though situated in sub-Saharan Africa shows many of Witzel's Laurasian traits, I have argued the continuity of African and African mythologies on several occasions, cf. van Binsbergen (2007, 2010). For the sake of the present chapter's argument, Fig. 14.1 and Table 14.1 provisionally present the distribution of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg, which Witzel

²⁶ Which I however read in the opposite way, notably as a plea for situating the origin of Bantu in Asia; cf. Trombetti (1923).

²⁷ #2.6. THE BACK-INTO-AFRICA MOVEMENT (not a massive migration but often just a trickle), of people, their genes and their cultural achievements, from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa since 15 ka BP, was particularly discovered by: Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Underhill 2004; Coia *et al.* 2005.

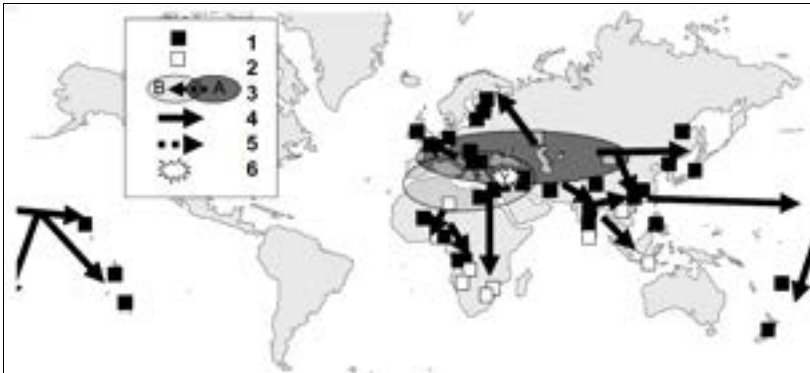
²⁸ The linguistic evidence is not generally agreed on, but it includes the demonstrable affinity of sub-Saharan Africa's most numerous linguistic macrophylum, Nigercongo, with the reconstructed proto-phylum *Borean (postulated for Central to East Asia, c. 25 ka BP), and with the Austric and Amerind macrophyla; cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77 f.; van Binsbergen, in press (d). I have a hunch (based, among other reasons, on the fact that the oldest attestations of Bantu derive not from Africa but from West Asia; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 81 f.) that Bantu emerged under considerable Asian notably Austric influence, probably outside sub-Saharan Africa, where it was yet immensely successful but merely over the past 2 ka.

singles out as specifically Laurasian i.e. Northern and un-African.

2.7. Methodological and theoretical lessons to be learned from the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg

2.7.1. The comparative variable as paradigm

Let us try to bring out some of the important theoretical and methodological aspects of the act of comparison, by concentrating closely on the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg, and its distribution in space and time.



for details see: van Binsbergen 2010m, reprinted in this book as chapter 14.. here also the relevant data are tabulated and referenced as Table 14.1.²⁹

Fig. 2.3. The Cosmic Egg in World mythology: Distribution and proposed historical transmission (without taking a Sunda alternative into account)(copied after Fig. 14.2 below, where also the data points are accounted for in the accompanying Table

Before we allow ourselves to be carried away by the clarity of the distribution map and by the plausibility of the historical connections suggested there (a distribution can suggest such connections but cannot really by itself determine what the historical sequence underlying the connection has been: from data point A to B, or the other way around, or both de-

²⁹ Although the proposed historical reconstruction appears to me the most plausible, and tallies with that of scores of other supposedly Pelagian traits (cf. van Binsbergen in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 372f.), it is only fair to indicate an alternative interpretation, in terms of Oppenheimer's (1998) Sunda Hypothesis – situating the origin of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg in South East Asia, and assuming it to have spread, not only north and east into East Asia and Oceania, but also west, on the wings of the postulated Sunda maritime expansion in the course of the first half of the Holocene. Oppenheimer claims that the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East including the Bible thus have a prehistoric Sunda origin. I have elsewhere argued why specifically in regard of Ancient Near Eastern myths this is very implausible (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008), although as a general hypothesis of transcontinental influence Oppenheimer's model has, as admitted above, considerable value especially for the study of Africa – so much so that in the context of the 2012 Leiden conference I presented (2012b, incorporated in 2019a) a paper setting out the genetic, comparative religious, archaeological and ethnographic evidence in favour of what I have come to designate as the 'Oppenheimer–Dick-Read–Tauchmann Hypothesis'; cf. van Binsbergen 2012b, and in press (b): ch. 12). In chapter 14 of the present book, we shall come back to the relative merits, in regard of the Cosmic Egg, of the Pelagian and Sunda Models.

pending upon an implied third point C), a close look at the entries in Table 14.1 remind us of the aggregate and constructed nature of the category of the 'Cosmic Egg'.

The notion of the 'Cosmic Egg' simply cannot be a universal³⁰ of human thought – therefore its distribution in time and space is too restricted. Eggs have constituted the visibly dominant reproductive format of all macroscopic animal life forms with the exception mainly of mammals including marsupials, and a few fish species (which are viviparous), and therefore the *concept* of the egg might be argued to have been universal and perennial ever since the appearance of conscious human life on earth, perhaps some four million years ago. Of the reconstructed *Borean roots with the semantics 'egg', *LVNV has reflexes in the present-day linguistic macrophyla Austric and Sinocaucasian; and *TVLV in Eurasiatic (including Indo-European and most other language groups of the Northern half of the Old World as well as Alaska and Greenland) and Sinocaucasian (Starostin & Starostin 1998–2008, 'long-range etymology'). However, the concept of 'cosmic' in the sense of 'belonging to the universe, the entire world as knowable to humans; Heaven and Earth' is not universal and, in Western thought, strictly speaking has not been attested before the Presocratics.³¹ Recent comparative mythology suggests that, replacing the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land, the Separation of Heaven and Earth became a central mythical motif in the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic, less than 20 ka BP, and subsequently became the dominant cosmology of Anatomically Modern Humans in most parts of the world.

What then is the idea of the 'Cosmic Egg'? It consist in a *Gestalt*-like concept, model or ideal type which a subset of humanity (to be defined as: *we, classifying and interpreting analysts belonging to a North Atlantic intellectual undertaking called 'comparative research'*) use to characterise and categorise the cosmogonic notions of historical participants in hundreds of settings in time and space, some of which may appear close to the analytical concept of the 'Cosmic Egg', while others may be relatively far removed from that concept and have to be actively interpreted before they can be classified as 'Cosmic Egg'. *E.g.*, The Nkoya of Western Zambia, South Central Africa, are not even included in Table 14.1, but by a stretch of the imagination they might be, for their traditions have it that the Creator was a bird, and that the Creator's child (gender is unmarked in the Nkoya language) is also a bird (*Likota Lya Bankoya* 4: 1; van Binsbergen 1988a, 1992) – birds are without exceptions (Blackburn & Evans 1986) born from eggs, so by implication the Nkoya have a two-tiered egg-centred cosmogony; on the strength of this argument I have now been added them to the distribution map. We may make this claim all the more confidently, since the distribution map Fig. 14.2 / 2.3 shows that the Cosmic Egg motif may be claimed for several other South Central and Southern African settings – although not unequivocally.

Looking through the dozens of entries of Table 14.1, we will realise that whenever the analyst decides to enter an attestation (defined by time, place, and designation of the historical par-

³⁰ To avoid misunderstanding: I am saying this for the sake of the argument only. I am not implying that Witzel presents the Cosmic Egg as a universal of human thought. His claim is explicitly more restricted: for him, the motif of the Cosmic Egg is a distinctive feature of Laurasian, *i.e.* North, 'civilised', usually literate, mythologies.

³¹ Gatzemeier 2001, Mercier 1957; *cf.* Dasgupta 1922 / 1992 for South Asian; Needham 1975, Allan 1991, for China; and Blacker & Loewe 1975, Eliade 1971, Middleton 1967 / 1975, King 1986, Zuesse 1979, for other cultures. Many studies in the anthropology of religion and in comparative religion have employed the term 'cosmos' as an analytical term to denote the historical participant's conception of the world, but such use of the term amounts to a form of etic imposition as long as we have not explicitly ascertained to what (probably very limited) extent the local historic participants whose mythologies we reconstruct, may be supposed to have an all-encompassing notion of the Universe. .

ticipants) into the Table, this is as a result of a complex operation of documentation, perception, assessment in the light of an operational definition of 'Cosmic Egg', checking against doubles, etc. No entry is totally self-evident, although it is likely that the analyst has a few 'type cases' in mind omission of which from the database would make the exercise futile and meaningless. The Finnish attestation would qualify as such a type case:

Luonnotar, daughter of the creation god, mated with a bird, and produced an egg; from this egg emerged Heaven, Earth, Sun, and Moon.

This is almost literally the formulation of the *Vayu Purana* (4.74-75) – which confirms the close affinity between Scandinavian (even if Uralic, i.e. non-Indo-European) and Indian (by implication: Indo-European) mythology. Yet even the most famous example of a Cosmic Egg in the European tradition, that of Leda mating with Zeus in the shape of a swan,³² keeps a considerable distance from that type case and can only be entered into the database as the result of a complex act of reasoning and interpretation. For although important gods and goddesses – later transformed and demoted into heroes heroines in the Troy saga – emerged from Leda's egg (Helena. Clytaemnestra, and the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux), Leda's egg was not claimed to have been the origin of the world or of humankind as a whole.

I am not spelling out these analytical details in order to cast doubt upon comparative mythology or any other comparative science, but in order to bring out my contention that the operation of comparison always consists in the application of a model invented by the analyst and external to the data – or let us say, the application of a paradigm. By implication, comparability (as, in this case, the comparability of various mythological and religious attestations suggestive of an egg-inspired cosmogonic notion) is not, in the first place, a given inherent in the data involved, but is the result of the analyst's judgment as to the extent to which any individual case comes close to the type case, ideal type, model or paradigm. *Comparability is in the eyes of the beholder.*

³² # 2.7. LEDA AND ZEUS: THE MYTHEME OF THE COSMIC EGG IN WESTERN EURASIA. The following footnote was taken from van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 363, see also there for the bibliography:

Leda with Zeus as swan: Ovid *Heroides* XVII. 55; Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* III, 16, § 1; Horace, *The 'Ars Poetica' = Epistula ad Pisones* 147. (*gemino ... ab ovo*); Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, II, 57d; IX 373; Lucianus, *Dialogi Deorum* 24.2 = 79.4.2; 2 (?) = 79.6.1 (?); 26.2 = 79.25.2; Virgil, *Ciris* 489; Lycophronis, *Alexandra*, ed. Scheer 1958: II, 48-49 (88); with thanks to Atsma, 2010, 'Leda', and to Fred Woudhuizen for checking and completing these references.

The divinity of the siblings Clytaemnestra, Helena, Castor and Pollux, their respective fathers, and their possible division over two eggs have constituted points of disagreement among the ancient mythographers. Much more could and should be said about Leda's rape by Zeus. I read this myth as follows: *it recounts an important phase in the succession of cosmologies and worldviews in Western Eurasia in the course of the Bronze Age, when male sky gods representing the cosmogony of the separation of Heaven and Earth as associated with invading, violent Indo-European speakers, came to supplant (or relegate to subaltern status), in other words rape, goddesses that were derivatives or variants of the Mother of the Waters, on which the ancient Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land hinged, and whose main symbols consisted in white aquatic bird, especially the swan.* Cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 140 and *passim*. And more on Flood myths in chapter 15 and 16, below.



Fig. 2.4. The Cosmic Egg in the rendering by the Zulu Lightning wizard Madela (Schlosser 1992)

One would have wished that on this point a world of difference could be claimed to exist between the manifestly blinkered analytical impositions of the Amsterdam / USA school of comparative anthropology, and the more subtle and emically-orientated historical and philological approaches of Ranger and Witzel. However, the differences between these two major school are not so great. Admittedly, the former is entrenched in a stance of alienated, emic imposition, whereas the latter on the basis of linguistic, cultural and historical understanding within a well-known, more or less limited region does take into account the historical participants' own perceptions and significations to a much greater extent. Yet even on the Ranger / Witzel side we cannot escape the fact that the selection and definition of items to be compared, in the last analysis, is entirely in the hands of the analysts, using a cosmopolitan language and the set of categories and theoretical concerns of a cosmopolitan field of knowledge construction (one's own discipline, and academia at large) that is very far removed from the historical participants' own life world and own conceptualisations. In addition to the motif of the Cosmic Egg, let us consider a few further examples.

Flood myths have played a prominent role in the recent debates on Comparative Mythology (e.g. Witzel 2010, van Binsbergen 2010, 2012; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; also see chs 15 and 16, below). Despite the fact that at least half of the world's recorded myths about a great inundation wiping out humanity and animal life in general, derive from North America, the type case of Flood myth is Noah's Biblical Flood and its antecedents and ramifications in the Ancient Near East; yet geologists have failed to prove the historicity of Noah's Flood (Aksu *et al.* 2002; The Canadian Press 2001, *pace* Haarmann 2003, 2005 and the literature

cited in footnote 416, below). Throughout the Old World, from Iceland to the Philippines, we may discern the model of the ‘Elaborate Flood Myth’, which goes through the following phases (van Binsbergen 2010: 181; reprinted here as ch. 8):

- a. ‘The cosmic order is provisionally established, including humans, but Heaven and Earth still merge, or are at least still connected through a Tower, ladder, pole, thongs, ropes, etc.
- b. humans commit a transgression (sorcery, murder, eating from forbidding fruit, discovery of sexuality in general, more specifically incest, etc.)
- c. the connection between Heaven and Earth is severed, and humankind is destroyed by a Flood
- d. usually by the intercession of a (or the) divine being, there are one or more Flood survivors, whose main task is to repopulate the Earth; a typical mytheme here is that of the twin siblings who survive the Flood and repopulate the world incestuously (cf. Katete and Luhamba, among the Nkoya; cf. Egyptian Shu and Tefnut, Greek Apollo and Artemis, and Dogon Nommo among the West African Dogon) – note the parallel with the discovery of sexuality, murder and incest (b)
- e. the renewed humankind attempts to re-connect to Heaven with the various natural, personal and ritual devices listed above – especially a tower
- f. in the process the Confusion of Nations occurs – a multitude of ethnic and language groups emerge.’

I cannot go here into all the extremely interesting aspects of Flood myths, their relation with an elemental cycle of transformations and with an older cosmogony according to which not the Separation of Heaven and Earth, but that of Water and Land (which the Flood upsets and relegates to a Pre-cosmogonic state) is the true beginning of human history. Just like the Cosmic Egg, also Flood myths were (on the basis of Frazer’s erroneous assertions a century ago) supposed to be the privilege of Northern, Laurasian mythologies, and to be absent from Africa – a claim that is manifestly wrong.³³ We will come in a moment to what this means for the theory and methodology of comparability. My main point at this juncture is that Flood myths occur so frequently over virtually the entire globe, and that the forms they take vary so immensely, that all comparison of such myths depends on considerable sleight of hand on the part of the analyst – in other words, on a very high degree of aggregation.³⁴ Is the Biblical story of Lot and his daughters a Flood story?³⁵ It has the elements of total destruction, depopulation and repopulation, and incest, but lacks the watery element and only obliquely touches on the Confusion of Nations (the story has an ethnic implication, though, by relegating the Israelites’s hated neighbours the Moabites and the Ammonites to the fruits of incest; *Genesis* 19:30 f.). Already a decade ago, we argued (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 91, 99n) that even the central Hellenic tradition of the Trojan War

³³ See the distribution map, with fully referenced data points, in van Binsbergen 2012 :72 f. :

³⁴ Cf. Isaak 2005; Dundes 1988; Frazer 1918; for an initial inventarisation.

³⁵ Below (ch. 8) we shall come back to Lot and his daughters. While taking the narrative as a fiery variant of a Flood story, the possible Bantu implications should not escape our attention: the *Old Testament* offers one of the earliest attestations of Proto-Bantu roots, such as Jabbok (‘fordable place’; *Genesis* 32:22), Canaan (‘place of refusal’; *Genesis* 33:19), and several more – including the name of Lot; cf. Karst 1931; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2021d.

may be considered a transformed Flood story. Are the whimsical North American stories where a *Divine Trickster both elicits and escapes a deluge*, proper Flood Stories that belong in the same bracket of classification? Is the well-known Grimm story about the Bean, the Straw and the Fiery Coal (AT 295; AT = Aarne-Thompson's famous classification of fairy tale motifs), perishing in the water they try to cross? Is the story (recorded both from the Zambezi area, South Central Africa, and from Indonesia) of a stranger old woman asking assistance in a village and when this is denied her, destroying the village with a flood – a Flood story at a par with the others? Is it enough to have a tale about destructive water to conclude that we are dealing with a Flood story? (In any transformative cycle of elements, in many parts of the world, Water – on the basis of common everyday experience of any humans since the domestication of fire, at least half a million years BP – would be a destructor of Fire regardless of the additional presence of any of the themes of the 'Standard Elaborate' model cited above). We cannot ask the historical actors from the many hundreds of provenances from which we have what looks like Flood stories. It is the analyst herself who makes the selection and, with the powers of persuasion constructed in his scholarly language use, conjures the apparently very different material together into one scholarly argument.

This process of concept construction, operationalisation, classification of data into the relative straightjacket of variables to be scored and measured, does not just affect the relatively abstruse and text-based domain of comparative mythology, but also the often more concrete and tangible comparative study of institutions in the history of a period or a region. Much of the work of the Ranger network was aimed at the documentation, classification and periodisation of *witchcraft* against the background of the evolution of South Central African village society between the 19th and the 21st centuries CE. Colonial witchcraft trials formed an important source of data, even though these were patently biased by the fact that under the law in force, legal action was targeted not at the practitioner of witchcraft (which was considered a mere symbolic act, however threatening, but without tangible not actionable material effects) but at the *accuser of witchcraft*.³⁶ Ranger brought an enormous energy, great scientific leadership and impressive charisma, substantial funds, a mesmerising style of writing, and a genuine identification with the lasting liberation of African people to this kind of research, yet his handicaps for such witchcraft research were obvious. In a region with more than a hundred different languages, the only language he commanded was English; not villages and urban squatter compounds, but universities, churches, mission stations and archives – the formal-sector centres *par excellence* of hegemonic redefinition of the African experience and identity in past and present – were about the only contexts in which he interacted with Africans. His enormous stylistic powers enabled him to gloss over the many

³⁶ #2.8. WITCHCRAFT BELIEFS AND CRIMINAL LAW. This Eurocentric, scientific perspective on the part of the judges would no longer prevail in witchcraft trials in post-colonial Africa, e.g. in Cameroon, when the judges themselves tend to subscribe to the reality of witchcraft; cf. Geschiere with Fisiy 1995; and my criticism of their theoretical approach, van Binsbergen 2001 / 2017. Incidentally, it has been my personal experience as a field-worker in sub-Saharan Africa that, being surrounded by a community whose language and culture one is in an advanced process of learning, and among which witchcraft beliefs and accusations are commonplace, it may become difficult *not* to adopt (albeit temporarily) such beliefs and project them onto negative encounters in the field. But perhaps I am an unusually suggestible and irrational person. One would have to explore the antecedents of witchcraft beliefs in the North Atlantic region (e.g. Thomas 1971; Ginzburg 1992; Wilson 1975; Favret-Saada & Contreras 1981; Wilby 2005), and their possible Modern and Postmodern aftermath (in terms of now only too fashionable accusations – in the media especially new digital media – of fascism, racism, sexism, pedophilia, necrophilia, of lack of Political Correctness, of populism?) in order to identify a likely source of atavistic, resurging para-witchcraft beliefs in our time and age.

lacunae and contradictions in his data, and to conceal lack of emic inside understanding under a thick blanket of dextrous formulations academic and passionate at the same time. The witchcraft accusations and trials he knew of, were mostly those committed to writing by expatriate civil servants decades ago in distant places whose African life worlds could only fragmentarily be reconstructed by the modern historian, if at all. In such a context, we cannot expect a profound and rich, emic discourse analysis that situates the many different and internally layered South Central African expressions for mystical evil directed at fellow-humans, before projecting these concepts in their evolution in time and their distribution in space. 'Witchcraft, after all, although a topic of British legislation since the Middle Ages, was no longer a recognised living reality in British society in the mid-1900s, nor could the etic expression 'witchcraft' be expected to correspond in detail with any of the similar concepts circulating in South Central Africa from the late 19th to the late 20th century.³⁷

Perhaps the real problem was that the people engaged in this kind of research genuinely believed that with the concept of 'witchcraft', they were handling an authentic, self-evident emic logical concept, that required no further emic discourse analysis. 'Witchcraft' is one of those hybrid concepts, like 'chief' in former British colonial Africa, or 'caste' when applied to former French colonial West Africa, that under the pretence of rendering authentic African exotic 'emic' content, in fact merely projects a European, othering and stereotyping etic concept onto African situations. Nor were these obvious limitations peculiar to Ranger's person and intellectual stance. He realised that in order to make sense of his widely comparative data from all over the former Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi) and adjacent territories, over the better part of a century, and to place them in a meaningful causal sequence, he badly needed (in addition to better emic data, but that need scarcely registered with the documentary historian that he always remained) more, and more systematic, theory than most historians would be prepared to utilise, then as now. Eagerly he embraced the neo-Marxism then *en vogue*, and he became the most authoritative champion of my own Marxist attempts – more abstract-theoretical than properly historical, as Jim Fernandez (1978) was right in pointing out – to make sense (van Binsbergen 1981) of South Central African religious history since c. 1500 CE, and to situate witchcraft, and the move away from witchcraft, within that historical process. Yet, probably significantly, his edited collection on the *Problem of Evil in Central Africa, 1500-2000* never saw the light of day, nor did the published version of his Wiles lectures, Belfast 1978, on *Witchcraft Belief in Three Continents*.³⁸ The problems of comparative work on the

³⁷ The literature on witchcraft beliefs and practices in South Central Africa and adjacent regions is enormous. For a few relatively recent contributions, with extensive bibliography, cf. Geschiere 2013; Bond & Ciekawy 2001; ter Haar 2007; Kiernan 2006.

³⁸ It was precisely, though ominously, in these two regrettably abortive manuscripts that Ranger rendered and praised my own perspectives upon witchcraft. With rare perceptiveness, it was in the context of these manuscripts and of Ranger's Belfast 1978 lectures on witchcraft (sponsored by the Irish whiskey brand Jameson...!) for which they were prepared, that Ranger had already spotted me as a witch in the African fieldwork context, long before I ever contemplated going native to the extent of 'Becoming a Sangoma' (van Binsbergen 1991). To avoid misunderstanding: I am utilising Ranger's work, which – because of its visionary power, and its writing style – has always been a source of immense inspiration and admiration for me, not in order to commit some intellectual parricide, but to bring out some inevitable pitfalls of comparative work. An abundance of similar examples could be picked up all over the literature. For instance, 'states', 'shrines', 'chiefs', 'kings', 'village', 'marriage', 'initiation', 'slave' – all these vital keywords of the historiography (and ethnography) of South Central Africa, create a mere illusion of understanding, because on the ground, in the actual historical situations to which they

history of witchcraft seemed too big for him, and probably for anyone. In the end, his masterly piece on the witch finder Tomo Nyirenda / Mwana Lesa ['God's Son'] remains one of the few tangible and lasting results of his many years of endeavour. And after the historical study of African religion, the topicality of the Zimbabwe war of liberation was to form his main preoccupation.

2.7.2. The unity or fragmentation of humankind³⁹ as a paradigmatic position

There is another paradigmatic problem that comes to light in Witzel's claims concerning the 'Laurasian' nature of the motifs of the Cosmic Egg and of the Flood myth. Here the point is not that the analytical concept we use as the focus of our comparison, turns out to be far removed from the complex and heterogeneous social and cultural reality on the ground. The point is now to realise that also the definition of the human community (in terms of its extent in time and space, and in terms of the name we attach to it) is an analytical construct – indispensable again, but unavoidably distortive.

The readiness to bifurcate present-day humanity in two parts, one with 'civilised' Northern forms of thought, the other with 'primitive' Southern forms, rests on a paradigm⁴⁰ that doubts the *fundamental underlying unity of all present-day humankind, i.e. of all Anatomically Modern Humans*. The rejection of that bifurcation rests on the alternative paradigm affirming such unity. Empirical and theoretical scientific arguments can help to make either paradigm plausible and attractive, but in the last analysis it seems to be the institutional, knowledge-political, and general philosophical position of the analyst that decides. Paradigms come and go, like other scientific fashions, they are not about demonstrable truth but about persuasive self-evidence within a restricted social milieu – e.g. the leading members of a scientific discipline within a particular decade. Essentially irrational and arbitrary, once a paradigm has been securely launched it is the task of the academic establishment to manage and protect it – as it is the task of the academic bohemian, poetic, dare-devil, charlatan or visionary fringe, to challenge such a paradigm and to propose alternatives.

When, unburdened by the politically correct intercultural politeness that has set the tone in transcontinental comparative studies since the decolonisation of South and South East Asia (late 1940s), and sub-Saharan Africa (early 1960s), Michael Witzel maintained for years that African do not have Flood myths nor the cosmogony of the Cosmic Egg, he did more than advertise the limitations of his Africanist knowledge or assert his independence in the face of potentially trivialising political correctness – after all, he is undisputedly one of the world's leading Asianists. In doing so, he implicitly defines the range of comparability of socio-cultural phenomena to encompass less than total humanity. Instead, he proposes a subset

refer, and in the historical actors's (not necessarily consensual!) signification of these situations, they refer to something very complex, floating, internally contradictory, and subject to change. Comparisons using these concepts can only exist at the cost of ignoring these dynamics – yet without such concepts all comparison would be impossible.

³⁹ I have meanwhile done further work on the topic of the fundamental unity of humankind; cf. van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f., and 2020f.

⁴⁰ #2.9. PARADIGMS. As a transient phase in the evolving History of Ideas (and a deceptive pitfall for the epistemology of science), the American historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1974) gained prominence with his idea of the waxing and waning of specific scientific paradigms whose absolute truth value was less important than their being upheld by a particular powerful section of the scholarly community. Kuhn had a great influence on Martin Bernal and the *Black Athena* debate as initiated by the latter.

of half of humanity (a subset to which he himself happens to belong by birth, language and national identity – Germany – , by academic field – the textual study of South Asia – and by (cf. *Goethe*) *Wahlverwandschaft* (with Japan, in many ways), excluding the other half from a number of cultural achievements that may easily pass as signs of accomplishment in civilisation, thought and historical awareness. It is the worldview that reflects the administrative organisation of European universities in the 19th and 20th century, more than the actual history of the world. Movement of people, genes, artefacts, languages and ideas, not the reification of boundaries between continents, has been the reality of human cultural history throughout, and especially ever since the Middle Palaeolithic, when despite the solid geological evidence of 70 kms of open sea separating Timor from New Guinea and Australia, Anatomically Modern Humans yet reached the latter two land masses (60 ka BP; cf. Bednarik 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999a, 1999b, 2003). The implication of state-of-the-art genetics discovering the ‘Back-into-Africa’ movement is that, with reference to recent millennia, we can no longer maintain the illusion of pure conceptual types applying to just one subset of humanity; and if we insist on pure types for the very remote past, e.g. at the time of the Out of Africa migration, there is a considerable risk that we merely, ethnocentrically, project our own prejudiced self-evidences of today, onto that remote past.

Perhaps the same risk is involved when we take the fundamental unity of humankind as our guiding principle in comparative studies. If it were not for today’s experiences of globalisation in communication, travel, international politics and economic life, we might have been unable to project such globalisation onto the remote past, and there already discern the desired unity that we see spasmodically growing all around us today.

Either position, therefore, may be grounded in ideology more than in empirical scientific argument. It is the classic paradigmatic choice between lumpers and splitters. It is the ‘splitter’ orientation that has prevented most linguists over the past few centuries to see the fundamental communalities that (according to the lumpers) unite (nearly) all linguistic macrophyla spoken today, and that, in the course of the 20th c. CE, has gradually been brought out by the succession of the Austric, Dene-Sinocaucasian, Nostratic and eventually *Borean *Hypotheses*. In genetics we are already beyond that point – the deciphering of the human genome in the last few decades has left little doubt as to the genetic unity of all Anatomically Modern Humans. These splendid and inspiring results (with immense implications for our present-day, politically and religiously painfully divided world), let us not forget it, have been the results of painstaking comparative research by tens of thousands of research workers.

I think that also other comparative sciences should take these lessons at heart. Due to the paradigmatic, i.e. essentially preconceived, simplifying and distortive, nature of the definition of our research variables for comparison, let us at least cast our net as widely as possible when it comes to defining the populations exhibiting these variables. Such a position would console us for the inevitable distance implied in any definition of a variable for comparative research. We may be unavoidably, etically, remote from the many different emic positions of the many different historical actors involved in our comparison. But if we take the fundamental unity of humankind as our point of departure (even if we realise that may be the projection of contemporary wishful thinking), we are admitting that, in the last analysis, we have no choice but remaining on familiar ground – that of kindred cultures which, like those to which we ourselves belong, are all descendants (transformed, innovated, sometimes beyond easy recognition) of the cultural package which our Pre-Out-of-Africa ances-

tors developed inside Africa. However much we may err in defining and understanding the cultural items we are comparing, we still bring to that comparison our own humanity which we share with the historical participants, and which means that, complementing the myriad surface differences, there will be underlying communalities and continuities, hence a basis for true understanding across boundaries.

In addition with the argument of *Before the Presocratics*, with which I started out in this chapter, my recent comparative work focussing on Africa's transcontinental continuities with the other continents brings out many further examples:

- The amazing rapprochements (cf. van Binsbergen 2020) between the mythology of Western Eurasia and that of Oceania (with an excursion into West Africa), concerning such mythemes as Land being fished up from the Sea; Delayed Cosmogony as a result of Incessant Mating between Heaven and Earth as Primordial Gods; the Invention of the Sail.
- The reduction to junior status of a chain of Neolithic goddesses from West Africa to China, with the concomitant rise of male celestial gods in the Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 6.4, p. 142)
- The amazing continuity between random generators including tablets in divination in three continents (van Binsbergen 2012: Fig. 8.6, p. 276, and Table 2.3, p. 66)
- The globally converging symbolism of the speckled Leopard-skin, and the even more amazing convergence of its lexical expressions across nearly all the world's linguistic phyla and macrophyla (van Binsbergen 2004 and in preparation (c))
- The amazing continuity between female puberty rights in sub-Saharan Africa and North America – with a whole range of similar parallels, e.g. in the fields of mythology, games, divination, basketry (van Binsbergen 2012a)
- The evidence for a transcontinental cosmology, hinging on a transformative cycle of elements, and found throughout literate Bronze Age Eurasia (resonating in the Presocratics), with ramifications to sub-Saharan Africa and to North America (van Binsbergen 2012a);

In the face of the apparently insurmountable paradigmatic difficulties I have outlined in this paper, one would be inclined to say 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'. Even if crosscultural, let alone transcontinental, comparison is patently complex and difficult, let us rise to the challenge.

2.8. Conclusion

As comparativists, we are Anatomically Modern Humans, engaging – to the extent to which our fields are social, cultural and linguistic – in the comparative analysis of the achievements of Anatomically Modern Humans. However abstrusely we may define our variables for comparison, and however crudely we may force the underlying historically lived reality of our data into the straightjacket of these variables, we would still not be comparing totally unrelated phenomena ('apples with pears'), because in the last analysis what is involved is all fruits from the same tree – that of the cultural history of a fundamentally one

humanity. Let us be tempted to take our results somewhat seriously – even if our comparisons cannot take into account all the local details of the historical actors original conceptualisations and expression, a spirit of communality links them and us.

Chapter 3. Rupture and fusion in the approach to myth (2003 / 2009)

Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics, and long-range historical reconstruction, with an application to the ancient and world-wide mythical complex of Leopard-skin symbolism) (2003 / 2009)⁴¹

ABSTRACT. On the basis of my engagement with myth over the decades, the present chapter seeks to present some 'prolegomena' to the study of myth today. It does so, in the first place, by a short overview of philosophical contributions and implications of the study of myth. After formulating and discussing a possible definition of myth, the argument focuses on two complementary perspectives in the scholarly approach to myth: (a) the objectifying perspective of rupture, versus (b) the participatory and identifying perspective of fusion. After indicating the pros and cons of both, and giving an example (notably, the 'hero fights monster' mytheme) of extensive continuity in myth through space and time, the chapter concludes with a summary of the main results of my long-range comparative research into Leopard and Leopard-skin symbolism, which is informed by loosely interlocking mythical complexes extending all across the Old World and part of the New World, over a time span from the Upper Palaeolithic to the present.

⁴¹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003b, 'Rupture and fusion in the approach to myth (Situating myth analysis between philosophy, poetics, and long-range historical reconstruction, with an application to the ancient and world-wide mythical complex of Leopard-skin symbolism)', paper read at the International Conference 'Myth: Theory and the Disciplines', 12 December 2003, University of Leiden: Research School CNWS (School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies), IIAS (The International Institute for Asian Studies); and NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/myth%20omineke%20defdefdef.pdf; cf.


3.1. Philosophical approaches to myth

In scholarly discourse, myth is often taken for granted as a self-evident genre of symbolic production. As an Africanist empirical scientist I, too, have often followed that approach. However, as an intercultural philosopher, it is my task to deconstruct self-evidences (cf. van Binsbergen 1999b, 2003a, 2015). Hence this chapter's argument.

It is not as if philosophy offers a wide and generally agreed-upon perspective on myth, or as if myth has been one of philosophy's central concerns in the last hundred years.⁴² Students of myth in the literary and social sciences including history will find that philosophers may occasionally take for granted such conceptual usages as have been adopted by the very fields of scholarship whose foundations philosophy is supposed to examine critically. This is largely the case for myth, as it is for philosophers' none too innovative use of the concept of *culture* (cf. van Binsbergen 1999b, 2003a). At one level this may seem to be true even of a post-structuralist philosopher like Derrida. He does engage in debate with Lévi-Strauss on the interpretation of myth of the South American Bororo people (Derrida 1967a: 149 f.), and with Plato (Derrida 1972; cf. Shaked n.d.) on the interpretation of the myth of Thamus and Thot as recounted in *Phaedrus*,⁴³ and in so doing appears to take for granted conventional notions concerning the nature and confines of myth as a self-evident unit of analysis.⁴⁴

⁴² Thus symposia like Poser 1979 or Schrempf & Hansen 2002 do not offer much that is substantially new. Perhaps this is different for Scarborough 1994 or Lincoln 1999, non vidi.

⁴³ The myth of Thamus and Thot, as told by the character Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* (1871 / 360 BCE) does not seem to be generally known. Yet it is a pertinent early criticism of logocentricity! Even the usually very extensive and complete *Wikipedia* digital encyclopedia does not have (2022) an entry on Thamus. Therefore I let the *Phaedrus* fragment follow here, in Jowett's translation (the fragment is scarcely essential to my own argument here, therefore, contrary to the lofty intercultural principles cited in my Introduction, I refrain from presenting the Greek text as well; it is readily available in Plato 1975 / 1999):

#2.10. PLATO'S PHAEDRUS FRAGMENT ON THAMUS AND THOT. 'Soc[rates]. At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth [Thot]; the bird which is called the Ibis is sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days the god Thamus was the king of the whole country of Egypt; and he dwelt in that great city of Upper Egypt which the Hellenes call Egyptian Thebes, and the god himself is called by them Ammon [ Amun]. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he enumerated them, and Thamus enquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. It would take a long time to repeat all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and for the wit. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.'

⁴⁴ Also cf. Derrida 1971; van Binsbergen 2005c / 2015c: ch. 6.

However, at a more fundamental level Derrida's deconstruction of the binary opposition so central to Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth, through the notion of *différance*, and Derrida's critique of logocentricity, do offer some of the essential elements for a meaningful approach to myth today.

Myth has certainly featured in main-stream Western philosophy from its very inception, in the Presocratic philosopher Xenophanes' (c. 570-480 BCE) attacks⁴⁵ on his contemporaries' mythical beliefs (without using the Ancient Greek word μῦθος *muthos*), and somewhat earlier even in Theagenes of Rhegion's allegorical interpretation of stories featuring divine beings.

The etymology of myth is charmingly uncertain. Most authoritative sources refuse to trace it beyond the Greek *muthos*. Partridge⁴⁶ adduces a Indo-European root *mud- or *mudh, 'to think, to imagine', and sees cognates of the Greek form in Lithuanian, Old Slavonic and Old Irish (to which Starostin & Starostin add: Tocharian, Old Greek, Baltic, Germanic, Slavic in general, and Celtic in general). Although Partridge explicitly discusses Latin *muttīre* ('muttering, mowing') as part of a complex centring on the English *mute*, he does not suggest a link with Greek *muthos* on this point. Such a link is however claimed by van Veen and van der Sijs,⁴⁷ who thereby exhaust their inventiveness, in the sense that they, too, refrain from tracing the etymology beyond Greek.⁴⁸ Largely relying on and popularising his hero Astour, Martin Bernal has placed controversial but often plausible proposals of Ancient Egyptian etymologies for Greek words at the heart of his *Black-Athena* thesis.⁴⁹ If *muthos* was not



⁴⁵ Diels 1951-1952: 21, *Fragmente*, 14, 12, 15, 16; cf. de Raedemaeker 1953: xiii f., 100 f.

⁴⁶ Partridge 1979, s.v. 'myth'; corroborated by Pokorný 1959-1969: II, 255; and Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Indo-European etymology'.

⁴⁷ van Veen and van der Sijs 1997, s.v. 'mythe'.

⁴⁸ The Starostin's Tower of Babel also identifies an Indo-European protoform *med, 'to think about, to reason, to decide', likewise with reflexes throughout the Indo-European realm, but impossible to link to Greek *muthos*; for our present purpose it is therefore immaterial that *med, contrary to *mudh, can be given a higher level etymology at the Nostratic / Eurasian level, as *mVrV, 'feel', which has reflexes in Indo-European, Altaic and Dravidian; the Tower of Babel record on this point is muddled, however, for under 'Eurasian etymology' up to eight reflexes *mVrV are listed but none with semantics 'feel'...

⁴⁹ Astour 1967; Bernal 1987, 1991; cf. van Binsbergen 1997a, Index, where Bernal's major etymological proposals are listed. Central within the *Black-Athena* discussion has been Bernal's controversial claim is that the name of the Ancient Greek goddess Athena (for which Karst 1931, cf. van Binsbergen 2021d has plausibly proposed a Central Asian provenance, as for her rival / counterpart Poseidon) should derive from a corruption of *HNT, 'temple of Neith', and that in fact the Ancient Egyptian goddess Neith (of old associated with the primal waters, but also with the Bee, Honey, with women's domestic work but also with weaponry) is the avatar of Athena. In this light it is most interesting that both Athena in Greek myth, and Thot (both with overlapping provinces of learning and wisdom) are, in some accounts, reputed to have been born from their father's head – as befits the divine representation of thought. On Thot's birth from – among many rival accounts, especially from the Twentieth Dynasty – his father Seth / Suteh's head, see Kurth 1975-1986; Bergman 1975-1986. On Athena's birth, see: Hesiod (1914 CE / c. 700 CE), *Theogonia*, 886 f., 924.; Pindar (1879 / 5th c.BCE), *Olympiana Carmina*, vii. 35 (Hephaestus opened Zeus's head); other gods assisted, and the birth place was Triton / Laco Tritonis: Apollodorus (1921 CE / 4th . c. CE), *Bibliotheca*, i. 4. § 6; *Scholium ad Pindari Olympiana Carmina*, vii. 66; Athena was born in full armour, Stesichorus *apud* Tzetzes (1601 CE / 12th c. CE) *Commentarii ad Lycophonem*, 355; Philostratus (1893 CE / ca. 200 CE) *Imagines*, ii. 27; *Scholium ad Apollonium Rhodium*. iv. 130; Atsma, 'Athena'. n.d. The main source for Thot's alleged birth from Seth's head is a 20th-Dynasty papyrus, to be dated to the end of the 2nd mill. BCE – the Late Bronze Age, associated with the Sea Peoples's episode and with the account (of contested historicity) of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. This is half a millennium before Hesiod, and it is unlikely that

among Bernal's original proposals, it might have been. For in Ancient Egyptian, *mdwj*  means 'speak, talk; word, saying', and *mdwt*  'speech, matter'.⁵⁰ In general, the combination of both a semantic and a phonological fit is considered a strong indication for a valid etymological connection.⁵¹

The word μῦθος was common from Homeric times onwards, denoting 'speech, spoken word, story, fable', usually without implications as to the truth or falsehood attributed to its contents (Liddell & Scott 1968, s.v. 'μῦθος'). What we classify today as myth, are stories told by Plato, e.g. concerning hamos and Thot, or the myth of the original duality and bisexuality of all human beings in *Symposium*,⁵² the myth of Er at the end of *De Re Publica / Republic*, or most famous the Parable of the Cave in Book VII of the same work. Gradually an opposition was installed between *muthos* and *logos*; the former would increasingly denote the furtive, oral statement in specific situations, a statement which could be just hearsay and need not be true; while the latter would increasingly denote the compelling expression of law and order, immutable philosophical truth, divine rule, the divine creative act, and hence a transcendent form of truth which was increasingly denied to *muthos*. The emergence of philosophical rationality in classical Greece has often⁵³ been described in terms of the transition from *mythos* to *logos*, a process in which Aristotle rather than his teacher Plato appears ultimately as

'...! maestro di color che sanno'⁵⁴ –

'the master of those who know', that is, of those who have left myth behind them.⁵⁵ In the process, the critical approach to what we now call 'Greek myths' was further developed, e.g. in the work of Euhemerus (300 BCE), who saw all mythical divine characters as originating in deified historical human beings.

that Egyptian text was conceived under Aegean influence – but there may have been a common third origin (Hittite?) for both.

⁵⁰ Gardiner 1994: 571; Hannig 2000: 1206. Because of the nature of Ancient Egyptian writing the vocalisation of its words is nearly always somewhat uncertain.

⁵¹ Purists among historical linguistics would add, as a third condition, the explicit formulation of correspondence rules setting forth the systematic transformation of linguistic forms between the language which a proposed etymology brings together – despite extensive attempts (e.g. Ehret 1995; Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994) this third requirement is not yet met in the present case (Takacs 1999, 2001) – I am grateful to the historical linguist V. Blažek for this reminder.

⁵² Plato 1921 (1975): *Symposium*, Aristophanes' speech.

⁵³ Cf. Nestle 1941; Dupré 1973-1974; Hatab 1990; Heidegger 1984; Gadamer 1996; Brisson 1982; Detienne 1981; Edmonds 2001; Morgan 2000.

⁵⁴ ...'the master of those who know'... Dante, *La Divina Commedia*, Inferno IV: 131.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Metaphysica* 1074b 1f., where Aristotle could be construed (cf. Dupré 1973-1974: 949) to use *muthos* more or less in our present-day sense, although it is more likely that he simply means 'oral tradition':

'Our forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to their posterity a tradition, in the form of a myth [ἐν μῦθου σχήματι] that these [celestial] bodies are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature.'

Cf. Hegel 1992: 20, where the same idea is expressed:

'Die Mythe gehört zur Pädagogie des Menschengeschlechtes.'

However, literary criticism, not philosophy, became the field where scholars pondered over myths, and the concept itself was not philosophically belaboured until the late 18th century CE, when Schelling proposed a very subtle philosophical approach to mythology. He thus gave the decisive impetus to the development, as a major component of classical studies (which were an emergent scientific discipline at the time), of a science of mythology, whose first major exponent was Karl Ottfried Müller.⁵⁶ It needs no longer surprise us that the word 'myth' was only first attested in the English language as late as 1830,⁵⁷ a quarter of a century later even than in Dutch (1804-1808).⁵⁸ Classicists, anthropologists (Tylor,⁵⁹ Lang, Frazer) and comparative religionists (Max Müller, Otto) grabbed hold of the relatively orphaned concept of myth, and it is in the hands of such specialists that a common, consensual scholarly understanding of myth has arisen between 1850 and 1950 – as the expression of a mythopoeic constructing of world and meaning that, while not impossible to understand, still was considered to be worlds apart from the scientific rationality which the pursuers of these disciplines attributed to themselves. From this relatively recent context, so replete with Faustian rationality and condescending objectification, arose the notion that we know what myths are ('a bunch of lies') and how we can identify them – that they are out there, to be drawn into the orbit of our scholarly analysis.

None than the neo-Kantian philosopher Cassirer (1874-1945) has more emphasised the extent to which the articulation of a mode of knowing beyond mythical thought was absolutely constitutive of the Enlightenment.⁶⁰ And it is mainly to Cassirer that we owe, in modern philosophy, an extensive body of reasoning on the nature of myth, on mythical thought as a phase in the intellectual development of humankind, and on the use of myth in the construction of viable, even dangerous, socio-political communities. For Cassirer (who wrote on Einstein's two theories of relativity and on the epistemology of the natural sciences with the same authority as on Kant and Heidegger), the only way to appreciate mythical thought is by contrasting it with scientific thought. This operation is claimed to highlight⁶¹ what Cassirer considers to be the two principal characteristics of mythical thought:

- unity of being between subject and world, as well as
- the immediacy of experience.

Here Cassirer shows himself a true heir of the Enlightenment. No less rationalistic than that great twentieth-century CE anthropologist of myth Lévi-Strauss, Cassirer sees in myth a way of thinking, of conceptualising, the world, rather than a mode of religious existential signifi-

⁵⁶ Müller 1825; cf. Momigliano 1984; Blok 1994, 1997.

⁵⁷ Little *et al.* 1978, s.v. 'myth'.

⁵⁸ van Veen and van der Sijs 1997, s.v. 'mythe'.

⁵⁹ Tylor 1948 (1971).

⁶⁰ Cassirer 1946, 1953-1957, 1955, 1961. Peter Gay's 1973 splendid and authoritative intellectual history of the Enlightenment cites Cassirer as his main inspiration.

⁶¹ In ways clearly reminiscent of his contemporary, the French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl with his theory of participation in 'primitive thought', but, in Cassirer's case, methodically worked out by reference to the Kantian *a-priori* categories.

cation.⁶² However, Lévi-Strauss shows the anthropologist's fascination for the beauty of such mythical thought, for which he seeks to formulate a systematic poetics (in terms of deep structure and transformation, among other concepts), thus rendering possible the identification of specific mythical thought and the systematic comparison between different forms of mythical thought. Cassirer, by contrast with Lévi-Strauss, remains even truer to the tenets of the Enlightenment, in that Cassirer considers mythical thought an essentially erroneous mode of thinking about the world.

Whatever the merits and limitations of Cassirer's approach to myth, throughout the twentieth century CE philosophy has been mainly fascinated by other themes than myth, and has approached these from other perspectives than Neo-Kantianism. As a result Cassirer's impressive edifice remains largely isolated. Some of it was circulated in the social sciences, in a somewhat attenuated and bowdlerised form, by Cassirer's admirers Suzanne Langer, Karl Mannheim, and C.W. Hendel. Few philosophical handbooks carry even an entry on 'myth'. Rather than reflecting on the processes of identity formation, and on the construction of world and meaningfulness through verbal articulation, which lie implied in the concept of myth, many philosophers content themselves with using the word 'myth', without further problematisation, in the loose, Modernist *i.e.* disenchanted, and one-sidedly pejorative, sense of 'a collective representation⁶³ that is patently untrue and that serves specific functions of justification and rationalisation for those who bring it in circulation and / or adhere to it'.⁶⁴

Cassirer wrote at a time when, inside Academia at least, scientific rationality went through an unbroken series of triumphs, when the cultural and somatic Other as representing a sizeable collectivity was largely absent from intellectuals's everyday practical experience and nicely tucked away in distant colonies, and when the Modernist heritage of the Enlightenment appeared to be humankind's main defence against such frightening forms of mythical irrationality as nationalism, state Communism and National Socialism as marked the first half of the twentieth century.

Cassirer died a few months after Horkheimer and Adorno, in their American exile, published their *Dialektik der Aufklärung*,⁶⁵ where the taken-for-granted juxtaposition between myth and Enlightenment is reconsidered:

'...schon der Mythos ist Aufklärung, und: die Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie zurück'.⁶⁶

In Horkheimer & Adorno's book, the (mythical!) image of the Homeric hero Odysseus tied

⁶² Cf. de Vries 1961: 169 f. This book, available in international translations, is still a useful and authoritative guide to the study of myth analysis up to the 1950s; further: Segal 2001; Dubuisson 1993; Strenski 1987.

⁶³ My choice of words is deliberate: such myths are considered to be the stuff out of which, in a way theorised by Durkheim (1912; cf. van Binsbergen 2018), society brings its members to venerate itself under the guise of the sacred.

⁶⁴ Cf. Barnes 1944-1945; Bouveresse 1996; Cassirer 1961; Davidson 2001; Dickie 1969; Hountondji 1983 (however, the reference to myth only appears in the subtitle of the English edition and was not there in the original French); Oosterling 1989; Vloemans 1930. For the application of the same conception of myth in political discourse, cf. Ivie 2002.

⁶⁵ Horkheimer & Adorno 1989 / 1944; cf. Freyberg *n.d.*

⁶⁶ Horkheimer & Adorno 1989 / 1944: 14. 'Myth is already Enlightenment, and Enlightenment hits back in myth'. (WvB)

to the mast of his ship while his comrades submit to the luring chant of the Sirens (Odyssey XII: 39), for scores of pages conjures up the tragic interpenetration of rationality and mythical thought which is plausibly claimed to have produced Nazism and Fascism.

Cassirer – Kantian far more than Hegelian – did not quite engage in such dialectics. His attempt to deal, once for all, with mythical thought is impressive, but fails to convince in our Postmodern, re-enchanted, globalised world of today, where the proliferation of identities has been raised to one of humankind’s major industries, and where myths (from Christian, Islamic and Hindu religious fundamentalism, to New Age, to human rights and democracy as an occasional justification for state violence, to the neo-liberal idea of the market, the body not only as precondition but *a fortiori* as ultimate standard of all human life, culture and society; the makeability of that body right up to gender identity, etc.) remind us every day that they, as myths, are here to stay. At the same time Cassirer reminds us, especially in his last book *The Myth Of The State*, of the all-important political dimension of myths and their study: if myth creates a collective life world (and by implication often render its built-in structural and physical violence invisible to the participants in that life world, the believers of myth), then the workings of myth are inevitably opposed to the assertion of individual knowledge, freedom, responsibility, and criticism: the ideals of the Enlightenment but also the foundations of Modern human rights. Pitch sticks, and it is hardly surprising that some of the major students of myth in the course of the twentieth century, such as Jung, Eliade, Jan de Vries, and Dumézil,⁶⁷ had strong conservative tendencies often accused of bordering on Fascism. To this political dimension we will return when, below, we discuss the role of the intellectual in the approach to myth, torn between, on the one hand,

- fusion with myth for the sake of individual sanity, the experience of beauty and a sense of social belonging; and, on the other hand,
- deconstructive critique of myth for the sake of society’s sanity and transparency, the maintenance of human rights, and the rational pursuit of valid scientific knowledge.

Leaning on Cassirer, but even more promising and inspiring, is the approach of the German / Dutch philosopher Wilhelm Dupré,⁶⁸ who (unfortunately without the benefit of such inspiration as post-structuralist philosophy – Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, Guattari – might have brought to his argument) goes back to Schelling’s subtle understanding of myth *as forming, and relating to, a whole*,⁶⁹ and therefore as far from allegorical. Dupré tries to make (at least, that is how I read him) the most of myth’s nature as

- context-informed, lived verbal expression in the here and the now, as against
- the ambitious, intimidating, transcendent, aspirations of *logos*.

Reflecting the writings of Eliade (1963: 192 *f.*), which were largely conceived before the work circulated of such theoreticians of orality as Ong, Finnegan, Derrida, Goody, Havelock, etc.,⁷⁰ Dupré reminds us that the tension between *mythos* and *logos* is congruent with that

⁶⁷ Cf. Horstmann 1998; Frauenfelder 2002; Ellwood 1999; García Quintela 2001.

⁶⁸ Dupré 1973; this makes one curious after his 1975 book, non vidi.

⁶⁹ Cf. Witzel 2001, who stresses that myths should be compared not in their constituent parts, but as wholes.

⁷⁰ Ong 1982, 1988; Finnegan 1970, 1988; Derrida 1967b, 1978; Goody 1968, 1986; Havelock 1971.

between oral literature and writing. He stresses the *kaleidoscopic* nature of myth and of the world it creates. Myth revolves on a verblatity which creates meaning and truth through articulation, and which appears to reside (especially in situations where writing is absent) in what (at least in my reading of Dupré) is implied to be *an interlocking or alternation of immanence and transcendence*,⁷¹ rather than external, transcendent procedures of verification and legitimation. The narrative then appears as the core, not only of myth, but of the human existence tout court:

‘Im Erzählen der Welt wird zwar die Ungesicherheit und Sinnbedrohung des Menschen erst wirklich offenbar, zugleich bedeutet jedoch die Tatsache, daß all das erzählt werden kann, Teilnahme an jenem Sinn, der dem Erzählen, oder besser, dem Artikulieren grundsätzlich eigen ist. Aus diesem Grunde kann das Wesen des Mythos nicht auf diesen oder jenen Bericht Beschränkt werden. Es ist vielmehr Artikulieren und Artikulation des Gegebenen als Tat und Tatschade des Menschlichen.’ (Dupré 1973: 951.)⁷²

This leads Dupré to distinguish four complementary tasks in our approach to myth:

- to understand myth and mythology [not so much as antithetic to ratio, but rather] as the matrix within which the play of ratio (*Verstand*) and symbol takes place – and it is out of this play that culture is constituted;
- to realise that inevitably there are not only many mythologies but (within each mythology) *pluralities* of myth, whose interrelations we have to investigate, for it is these interrelations that constitute the community in tension with the individual person;
- to identify the liminal situation where the *logos* of speech determines the *mythos* to such an extent that it begins to coincide with the latter as self-reflecting theorising – in other words, as philosophy;
- on the one hand theory has to illuminate the mythical, but on the other hand it has the task of verifying the mythical element within the horizon of humankind, it has to become a self-reflective theory of the development of the mythical, *i.e.* a philosophy of history.

Little wonder that Dupré’s final conclusion is that

‘das Problem des Mythos ist letztlich das der Fundamentalphilosophie.’ (Dupré 1973: 955 f.)⁷³

Situating myth in the ubiquitous phenomenon of human verbal enunciation, of narration (as does McDowell 2002) implies that for Dupré myth is in itself a ubiquitous and self-evident aspect of the human condition, rather than a special form of thought reserved for

⁷¹ This insight will cast a further illuminating light when, in chapters 15 and especially 16, below, we have a look at transcendence in the context of Flood myth world-wide.

⁷² ‘Only when we subject the world to narrative will become clear the great extent to which Man is without certainty and full of deceptive meaning, but at the same time the fact becomes manifest that, whatever can be told, participates in the very meaning that is the essential quality of all narrating, or rather, of all aerticulation. For this reason the essence of myth cannot be limited to any specific content. What is really at stake is the act of articulation of that which is given, and that act is fundamental to being human.’ (tr. WvB)

Now that I re-read and translate these lines, in the final editing of the present book, my enthusiasm about them knows again no limits, and I understand why I must be a writer and a poet, far beyond the necessities of ensuring an income, a decade into my pensionable age – but simply as the most obvious way of being human.

⁷³ ‘The problem of myth is, finally, that of a philosophy which searches for fundamental insights.’ (tr. WvB)

narrowly circumscribed circumstances.

Dupré's emphasis on the narrative element, which would make myth appear as primarily a form of orature, has a peculiar implication for mainstream myth analysis. Since so much of the latter deals, not with living myth orally presented in informal situations, but with established written texts and with pictorial and other artistic references to such written texts, it would seem as if in the academic practice the concept of myth has hardened, even fossilised, to the point where myths have come to appear as a distinct and self-evident genre of texts readily available for processing in the hands of scholars. The rediscovery of orature in the last quarter of the twentieth century CE might have remedied this one-sidedness if only this rediscovery had been picked up more consistently by comparative mythologists.

Dupré's position is reminiscent of Barthes's, whose *Mythologies* (Barthes 1957) trace the structuring orientations behind late capitalist bourgeois life (so that for Barthes 'myth' comes close to the Marxian 'false consciousness' – the mythical orientations in question are held to be mistaken conceptions of reality).

A similarly central place is attributed to myth by Kolakowski, who defines as myth any mental construct that imposes meaning, order, direction upon the human world:⁷⁴

'Er [der Mythos] umfaßt einen elementaren, wenn auch quantitativ geringfügigen Teil der religiösen Mythen, namentlich die sogenannten Ursprungsmythen, und erstreckt sich darüber hinaus auf bestimmte Konstruktionen, die (verborgen oder explizit) in unserem intellektuellen oder affektiven Leben gegenwärtig sind, und zwar auf diejenigen, die es uns gestatten, die bedingten und veränderlichen Bestandteile der Erfahrung teleologisch miteinander in Zusammenhang zu bringen, indem man sie auf unbedingte Realitäten bezieht (auf solche wie "Sein", "Wahrheit", "Wert").' (Kolakowski 1984: 6.)⁷⁵

People construct myth in order to acquiesce themselves: in order to experience the empirical world as meaningful, in order to satisfy their desire for immutable values capable of underpinning their orientation in the world, and in order to escape from the temporal finiteness of their personal existence and of that of the world. In crucial contradistinction to Dupré (for whose approach to myth I highlighted the felicitous idea of the oscillation between transcendence and immanence),⁷⁶ Kolakowski insists that any true myth represents a transcendent value, in which abstraction is made from the finiteness of human experience:

'Ich nenne jede Erfahrung mythisch, die nicht nur in dem Sinn die endliche Erfahrung transzendiert, daß sie nicht deren Beschreibung ist [...], sondern auch in jenem, daß sie jede mögliche Erfahrung relativiert, indem sie diese verstehend auf Realitäten bezieht, die grundsätzlich ungeeignet sind, durch Worte beschrieben zu werden, die eine logische Bindung mit der verbalen Beschreibung der Erfahrung

⁷⁴ Kolakowski 1984, cf. Kesselmeier 2000, on whom my summary leans heavily.

⁷⁵ 'It (mythos) comprises an elementary (even though quantitatively minimal) part in the form of religious myths, notably the so-called myths of origin, and beyond that extends to particular constructions which (whether implicitly or explicitly) are present in our intellectual and affective lives – and in particular those constructions which allow us to teleologically connect the contingent / conditional and mutable elements of our experiences, in such a way that one becomes conscious of their relationship with unconditional realities (such as 'being', 'truth', 'value'. (tr. WvB)

⁷⁶ Not for nothing, but without direct, conscious indebtedness to Dupré, oscillation (not only between transcendence and immanence, but even more comprehensively, between being and non-being, is given a pivotal role in my picture of reality in my recent book *Sangoma Science* (2021), designed to make sense of my observations, over the decades, in the world of ecstatic cults especially the Sangoma cult of Southern Africa, to which I have belonged since 1989.

eingehen.' (Kolakowski 1984: 41)⁷⁷

Kolakowski does not, in this connection, investigate the specific historical and socio-political conditions under which such transcendence may be attained as a technical accomplishment of thought. He implies it to be a universal and perennial human capability, per definition as universal as he claims myth itself to be. In one way he is right: such transcendence is already given with the word, on the principle posited by the great Dutch linguist Reichling that 'language is a vicarious act' (Reichling 1967) – in other words, the human technology that allows us to refer to what is not there and not now, by means of words (any words) that have per definition (...) a much wider application than just the here and the now. But such a view of mythical transcendence is not very useful, because it would no longer allow us to distinguish between language in general, and myth as a very special form of language. I would rather suggest that, given the transcendent capabilities of the word, myth uses this capacity to the full and, as it were, raises it to the power 2, by conjuring up a world that

- is not only not here and not now but that may have no empirical existence whatsoever anywhere at any moment in time (which brings myth into the realm of the hearsay, the imagination, the poetic, and the religious),
- that is brought to life and to credibility by using of narrative modes analogous to (although not always identical with) the conventional methods of narration by which reliable, true reports on the empirical world outside the here and now are rendered; and finally a world that
- is not idiosyncratic, not exclusive to the narrating individual, but one whose narrative accounts are shared, circulated, retained and reproduced within a wider community (which thus constitutes and perpetuates itself).

Thus myth creates an effective world that may or may not be real but whose main characteristic is that it appears as real to those who produce the tales on that world and to those who listen to it.⁷⁸ Producing this appearance of reality involves an active process of captivating

77 'I call every experience mythical, that not only transcends the finite experience in this respect (a) that it cannot be exhaustively described in experiential terms, but also in another respect notably (b) that it takes a relative view of any possible experience, in such a way that it relates the experience in an interpreting way to realities which are essentially incapable of being described in such words as constitute a logical link with the verbal description of the experience.' (tr. WvB)

⁷⁸ #.3.1. ON CLIFFORD GEERTZ'S DEFINITION OF RELIGION. In my formulation here there is an echo here of Geertz's (1966: 4) famous definition of religion, to which we may refer repeatedly in this book:

'Without further ado, then, a religion is:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.' (itemised numbering added – WvB)

Meanwhile, as far as religion is concerned, Geertz's definition leaves much to be desired. I am not convinced that religion comes in countable, discrete units, for the same extensive reasons why I do not believe that it is useful to speak of 'cultures', plural (van Binsbergen 1999b, 2003a), but only of cultural as a specific orientation of the human condition. Moreover, like many definitions of religion and myth, Geertz's definition is not really just a definition but a nutshell theory: it tells us not only how to identify religion in empirical reality, but also claims to reveal its inner workings such as can never be immediately manifest upon empirical scrutiny using the definition as a searchlight. Geertz's personification of 'a religion' ('which acts...') leaves unsolved the puzzle as to how,

and persuading the listener with specific literary means.⁷⁹ Principal among these means is analogy with the real life world of the here and now, even though this analogy may involve specific inversions, distortions, transformations. For the narrators and the listeners, therefore, it is essential that the mythical world is scarcely distinguishable from, and scarcely discontinuous *vis-à-vis*, the empirical world.

#3.2. ON TRANSCENDENCE: A FIRST INTRODUCTION. It would be misleading to speak of transcendence, in this connection, as if it were a universal and self-evident condition. Only under certain conditions could the mythical world be said to be transcendent, in the sense of being strictly distinguished from the empirical world, at a totally different plane, absolutely incomparable with the empirical world and its inhabitants, and representing a totally different order of being. I submit that, in a pure form, such transcendence can only occur (*i.e.* can only be thought) in situations where people experience external forms of the exercise of authority and control, which are completely discontinuous with the ordinary and familiar forms of authority and control informing their everyday life world here and now. Such external forms of authority and control are brought about mainly by *writing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science* – four devices that, separately or in combination, make it possible for an absent, dead, or even completely imaginary person (such as a testator, a king, the state, a god) to exercise near to complete control over a situation here and now through the vicarious means of language. For all we know, writing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science only emerged in a very circumscribed spatial and temporal context: the Ancient Near East (including Egypt) by the end of the 4th millennium BCE. Only under such conditions would I expect myths to emerge that evoke a transcendent world absolutely incomparable with the ordinary life world – so absolutely incomparable that, for instance, a prohibition on graven images (like in Ancient Israel and Islam) may be entertained; yet even there the transcendent God is supposed to have created Man after his own image, *as if even in a thoroughly literate and priestly context myth shies away from total transcendence*. I consider (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2018) the emergence of transcendence as a mode of thought, the outcome of a long historical process, not as an immediate and inevitable implication of writ-

precisely, the cognitive elements that Geertz places at the centre of the religious process ('formulating conceptions'...) manage to inspire the specific moods and motivations that allegedly constitute ('a') religion. And if we are tempted (on the basis of sound comparative and theoretical considerations) to propose that all these cognitions, moods and motivations remain up in the air, utterly ineffective in shaping a religion and, through religion, a 'uniquely realistic' life world, until they are put into practice by the believers' specific actions both in the ritual sphere and in everyday life, then it is clear that apart from the personification of religion as an acting agent, *action* is the major missing element in Geertz's definition of religion.

⁷⁹ For the nature-myth school of Max Müller, myth was primarily a 'disease of language', allegedly springing from the postulated imperfections of prehistoric and proto-historic language (*cf.* Rose 1961). This is an obsolete position in the sense that the oldest language forms directly or indirectly attested (*i.e.* over the past 10,000 years) are found to be every bit as advanced and as complex as modern languages. This, at least, is the result of a statistical analysis which Marsico (1999) conducted on a database of proto-languages, albeit with specific emphasis on phonological aspects. We have no direct attestations of earlier language forms (they have been convincingly and extensively reconstructed though, especially in the form of *Borean) but must inevitably postulate that the truly oldest forms, as spoken by Anatomically Modern Humans over 100,000 years ago, may have been less complex (*cf.* Aitchison 1996). In a long-range historical perspective (to which we have only access through conjectural reconstruction on the basis of extrapolation of attested forms), Müller's position has a point in that it rightly acknowledges the basis of myth in language-based forms of narration. However, the thrust of recent approaches like Dupré's and Kolakowski's is that, rather than being epiphenomenal upon language, myth is predicated upon the very essence of language.

ing, the state, an organised priesthood, and science. The latter achievements did exist in 3rd millennium BCE Mesopotamia, yet one of the greatest specialists, Thorkild Jacobsen, could still explicitly describe the mythico-religious orientation of that place and time as overwhelmingly immanentist.⁸⁰ Meanwhile we should realise that the four conditions listed here do not always occur in combination. State formation has been a widespread phenomenon on the African continent from the late 4th millennium onwards,⁸¹ yet in many cases these were states without writing. That even so statehood would amount to discontinuity with the cultural orientation of the here and now of local communities, and hence might constitute a growth point for transcendent thought, is suggested by my study of the Nkoya states in terms of such cultural discontinuity (van Binsbergen 2003c, and in press (b)).

These are some of the ideas that, in the background, will inform the argument which follows now.

3.2. *A provisional definition of myth*

There is no dearth of definitions of myth. Above we have already considered elements towards such a definition. Dupré gives a succinct one:

‘Mythos im weitesten Sinn verstanden bedeutet Wort, Rede, Erzählung von göttlichem Geschehen. Er begründet eine Tradition.’ (Dupré 1973: 950)⁸²

Famous is Eliade’s definition, whose extensive work on myth surprisingly continues to impress for its profound insights, in my opinion, now that I am re-reading it after more than thirty years:

‘le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial, le temps fabuleux des “commencements”. Autrement dit, le mythe raconte comment, grâce aux exploits des Etres Surnaturels, une réalité totale, le Cosmos, ou seulement un fragment: une île, une espèce végétale, un comportement humain, une institution. C’est donc toujours le récit d’une “création”: on rapporte comment quelque chose a été produit [sic], a commencé à être. Le mythe ne parle que de ce qui est arrivé réellement, de ce qui s’est pleinement manifesté. Les personnages des mythes sont des Etres Surnaturels. Ils sont connus surtout par ce qu’ils ont fait dans le temps prestigieux des “commencements”. Les mythes révèlent donc leur activité créatrice et dévoilent la sacralité (ou simplement la “surnaturalité”) de leurs oeuvres. En somme, les mythes décrivent les diverses, et parfois dramatiques, interruptions du sacré (ou du “sur-naturel”) dans le Monde. C’est cette interruption du sacré qui fonde réellement le Monde et qui le fait tel qu’il est aujourd’hui. Plus encore: c’est à la suite des interventions des Etres Surnaturels que l’homme est ce qu’il est aujourd’hui, un être mortel, sexué et culturel.’ (Eliade 1963: 15; originally published in an English translation readily available to the reader)

While splendidly evocative and bringing out many points that are essential in defining humankind’s most cherished myths (but not all myths are myth of origin or of aetiology), this famous definition yet has a number of unmistakable shortcomings. Instead of a definition

⁸⁰ Jacobsen 1976. For a study tracing (largely on the basis of an analysis of myths) the emergence and evolution of the concept of magic in the Ancient Mesopotamian context, cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999, reprinted in van Binsbergen 2017: 293-325.

⁸¹ Thus in my book *Tears of Rain* (1992) I claimed to study precolonial states in South Central Africa – however Vansina (1993) in his otherwise complimentary review contests that there were states in the proper sense of the word. Since we both refrained from properly defining ‘state’, the exchange may be considered to end in a draw.

⁸² ‘Understood in the most extensive sense myth means word, speech, narrative of divine events. Myth forms the basis of a tradition.’ (tr. WvB)

aiming merely at identifying elements of empirical reality open to further analytical scrutiny, it, like Geertz's, amounts to a theory in a nutshell, in that it already postulates specific relations between the various features of myth that the definition allows us to identify, and, in so doing, imputes such generality, even universality, into these features and their specific relations as could never be ascertained by a mere application of the definition in itself, but as could only be established on the basis of subsequent, painstaking empirical research. Moreover, the definition narrows down the occurrence of myths to such times and to such human communities as have a well-defined and interculturally recognisable notion of the *sacred*, of *primordial time*, of *origins*, of *supernatural beings* (so, by implication, cultures that explicitly make *the distinction between nature and the supernatural*), of *creation*, of the *world*. My extensive, specialist acquaintance with a handful of African societies, with the Ancient Near East and Egypt, the Bronze-Age Mediterranean, my recent dabbling in contexts in Asia, Oceania and North America, and my voracious reading on numerous other human contexts in space and time, tells me that these themes are very far from universal. And Eliade's definition imputes to all contexts where myths are found, the notion (a notion, moreover, to be explicitly identifiable in the consciousness of the human actors native to such contexts) that the world and humanity, not only of the past but also of today, is constituted by the events recounted in the myths. For Eliade's definition not only points out that the life world of the owners of a particular myth is (as could be argued from an analytical distance, by a scholarly outsider) constituted by that myth and other myths – but also that the myth owners themselves consciously believe that this is how their world is constituted. We can easily grant all or most of these requirements when referring to the creation myths of the Ancient Near East, such as *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian creation myth; Pritchard 1969), or the creation stories of *Genesis* – products of a literate, state-based society with organised religion including a specialised priesthood defining, canonising, keeping, transmitting and publicly representing these myths as major components of the specialised professional science. But these specific socio-political features, however typical of the Ancient Near East, have only a very limited distribution throughout human history and across the continents. Most of these features, and many of the other specific stipulations of Eliade's definition, would be absent in the African situations I have studied at close range for decades, for instance among the Nkoya people of Western Zambia.

Let us see if the latter's situation can help us formulate a myth definition that is less theoretically presumptuous, and that therefore might have wider applicability than just literate, state-based societies with an organised priesthood.

A relative paucity of myths (by some conventional definition) as compared with other continents has often been claimed for Africa.⁸³ Like other parts of Africa that (albeit for little more than half a century) happened to be colonised by the British (in the Zambian / North Rhodesian case: from 1900-1964) and explored by predominantly British scholarship, also the Nkoya people of Zambia have been understudied (apart from my own work) as far as their myths, legends, folktales and other forms of oral literature is concerned.

Especially in regard of parts of Africa once colonised by the British, much work has been done on the possibility (or, considering myths' dependence on latter-day political processes,

⁸³ Cf. Finnegan 1970; however, cf. Okpewho 1983. Also: Soyinka 1976; Appiah 1994; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010d, the latter three reprinted in the present volume as chs 5, 6 and 8.

the impossibility) of extracting, from African myths, objective historical information, especially concerning processes of state formation.⁸⁴ After the enthusiasm for this approach in the 1970s and 1980s, we are now gradually realising that much of this work, including some of my own (1992), was based on the – less and less convincing – assumption (a version of Whitehead’s – 1997 / 1925: 52, 58 notorious *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*) that myths documented in Africa in the 19th and 20th century encoded actual historical processes of only a few centuries’s time depth, and could be thus decoded. In fact, it is now dawning upon us that this mythical material is often millennia old and that it is usually impossible to sort out how much of this ancient and entirely mythical contents has been projected onto (by comparison, relatively recent) actual historical events. This line of argument has been advanced by Wrigley (1988), whose argument may be summarised as follows:

‘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 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.’
(African Studies Centre, *n.d.*)

Mutatis mutandis, the same criticism could be levelled against my own work on the ethno-history of the Nkoya people of Zambia, especially my *Tears of Rain* (1992).⁸⁵ This research (conducted in close association with what was once the Manchester School of Gluckman and his associates, and with the Ranger School seeking to retrieve the history of African religion) did touch on myth and oral traditions, but the main foci of my research in that connection have been ethnicity, kingship, and cults of affliction, against the background of social organisation at the village and urban-ward level. Initially, I never sought a comprehensive account of myth and other forms of orature in late twentieth-century CE Nkoya society. Nor was the way in which elements of myth circulated in everyday life and rituals, conducive to such an endeavour: in nearly three decades of intensive association with the Nkoya people through nearly annual spells of field-work, I hit on fragments of myth with every step, but hardly any myths were ever formally recounted in full in my presence (and, as I am reasonably sure, neither in the presence of born Nkoya people) except in the artificial situations of formal fieldwork interviews, usually staged with chief’s councils in session. Instead, scraps of disconnected mythical elements were hinted at in songs, rumours, fireside stories and informal conversations, often disguised as allegedly historical events occurring in the lives of people still alive,⁸⁶ within, or at the edge of, living memory. At first I fell into the

⁸⁴ Cf. Atkinson 1975; Bourdillon 1972; MacGaffey 2003; Mason 1975; Miller 1980; Morton 1972; Nugent 1997; Okpewho 1998; Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi 1990; Packard 1980; Pettersson 1953; Ranger & Kimambo 1972; Ranger 1988; Reefe 1981; Schoffeleers 1992; Shepperson 1966; Vail 1979; van Binsbergen 1981a, 1985b, 1992, 1998c/2006; Willis 1978, 1981; Wrigley 1988; Yoder 1980.

⁸⁵ As I began to realise by the end of the 1990s (van Binsbergen 1998c/2006); Vansina 1993 however seems inclined to accept my original, 1992 argument as to the historicity of these mythical traditions – although he disagrees with of my use of the term state for the socio-political formations in precolonial Western Zambia.

⁸⁶ Chapter 20 below is a nice case in point, where a nonagenarian village headman is locally supposed to have witnessed the collapse of the Nkoya equivalent of the Tower of Babel, *Genesis* 11.

trap of this historical illusion, producing my book *Tears of Rain* (1992) as a reconstruction of the last few centuries of precolonial Nkoya history based on these mythical elements. It was only in subsequent years, when reworking on this material comparatively (across Africa and even intercontinentally, and after exposure to the daily company of specialist Assyriologists and Bible Scholars at NIAS, 1994-1995) that I awoke to their truly mythical nature. It was only then that I began to realise that what I (along with my interlocutors) had taken to be oral history of the 17th-19th centuries CE, was in fact a recasting of millennia-old mythical material, small parts of which could be retraced to Ancient Egypt, the Ancient Near East, and Ancient South and South East Asia, and in the specific local Nkoya application probably devoid of all objective historicity.

A very central myth among this people details the origin of kingship (Nkoya: *Wene*), which the Nkoya consider one of their most central institutions, at a par with female puberty rites, funerary rites, and courts of law. The following myth is known to a great many people and enshrined in the oral-historical collection *Likota Lya Bankoya* which their first Christian pastor, Rev. Shimunika, compiled in the middle of the 20th century:


‘WHERE THE KINGSHIP OF THE NKOYA CAME FROM: THE STORY OF THE CAULDRON OF KINGSHIP

4₁⁸⁷ The kingship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large Cauldron full of game meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that *Mwene* [= Lord] 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* [= Eagles] on the part of the birds, and the *Mbunze* [= Hawks] on the part of the people.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Deliberately, Shimunika sought to enhance the authority of his compilation of myths and oral traditions by emulating, typographically, the only major text he knew: the Bible, divided in chapters (indicated by a large uncial-like letter), and verses. In my editions (1998, 1992) I have retained this feature; for extensive discussion of this interpenetration of orature and Biblical literacy, cf. van Binsbergen 1992.

⁸⁸ In our present search for a definition, we cannot give this text the full analytical attention it deserves. In fact at least three myths are involved here:

- one regulating the differential claims of local clans to the kingship;
- another one associating the kingship with *Rain*, the *Demiurge* (*Mvula*; among the Nkoya a popular etymology connects this with *kampulu*, ‘Leopard’, the spotted animal whose speckles are like raindrops – the popular etymology may or may not be tenable from a professional linguistic point of view);
- and finally one about the original cosmic characters to have been two specific birds of prey: the High God (as male, or more likely, female, or even both; gender is not expressed in Bantu languages, and this fact is – cf. van Binsbergen 1992 – a central aspect of my reading of Nkoya myths), and the latter’s *Demiurge* / child.

The third mythical theme is particularly interesting because, like the symbolic complex centring on speckledness which features centrally in my long-standing analysis of Leopard symbolism, it has a very wide distribution throughout the Old World. In the somewhat narrower but still very extensive Nostratic realm (whose precise composition is subject to disagreement, but which by many current conceptions ranges from Mauritania to the Scandinavian North Cape and the Bering Strait, and then on to Greenland) very few names of animal species can be claimed to have made part of the Proto-Nostratic lexicon; but the speckled hawk (Proto-Nostratic *hr, cf. the Ancient Egyptian hawk or falcon deity  Hr, ‘Horus’) and perhaps the eagle are among them (Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994). In South Central Africa (where the Nkoya are located), the speckled hawk is contrasted with the evenly black-and-white coloured fish eagle. Evoking the common symbolic juxtaposition of speckledness versus homogeneous coat texture, this third Nkoya complex appears to derive from very old layers of a common Old World symbolic complex, going back to the Upper Palaeolithic. So does the bird theme in

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 Mpungumushi⁸⁹ sha Mundemba called all the people. He said to them: "Whosoever can take the large pot of game meat off the fire will become *Mwene* [king, overlord] 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 big and could burn them: it was very dangerous for them to go near. 4 All the clans: Mburze, Lawwe, Ntabi, Nkombi, 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 watertight 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 Sheta⁹⁰ 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 relatives. She is 'the bird'⁹¹ 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 Nkonze"⁹². 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."⁹³

#3.3. A VIABLE DEFINITION OF MYTH. On the basis of this one example, a useful definition of myth begins to articulate itself. Let us define, provisionally, myth as:

- a narrative
- that is standardised
- that is collectively owned and managed
- that is considered by its owners to be of great and enduring significance

itself: a reconstruction of humankind's oldest mythical repertoire brought out that, out of a corpus of about twenty Narrative Complexes attested on African cosmogonic myths and on Old World mythology in general, only three Narrative Complexes can be argued to have been part of the original Pre-Out-of-Africa package, from before c. 60-80 ka BP, and one of these three is the theme of the Lightning Bird, whose egg is the world; our below chapter on the Cosmic or World Egg can be profitably consulted for further aspects.

⁸⁹ A name or title which is evidently not modern Nkoya, and in which the Luba words *mpungu* ('buzzard', 'fish eagle') and *mushi* ('village') can be detected; their present-day Nkoya equivalents are *chipungu* and *munzi*. Luba and Nkoya are closely related: after studying Luba at Ghendt University, Belgium, my wife Patricia could converse in rudimentary Nkoya within a matter of weeks.

⁹⁰ 'The Dizzy Ones', affected by the circling around the pot of meat.

⁹¹ 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.

⁹² 'Lickers'.

⁹³ While engaged in the final editing of this book, it occurs to me that the narrative of the Cauldron of Kingship might also be read as a remote echo of the cyclical transformation of elements, and the heroic (or rather, royal) disruption of the cycle by 'lifting the cauldron with meat off the Fire'. The disruption would then introduce a lineal time progression, as an innovation upon the cyclical conception of time history inherent in an archaic worldview. Although this is a new step for me, it is on trodden ground: a catalytic, advanced version of the cosmology of cyclical element transformation has been explicitly argued by me to inform Nkoya clan nomenclature (van Binsbergen 2012a).

- that (whether or not these owners are consciously aware of this point) contains and brings out such images of the world (a cosmology), of past and present society (history and sociology) and of the human conditions (anthropology) as are eminently constitutive of the life world in which that narrative circulates, or at least: circulated originally
- to this we may add that, if this constitutive aspect is consciously realised by the owners, the narrative may be invoked aetiologically, to explain and justify present-day conditions
- and that therefore is a powerful device to create collectively underpinned meaning and collectively recognised truth (regardless of whether such truth would be recognised outside the community whose myth it is).

3.3. Discussion of the definition

This definition helps to bring out some of the contradictions we have to consider in the study of myth.

I have avoided, in this definition, to introduce an element which many students of myth have considered important: the distinction between gods (who are supposed to be paraded in myth, constituting its distinctive feature) and heroes and ordinary mortals (who are supposed to feature in epics, which are held to be different from myths). My reason is that such a distinction between gods and mortals is predicated on the concept of transcendence, which we take for granted in Late Modern Times and in the Western intellectual tradition but which yet, as I have argued, only emerges in its true form under very specific 'logocentric' conditions of relatively limited distribution: writing, the state, priesthood, and science. I submit that typical of mythical narratives is not, statically, the evocation of gods, but the tension between two kinds of ontological conditions:

- one godlike and moral, and the other
- human/only-too-human (a Nietzsche book title),⁹⁴

in such a way that the image of the world oscillates between occasional but unsystematic transcendence and a more standard condition of immanence.⁹⁵

The definition mixes emic elements (*i.e.* elements that are consciously recognised by the owners of the myth themselves in their very own concepts and language), with etic elements (that can only be formulated in the meta-perspective of scholarship and that tell us what a myth does provided the owners do not realise that this is what it is doing: constituting a life world, actively creating meaning and truth as if these were not self-evident and universal givens). According to a widespread view in philosophy and the social sciences today, human life worlds are not given but culturally constructed within narrow horizons of space and time, and meaning and truth – when considered from the scholar's meta-perspective – are

⁹⁴ Cf. Nietzsche 1896, vol. II-III: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*.

⁹⁵ In the background this argument on transcendence and immanence, and its application to myth, is inspired by similar criticism which could be levelled against a related juxtaposition, that between sacred and profane, which Durkheim (1912) made into the distinctive category of religion, and the cornerstone of his theory of religion as veneration of society through the intermediary of arbitrary symbols. Cf. van Binsbergen, 2018 and 2021f, with extensive discussion of the relevant literature.

therefore far more contingent and relative than they would appear to be from the perspective of the local horizon constituted, precisely, by myth.⁹⁶

The paradox which now opens up is that at the emic level myths may appear as universal and cross-culturally recognisable statements on the human condition, while at the etic level myths appear primarily as the kind of illusions that allow others, against all odds and against our better judgement, to create and maintain a human society. Analytically, from the etic perspective, myths are in the first place other people's myths, and the task of scholarship in the field of myth is to describe and compare mythical contents and develop a meta-perspective in the light of which a more fundamental scientific truth may become detectable behind the particularistic myths that inform specific, narrow horizons of time and space. Ever since Xenophanes and Theagenes of Rhegium (both c. 500 BCE), and especially since Euhemerus (ca. 300 BCE), narratives have (through a process of labelling) become transformed into myth under the estranging gaze of the analytical scholarly outsider, for whom the myth does not contain truth, at least not the truth the owner and narrator consciously recognise. Hence, the construction of a specialist field of scholarship of myth risks to imply, in principle, an implicitly violent hierarchical re-ordering of the world on the basis of a radical distinction between

- the collective owners/narrators of a myth, and
- the scholarly analyst of the myth.

Here the analyst claims a privileged position which, if adopted by owners/narrators of myth, would destroy the latter's position as well as the very myth itself. In recent decades, more

⁹⁶ #3.4. INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM OF MYTHS'S INERTIA IN LONG-RANGE TIME. This is the standard view, based on the (implicitly presentist) perspective of mainstream sociology and anthropology, in which

- all culture is axiomatically considered to be *individually acquired through a social learning process* (instead of being innate, i.e. being determined by genetic, neurobiological or other biological factors)
- life worlds are recognised to be *recent*
- and, under the onslaught of cultural globalisation supported by new technologies of communication and information, *ephemeral*.

Under such conditions it is often possible to trace the relatively recent origin of specific myths, e.g. the foundation myths of world religions. 'Relative' is here taken against the time scale of the 200,000 years of the existence of Anatomically Modern Humans. However, there is evidence suggesting that in this longer time scale, these axioms may need to be reconsidered. The converging evidence from human cultural (near-) universals and from mythological archaeology reconstructing the oldest myths of Anatomically Modern Humans, brings out a picture of such *unusual immutable cultural inertia of key myths and key cosmologies* (a cultural inertia which otherwise we have mainly seen in the case of lithic tool industries, remaining constant for tens of thousands of years; or in cupmarks, geometric patterns, and the conceptualisation of granulation e.g. in Leopard-skin symbolism – all suggestive of similar time spans, cf. van Binsbergen 2004b, in press (h); van Binsbergen with Lacroix 2000) that we must seriously consider the theoretical possibility (however awkward and counter-paradigmatic) that some mythical contents may be species-specific, and inherited through biological rather than social means. This, of course, is reminiscent of Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, with this (extremely contentious) proviso that for Jung such a collectivity did not necessarily encompass the whole of (Anatomically Modern) humankind, but could also be situated at the more restricted levels of major clades ('races', 'gene pools'), nations, clans, and families – so that ultimately, Blacks, Jews, Gentiles, Chinese, Native Americans, Nkoya, Dutch, might have substantially different forms of collective unconscious. Whether such a gene-pool-specific 'collective unconscious' coincides, after all, with the tacit *sous-entendres* of one's culture (rendering this entire Jungian train of thought futile and unnecessary – and being a child of his age and discipline Jung had no access yet to the Modern social-scientific concept of culture) would be the least of our worries; the answer is probably affirmative. The greatest danger waiting at the end of this train of thought is that it implies the total fragmentation, dissolution, annihilation even of what in my opinion is the implied basic tenet of intercultural philosophy, globalisation, social science, art and human understanding: *the fundamental unity of humankind* (van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f.; http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/vicarious/vicar_block_A.pdf). That is too high a price to pay.

than two millennia after the Ancient Greek debunkers of their contemporaries' myths, such hierarchical analytical constructions often coincide with the juxtaposition between

- 'the West' (where most analysts of myth reside in fact, or – if residing elsewhere – which they have taken as a reference group)
- and 'the Rest'.

Hence the deconstruction of myth (especially of such myth as underpins other cultural settings than the Western one) has been argued⁹⁷ to belong to the overall installation of North Atlantic hegemonic violence, by materially and physically coercive means as well as by the claim of a monopoly on scientific rationality – without which there would be no science of myth as distinct from the narration and living of myths. The emic/etic distinction and the superiority claim involved in the North Atlantic / Western / global-scholarly etic deconstruction of myth, is typically Modernist, and as such obsolescent in a Postmodern world. In our largely Postmodern world, mythical analysts' claim of a privileged position (just like any such claim in the analysis of social and political life, the arts, religion *etc.*) has become profoundly problematic.⁹⁸ Such a claim would appear to amount to a myth (in the sense of untruth) in its own right.

3.4. Rupture and fusion

But meanwhile the Modernist pretence of having access to such a privileged position has brought us, as scholars interested in the study of myth, a wide but converging variety of insights into the literary, historical, psychological, cultural and socio-political manifestations and workings of myth. These insights carry their own fascination and justification. Perhaps more than anything else they respond to the Kantian admonition *sapere aude* ('have the courage to shed your ignorant naivety'), of which the Neo-Kantian Cassirer has been the most vigorous representative in the twentieth century CE. We would therefore be reluctant to sacrifice these insights on the altars of Postmodernity and of, usually ephemeral, Political Correctness (such as is embodied in the emphasis on the hegemonic implications of an analytical perspective on myth that claims greater insight than the myth owners themselves can afford to have). The scholarship of myth, in the broadest possible sense, is at the core of the construction of Modernity from the Enlightenment onwards. The hallmark of Modernity is the self-proclaimed capability of exploding other people's myths, and of replacing them by more valid truths characterised by scientific rationality, objectivity and universality.⁹⁹ Here the scholar's principal approach to

⁹⁷ Clearly somewhat myopically, considering the only recent installation of North Atlantic global domination (18th century CE or later), and the very great antiquity of Greek criticism of Greek myths (from 6th century BCE onwards).

⁹⁸ #3.5. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A PRIVILEGED POSITION IN POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHY. For a Foucaultian critique of this illusion, based on the concept of genealogy (which is ultimately Nietzschean), see: Rabinow 1984; Foucault 1977. Cf. also Kimmerle 1985; and: Nietzsche 1887. The impossibility of an epistemological Archimedean point is also argued in: Rorty 1979; and from a totally different point of view in: Putnam, 1978, 1981. Such impossibility, in other words, is a received idea in present-day philosophy.

⁹⁹ Cf. Harding 1997 and my extensive, largely positive, reaction: van Binsbergen 2001a / 2015a: ch. 13. This perspective is eminently relevant to global politics in the last few decades, when the implicit refusal, on the part of Islamic fundamentalists, to accept a Modernist perspective on the relative, time-capsuled truth of sacred texts and the need to reconsider them from the perspective of our later time and age, time and again leads to violent confrontations and massive loss of life – of which '9/11' (the Islamist attack on several targets on the Eastern seaboard of the USA) and the subsequent retaliation in the form of the American 'War on Terror' are only the

myth is that of rupture: the double movement by which the analyst of the myth

- dissociates herself from the owners of the myth, and
- by which the myth (analytically diagnosed to contain a particular meta-message about history, cosmology, psychology *etc.* of which the owners are necessarily unaware) is torn apart from the life world in which it was originally cherished; is subsequently transformed; and is finally reproduced in the (meta-)terms of a different (typically North Atlantic or global) life world.

This analytical, reductionist assault on myth has been very much the dominant trend throughout the social-scientific study of myth since the late nineteenth century CE. It has produced a number of seminal approaches, such as:

- Bachofen's and Graves's meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of a lost world of gender equality and even female domination over men,¹⁰⁰
- Max Müller's (1873, 1880) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of recurrent astronomical processes involving the great luminaries Sun and Moon, and other observational regularities of the night sky;
- Frazer's (1890-1915, 1918, 1970) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of kingship, magic and primitive science;
- Harrison's (1903, 1948) meta-narrative explaining away important mythical material in terms of the universal precedence of myth over ritual, or ritual over myth
- Freud's and Jung's meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of universal human drives, dilemmas, contradictions and collective images;¹⁰¹
- Lévi-Strauss's (1960, 1968, 1969-1978, 1971, 1973.) meta-narratives explaining away important mythical material in terms of (essentially content-less) binary oppositions and transformations as constitutive of any human thought and of society in general;
- historical approaches seeking to extract what little objective history may lie hidden under myth, and which we have already discussed above (also *cf.* ch. 2, above)

What often amazes the literary scholar (and *a fortiori* the literary writer), and even more so the owner of myths both in the North Atlantic and outside, is the sustained Faustian tendency to appropriative, subordinating reduction inherent in such primarily analytical approaches to myth. I am not implying that all these approaches specifically declare myths to be untruths and falsehoods, to be mistaken science; yet, clearly, the scholars listed are only satisfied once the myth is deconstructed and transformed into some totally different statement which is no longer recognisable to the original owners of the myth.

Being ourselves owners, admirers, beauty-stricken commentators, and scholarly and literary transmitters, of myth we realise only too well that *not rupture*, but *fusion*, is existentially our

most obvious examples. The fundamentalists's rejection of the Modernist, in fact globally-intellectual but in practice Western, perspective on religious truths rests however not only on antiquarian modes of thought within present-day Islam but also is a fairly understandable reaction to the unmistakable hegemonic violence which the West has exerted on the world of Islam and the Third World in general especially during the last few decades (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2005e / 2015a).

¹⁰⁰ Bachofen 1861; Graves 1964, 1988. *Cf.* Borgeaud *et al.* 1999. In modern academia, similar perspectives have been adopted by Gimbutas.

¹⁰¹ Freud 1918, 1963; Jung 1987; Jung & Kerényi 1951. The Oedipus complex is among these allegedly universal affects.

most rewarding approach to myth. While the rupturist approach to myth may be situated in the Enlightenment, the fusionist approach is rather rooted (together with so much of enthusiastic scholarly research into myth, folktales and folklore from the early nineteenth century CE onwards) in post-Enlightenment Romanticism.

Our tasks as global intellectuals studying myth is thus situated between rupture and fusion, in the field of tension between

- celebrating such myths as create and communicate – well in line with current notions of human dignity and self-realisation – beauty, cosmological meaning, sociability, self-respect, power and freedom (often through their transformative incorporation in literary, musical, dramatic and graphic artistic expressions; or alternatively, through their underpinning an equitable social arrangement, a justified socio-political cause, or even more in general, because the myths in question are enshrined in the collective representations of our society); and, on the other hand,
- exploding the kinds of myths (e.g., the male myth – prominent throughout West Asia and the Pelasgian Realm, including the world religions that originated there: Judaism, and to some extent also Christianity and Islam – of the polluting female body; the White racist myth of lazy, dirty, ignorant, incompetent Blacks; the Fascist myths of power, order and superiority, etc.) that so very often, result in the opposite of human dignity and self-realisation, – and having this result in principle by virtue of – *mutatis mutandis* – the very same mechanisms as summed up under (1).

3.5. *The scholar's adoption and celebration of myth*

A field of tension,¹⁰² in order to be sustained, requires both poles of a contradiction to persist. This means that the scholar must at the same time

1. *deconstruct* myth, and,
2. (deferring such deconstruction), *adopt and celebrate* myth.

At first glance, the adoption of myth and the pursuit of scholarship (as under (2)) would appear to be incompatible and mutually exclusive, but that is a premature and unjustified conclusion. On the contrary, as literary scholars are well aware, we may engage in the identification and celebration of such literary, pictorial, ideological and political myths as may be

¹⁰² #3.6. 'FIELD OF TENSION' AS A USEFUL BLANKET TERM. For the relevance of the concept of the 'field of tension' for the study of situations of interculturality, cf. van Binsbergen 2003a: 40, 280. Such situations invariably present the *aporia* to the effect that *truth and meaning can only be constructed and maintained within one culturally distinct domain, which they, in their turn, construct in the first place – so that truth and meaning in principle cannot be negotiated across cultural boundaries*. The local *truth province* and its virtual non-negotiability across cultural boundaries, is an important perspective in my intercultural philosophy (e.g. van Binsbergen 2003a, 2015a, 2021c). The notion of the 'field of tension' allows us to more or less overcome this *aporia*: it takes a relative view of boundaries (which are always both firm barriers, and invitations to cross them, at the same time), and it reminds us of the fact that even within one cultural domain, truth and meaning are divided against themselves. Thus the 'field of tension' invites us, as a practical compromise, to build a liveable human and social world in the face of the irresolvable oppositions invested in each of the many culturally distinct domains, out of which our present-day world consists; the field of tension ushers us beyond the prisons of intransigent local cultural thought constructs.

argued to express and reinforce current notions of human dignity and self-realisation, in other words, such myths as may be invoked as demonstrations of more or less dominant and more or less unchallenged collective representations in the current wider society. In North Atlantic society, numerous are the literary critical studies that help us to identify and appreciate the overarching myths informing the details of a novelist's, poet's or playwright's literary product.¹⁰³ Such myths may be described by critics in abstract terms that convey fundamental themes in present-day North Atlantic society: the quest for power, integrity and existential redemption; the conflict between individual drives and collective Super-Ego-type censorship, or between passionate love and official duty; productivity, creativity, transformation, trust, wisdom, gender balance, identity as the partial and contested outcome of life-long struggles; the fragmentation, performativity, absurdity and human failure inevitably attending such struggles and rendering them, in part, incredible. Here the models of man and of action that are proffered in the mythical narrative, overlap or even coincide with such models as inform social life in the mythologists's own society. But mythical models and social models, more or less, pattern and instigate the actual behaviour of human beings without ever totally determining it.

#3.7. THE APPLICATION OF ANCIENT MYTHICAL MATERIAL IN CONCRETE PRESENT-DAY CONTEXTS OF LITERARY AND PICTORIAL PRODUCTION, POLITICAL ORATORY, ETC. often takes a very specific form: that of the deliberate (typically archaicising) re-circulation of undisguised, stereotyped, ancient mythical contents in latter-day artistic products, with specific mythic protagonists in stereotyped interrelationships and evolving struggles with their respective opposites. Here usually not the belief in the true historical existence of these protagonists and their mythical history is at stake, but the exemplary, emblematic use to which they are put, allowing the latter-day artist or orator to juggle with standardised positions and relationships triggered by the mere mention of the all-familiar names of the mythical protagonists. The device is an example of intertextuality (latter-day literary products selectively and usually somewhat innovatively referring to ancient mythical texts). In the North Atlantic tradition, this peculiar re-circulation of clearly identified myths¹⁰⁴ pervades Hellenistic, Ancient Roman, European medieval and Early Modern literatures and is still very far from extinct – to judge by such twentieth-century authors as the Irish James Joyce (*Ulysses*, recycling the mythical contents of the *Odyssey*) and the Flemish Hugo Claus (*Omtrent Deedee*, recycling the myth of the castration of Cronus and the birth of Aphrodite).¹⁰⁵ Numerous other examples could be given outside the North Atlantic region, from mythical complexes as far-flung as the West African *Sundjata* epic, the South and South East Asian *Mahabharata*, Alexander / Iskander myths throughout Central, South and South East Asia, etc. (cf. Lombard 1993). The strange attraction of this inveterate literary device of 'bringing ancient myth to life' appears to lie in the deliberately ambivalent nature of the relationship between the mythical and the Modern: the ancient

¹⁰³ Cf. Allen 1970; Bodkin 1934; Grassi 1957; Hunger 1974; Lurker 1958; Panofsky 1962; Seznec 1994; Strelka 1979; Strich 1910; van Gorp 1982; Wheelwright 1942.

¹⁰⁴ While the emphasis here is on Graeco-Roman myth, we are reminded that also Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other world religions have produced mythologies which, over the centuries, have frequently been recycled for literary purposes.

¹⁰⁵ In addition we may remind ourselves of the work of such poets as William B. Yeats (Ireland) and Adriaan Roland Holst (the Netherlands).



standardised narrative shimmers through its modern trappings, adds extra force and meaning in it, organises the plot to some extent, yet must at the same time be craftily domesticated, customised, brought to local present-day life, and innovated so as to prevent that the ancient myth becomes intolerably dominant and freezes the life force of modern literary characters and their actions.¹⁰⁶

Literary scholars cannot convincingly handle such mythical material if they insist on the analytical rupture between (a) themselves and (b) the myth they, and the literary authors under scrutiny, are handling. Their literary comments are likely to become positively mythographic and mythopoeic ('myth-making'), at the same time as scholarly and distant – and they may seek to convey and emulate, in their writings, something of the tension and the beauty that informs the mythically-orientated writing under scrutiny, in the first place.

A rather similar situation occurs in a particular form of anthropological engagement with living myth: when it is not the analytical, cross-culturally comparative stance of ethnology that prevails, but the active participation, as observer as well as temporary member, in present-day contexts in which the owners' ceremonial or ritual enactment of myth constitutes the backbone of a social event. This situation is very far from exceptional, and need not be exotically constructed.¹⁰⁷ Imagine a young sociological field-worker whose Ph.D. research takes her to join the supporters of a prominent soccer club in their European peregrinations. The club's identity, its symbolism through colours, verbal associations, standardised narratives of historical triumphs and defeats, and other attributes, will combine with those of the

¹⁰⁶ This, at least, was the conclusion of my first, unpublished, exploration in myth analysis (van Binsbergen 1966b): a re-study of classical Greek myth in Hugo Claus's novel *Omtrent Deedee* in polemic response to Weverbergh 1963, cf. Claes 1981, 1984. By the same time I also investigated – in an extensive study of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) – the opposite case, of how a literary writer moves, not (like Hugo Claus) from ossified myth to living narrative, but from narrative to mythopoiesis (van Binsbergen 1966c). However, these early literary studies of mine were to share the fate of my North African ethnography, constituting a continuous reference point in my own thought throughout the decades of my career, yet remaining shelved to this very day.

¹⁰⁷ Although it may very well be so constructed; cf. Venbrux 1995: an account of present-day anthropological field-work in North-western Australia, where violently conflictive relations between kin are – or so is Venbrux's conviction on the basis of prolonged and traumatic participant observation – constantly informed, and articulated, by reference to mythical characters to whose mythical roles the present-day protagonists in family dramas are irresistibly drawn. There are obvious parallels with the literary devices of James Joyce and Hugo Claus as indicated above. But also in everyday experience in the North Atlantic such mythical projection occurs frequently, e.g. when an adversary is called 'a Judas' (*Luke* 22:48), a treacherous woman 'a Jezebel' (1 *Kings* 16:31), a doubter 'a doubting Thomas' (*John* 20:26), nudity becomes 'Adam's costume' (*Genesis* 2 f.), etc. Moreover, the interpenetration of myth into everyday experience is both one of the central concerns of magic, and one of our main sources for myth in the first place. For instance, when throughout the traceable history of Ancient Egyptian

magic the experiences of Isis and her infant Hōrus in the marshy Delta environment of  or , ꜥꜣ-bit / Chemmis are invoked to cure snake bite and other dangers, it is not so much the myth that heals the current danger, but rather the current danger that keeps the myth and its protagonists from dying out. The ancient therapist's view was, no doubt, that the incantation of myth remedies current distress through the intervention of the myth's protagonists; the modern mythographer's interpretation would rather be that it is the curative recitation that keeps the myth and its protagonists alive through attaching it to a context in which meaning and redress are created through a process of symbolic production. The parallel with what Venbrux describes is close, and we would certainly be wrong to attribute to his Australian Aboriginal research associates some kind of atavistic mythical thought which has elsewhere been banned or overcome by civilisation. Myth is the basis of any civilisation, and of all human social life of Anatomically Modern Humans.

club's present and past protagonists and corresponding features of the opponent clubs to bring out mythical dimensions of heroic struggle, defeat and victory towards which the field-worker will often employ fusion, rather than rupture, as a personal position. Beyond mere instrumental association, she is likely to become a fan of the club in question – at least for a long as the fieldwork lasts. During my first fieldwork in North Africa, I did not just study shrines and ecstatic cults, but I joined in the rituals and pilgrimages and became somewhat indistinguishable from the villagers also in this respect that I came to believe in the local saint and in the invisible agencies venerated in this ecstatic dance – a belief I have kept up, with the attending rituals including the dedication of sacred meals, for over half a century to this very day.

Let those of my readership who insist that such a North Atlantic present-day example does not apply because myth – in their stereotypical opinion – has to be savoured in a typically exotic setting of totemism, magic, divination and bloody sacrifice, be reminded of the many anthropologists, including myself,¹⁰⁸ who have braved the tenets of their academic rationality and have actively adopted, on the basis of a considerable amount of cultural learning and of initiation, in the enactment of local African, Asian, Oceanian and American myth during field-work outside the North Atlantic. Back home, will they relapse into the appropriative, reductionist rupture in contrast to the fusion characterising their actual field-work? Or will they find the forms, literary more than scientific, and beyond the claims of a monopolised access to privileged truth, that will allow them to salvage, to render into discursive and evocative writing, the living myth they have encountered and embodied in the field; and will they do so in a fashion that invites the recognition, and the identification, of the owners of those myths? (Cf. van Binsbergen 2003a, 2021c).

Literary scholars often write about texts whose authors they have never met, and whose authors may have long been dead. Ethnographers temporarily and vicariously living mythical contents within present-day local horizons¹⁰⁹ have more immediate reasons to appreciate that the personal, practical participation in living myth, involving also the intersubjective understanding of myth at the owners' / narrators' own terms, is primarily an act of *sociability* (cf. van Binsbergen 2004a, cf. 2015: ch. 8). By not explicitly and not publicly breaking out of the spellbound world constructions of shared living myth, one affirms one's fellowship with the myth owners. Since many anthropological scholars (and North Atlantic students of myth in general) believe to have eradicated myth from their own professional sub-culture, and increasingly from North Atlantic culture in general, fusion as a mode of sharing myth is also a form of countering North Atlantic hegemonic presumptions, and creating a possible context for intercultural understanding; it admits the fundamental humility of the human condition, notably the unattainableness of a privileged position in intercultural encounters, unless through violence.

¹⁰⁸ The list of such professionals who succumbed, through initiation, to myth in field-work includes: Matthew Schoffeleers, Paul Stoller, R. Jaulin, John Janzen, René Devisch, Michael Jackson, Frank Cushing, etc.

¹⁰⁹ Be they the scene of Manchester United soccer supporters, or Nkoya cults of kingship, or West African Pentecostal church services hinging on the diabolical qualities of globally circulating artefacts and moneys that have not first been whitewashed through the church's selective blessing; cf. van Dijk 1999; Meyer 1998, 1999.

3.6. The scholar's critical battle against myth

Such sociability through participation in living myth is far easier to achieve in expressive domains such as ritual, drama, orature, visual arts, than when myths consciously and explicitly address, discursively, the structure of the life world, as an unmistakable form of cognitive knowledge production. We have seen that the fundamental act of rupture in the study of myth consists in questioning the truth value of myth (by such standards as objectivity, universality and rationality – the three fundamental qualities which the Sandra Harding (1997) identifies as the central claims of Western science). Where, on the one hand, the fusionist student of myth would see affirmations of identity, standardised models for action, and the active creation of meaning and of empowerment often after long periods of oppression and denial,¹¹⁰ the rupturist, on the other hand, would prefer a literalist approach, where the myth is taken, not as myth in terms of our above definition, but is taken as (or rather, mistaken for) a pseudo-scientific statement of fact, to be assessed, deconstructed and (inevitably) exploded, with the same scientific rationality that constructs the rupturist position in the first place. It is in this way that the great majority of Afrocentrist, feminist, New Age, ethnic, nationalist and so-called fundamentalist (both Christian, Islamist, and Hindu) writings and related discourses have been relegated (by a host of unsympathetic critics who tend to occupy positions of power in academia, the media, and government circles) to the domain of myth – not in recognition of the uniquely pivotal position of myth in the construction of any society including Postmodern globality, but pejoratively, in contempt of the, allegedly, pseudo-scientific overtones such discourses tend to carry, and selectively stressing the recent semantics of 'myth' as 'untruth'. Allegedly, I say – for it is only one little step for such rupturist critics to be made to realise that also their own sacrosanct fortress of scientific rationality, objectivity and universality constitutes nothing but a myth – certainly in the sense of my definition as given above, and very likely also in the very pejorative sense (as 'untruth') which these critics give to 'myth' and, by implication, extend to the forms of contestation, alternative reflection and liberation enumerated above.

Here it becomes very manifest that one person's myth is another person's truth. There is no way in which a responsible intellectual producer can opt to dwell exclusively on one side, at one pole, of the field of tension between rupture and fusion. Complete fusion will mean a total abandonment of the great achievements of critical thought since the Enlightenment (and in fact, as the names of Xenophanes and Theagenes demonstrate, since the very beginning of Western philosophy).¹¹¹ As intellectuals, we simply cannot allow ourselves, or even others, to live with an unchecked proliferation of myths that are not even partially subjected to critical scrutiny. On the other hand, complete rupture will lead to the destruction, not only of the myth-underpinned life worlds of others, and of their identity (however much admitted to be constructed), but also of our own life world, in which *scientific rationality, universality and objectivity can only exist to the extent to which these are themselves raised to the status of myth*, and help to cosily cushion that life world amidst North Atlantic modern myths (such as democracy, the market, and human rights) – the latter myths being largely invisible to us, as myths, like the very air we breathe in.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Toelken 2002, with regard to Native American handling of myth today.

¹¹¹ It is here that the uniquely constitutive role of Kant needs to be appreciated. But does Western philosophy have, independently, the monopoly of such scepticism? Probably not. Cf. Gupta 1981; Chinn 1997.

3.7. A near-universal mytheme: ‘hero fights monster’

Bodies of mythological knowledge are among humankind’s oldest¹¹² attested and best studied systems of knowledge. The recognition of the similarity of mythological patterns as found in distinct linguistic and cultural traditions was already a fact in Antiquity, when it inspired the practice of the *interpretatio graeca* (cf. Griffiths 1980): the projection of Greek mythological proper names and concepts onto the mythologies and ritual practices of the Egyptians, Scythians, Celts, *etc.* at the periphery of the Greek world – a practice well-known from the works of Herodotus and Plato.¹¹³ World-wide, the available mythological material is of an incredible wealth. This extensive corpus includes cases of myths of the most far-reaching continuity and convergence, and in this respect borders on the same spatial globality which Harding has,¹¹⁴ rightly, identified as a crucial factor in the universalism attributed to Western science. To make this point, I propose to select just one mytheme¹¹⁵, that of ‘hero fights monster’ (more on mythical heroes in ch. 15, below), and to study it by reference to just one, highly reliable and authoritative, source: the account of Fontenrose’s explorations into the charter myth of the famous Delphic oracle in Ancient Greece. The mytheme involves two archetypal characters, the hero and the adversary, to which often a third is added: the usually passive heroine (as some kind of catalytic third party).

The following table demonstrates the truly amazing, nearly universal distribution of this mytheme across world cultures:

	selected protagonists	selected enemies	selected passive heroines
African interior	Perseus	Ketos	Aso, Andromeda
Egypt	Ammon, Athena / Neith, Geb, Horus, Isis, Min, Osiris, Rē, (Seth), Thot, Uto	Apep, Bata, Busiris, the Sea, Seth, (Thot)	Anat, Asherat, (Isis), Nut
Canaan, Israel, Ugarit, Syria	Anat, Aqhat, Baʿal, Beltis, El (II), (Judith), Cadmus, Melqart, Paghat, Perseus, Phoenician Heaven god, Yahweh	Holofermes, Humbaba, Judith, Ketos, Leviathan, Mot, Orontes, Phoenician hawk dragon, Satan, Tannin, Yam, Yatpan	Andromeda, Asherat, Kassiepeia, Omphale, Phoenician Earth goddess
Anatolia, Cilicia, Hittites, Cyprus	Baʿal Tarz, Hittite Weather God, Hupasias, Inaras, Kumarbi, Mar-syas, Perseus, Sandon, Teshub, Telipinu	dragon, Illuyankas, Medusa, Oceanus, Syleus, Typhon, Ullikummi, Upelluri	Aphrodite, Semiramis
Mesopotamia	Anu, Ea, (Enkidu), Enlil, Gilgamesh, (Inanna) / (Ishtar), Lugalbanda, Marduk, Nergal, Ninurta, Shamash, Tammuz	Apsu, Asag, Bilulu, (Enkidu), Erishkigal, (Gilgamesh), Girgire, Humbaba, Imdugud, Inanna / Ishtar, Kingu, Labbu, Seven Demons, Tiamat, Zu	

¹¹² Cf. Witzel 2001, 2003, 2012; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2005b, 2010d, all reprinted in the present book. In these long-range studies certain myths are argued to have a time depth of well over 100,000 years.

¹¹³ Sometimes the *interpretatio graeca* falters, e.g. in the case of the erroneous Greek identification of the Ancient Egyptian Creator god Ptah, with the Greek god of Fire and artful handicrafts Hephaestus; cf. Blažek 2010 (who supports this identification), and my extensive book in the press (g), where the identification is refuted with detailed arguments.

¹¹⁴ Harding 1997; cf., specially on the point of global distribution of myth, van Binsbergen 2010d.

¹¹⁵ I.e. ‘smallest meaningful unit of mythological narrative’.

India, South East Asia, Persia	Fredun = Thraetaona, Indra, (Kaikeyi)	Azi Dahaka, Danu, Garuda, Manthara, Nahusha, Namuci, Ravana, Sinhika, Viparupa, Vṛtra	(Kaikeyi)
China	Chu Yang, Li Ping, No Cha, Shen Yi, Yi, Ying Lung, Yü	Ch'ih Yu, Chu Wang, dragon, Fung Po, Ho Po	Hsi Wang Mu
Japan	Agatamori, Amewakahiko, Izanagi, Raiko, (Susanoo), Takemikazuchi	Susanoo	Amaterasu, Izanami
North Africa and Southern Europe	Athena / Neith, Heracles, Melgart, Perseus	Antaeus, Atlas, Cacus, Evander / Faunus, Geryon, Ophion	
Greece	Apollo, Artemis, Athena, Dionysus, Erechtheus, Eros, (Hekate), Heracles, (Hermes), Io, Cadmus, Cronus, Pan, (Poseidon), Uranus, Zeus [Ceraunius] ¹¹⁶	Achelous, Aigis, (Apollo), Ares, Delphyne, Despoina, Diomedes, (Dionysus), Dracon, Echidna, Gigantes, Glaucus, Hades, Hekate, Hera, (Heracles), (Hermes), Hydra, Kampe, Kepheus, Keto, Ker, (Cronus), Cygnus, Lamia, Laogoras, Laomedon, Linus, Neleus, Ocean = Oceanus, Ogygus, Pallas, (Perseus), Phlegyas, Phorbas, Poine, Poseidon, Python, the Sea, Sphinx, Styx, Sybaris, Tartarus, Telphusa, Thanatus, Tethys, Titans, Tityus, (Uranus), Zeus [Chthonius], Zeus's hawk ¹¹⁷	(Artemis), Deianeira, Demeter, Ge, Io, Kelto, Leto, Moerae, Persephone, Rhea, Xenodice
Pre-Christian Northern Europe	Bearson, Beowulf, Hagen, Odin, Ogier the Dane, Parzival, Sigurd / Siegfried, Sigmund, Thor	dragon, Fafnir, Firedrake, Grendel, Grendel's Mother, Hel, Holda, Lorelei, Midgard Snake, Regin-Mimir, Valkyrie, Venus, Ymir	Audumla, Brynhild, Krimhild, Lohengrin
Christian Europe	St Evenmar, St George, St Michael	Satan, St George's dragon, the Woman of Rev. 12 & 17	
Americas	Coyote, Gucumatz, Hunahpu, Xbalanque, Tahoe	Nashlah, Xibalba, Vucub-Caquix, Wishpoosh	

Table compiled on the basis of scattered information contained in: Fontenrose 1980. Italics denote female characters.

Table 3.1. A near-universal theme of systems of mythological knowledge: 'hero fights monster'.

What could explain the persistence and global distribution of this mytheme? At the end of his long quest for comparative data, scanning the local and cultural specifics of the mytheme 'hero fights monster', Fontenrose falls short of inspiration, and all he can offer us is an appeal to *the universal human condition in the face of death*. A rather disappointing truism. Yet, as we shall see in the next sections, this persistent global distribution also implies an invitation to engage in the study of long-range comparative world mythology on a grand scale – as in the work of Michael Witzel and his Harvard network, including my own work.

3.8. Living with the tensions: Towards a specialised scholarship of myth

The field of tension between rupturist and fusionist approaches to myth, signalled above, is too productive than that we should try and resolve that tension by a radical retreat from

¹¹⁶ To which could be added, e.g., Agenor, Argus, Eurybatus, Euthymus, Coroebus, Lykus, Pyrrhichus, Silenus.

¹¹⁷ To which could be added, e.g., Admetus, Akrisius, Actaeon, Amycus, Amyntor, Asclepius, Autolyclus, Dryopes, Erginus, Eurynomus, Eurypylos, Eurytion, Eurytus, Euphemus, Geras, Heros of Temesa, Coronus, Ladon, Laestrygones, Lakinius, Lityerses, Lykorus, [Peri-]Clymenus, Phineus, Phorcys, Polydectes, Satyrus, Theiodamas, Tiphys, Titias.

living myth – which is impossible anyway because we cannot live without collective representations. Yet the contradictions of scholarship produce a relative compartmentalisation in time and place that allows us to engage, as specialists (and only for that part of our existence where we can identify as specialists), in the detached study of myths as if they were exclusively other people's. In this respect the possibilities suggested by Table 3.1 alone are dazzling: there is the suggestion of an underlying pattern informing an incredible variety of cultures in the Old and the New World, across millennia. Is the study of myth a road to the recognition of very old layers of a very widely shared worldview? Or does it, instead, reveal the innate tendencies built into the universal human mind? Detached myth analysis is not only constitutive of the Western intellectual tradition and especially of the Enlightenment – it is one of the most fascinating intellectual activities one could engage in.

Over the past decades, I have personally, intensely, and from a variety of different angles grappled with the study of myth. In certain aspects of this work I have identified as a fusionist:

- using my position as a prominent North Atlantic Africanist scholar to proclaim and defend an attenuated form of *Afrocentrism*, as reformulated by me in the context, and in the terms, of scientific rationality,¹¹⁸
- and using my anthropological field-work *to become a practicing diviner-priest (Sangoma)* in the Southern African tradition, propagating that practice worldwide through the Internet, and seriously, incisively analysing that field of knowledge in its own right with a methodology inspired by both mainstream North Atlantic science, and *Sangoma* knowledge (van Binsbergen 1991, 1998b, 2003a, 2021c).

But in many other respects my studies as a mythical scholar have tended to rupture, to analytical distance. This has been the case for my early study of myth in a North African sacred landscape,¹¹⁹ and, largely,¹²⁰ for my attempts to unravel – mainly on the basis of local myth and oral tradition – the precolonial post-1500 CE history of state formation, gender relations and ethnicity in Western Zambia (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1992); but particularly for my more recent probings into long-range mythical ramifications.¹²¹

- mythical continuity of dualist mythical structures informing the worldwide history of, mainly, geomantic divination (including the Arabic, African, and European Renaissance forms) ever since its remotest traces in the Ancient Near East
- mythical continuity between Ancient Greece and Ancient Egypt, in the context of

¹¹⁸ *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1997a, 1997b, 2000a, 2000b; 2005d / 2015; ch. 12; and my web page 'Afrocentricity and the Black Athena debate', at: <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/afrocentrism/index.htm>.

¹¹⁹ *Cf.* van Binsbergen 1980b, 1985c, in press (jb). I am honoured that Vansina's study (1985) of homeostasis in the use of myth for historical reconstruction uses this study of mine as an example; also *cf.* Vansina 1993. However, blood being thicker than water, the Tunisian field-work features prominently in my poetry, and the only full-length book I published on it so far is a novel, *Een Buik Openen*, (1988b), hinging on the tension between the affirmation and the living on local myth, on the one hand, and its scholarly deconstruction (detective-fashion) in the face of methodological reconstruction historical truth, on the other hand. I am fortunate that my youngest daughter Hannah van Binsbergen is continuing our family line of *belles lettres*, with a vengeance.

¹²⁰ Largely, for here again a combination of a rupturist and a fusionists perspective was pursued, in that I not only wrote the standard history of the Nkoya people, but also joined them in active defence of their ethnic identity and interests at the regionally and national level in Zambia, and in the process was adopted as son of one of their two kings, Mwene Kahare Kabambi.

¹²¹ For a related long-range recent approach to myth, *cf.* Witzel 2001, 2012.

the *Black-Athena* debate¹²² (an idea I now consider obvious – cf. Table 2 below – and perhaps even almost pedestrian, for being over-obvious, because from a long-range perspective comprising dozens of millennia and all continents, like my latest work on Leopard symbolism, the affinities between the Egyptian and Greek mythological repertoire are only too predictable, both straddling Afroasiatic and Indo-European varieties of Nostratic, in the same narrow horizon of the Eastern Mediterranean basin and the Extended Fertile Crescent)¹²³

- mythical themes which connect South Central African kingship with South and South East Asia and the Ancient Near East (van Binsbergen 2010a)
- mythical themes emerging in long-range patterns of animal symbolism across the Old World, as exemplified in clan names, divination systems, and systems of astronomical nomenclature (van Binsbergen 2021e)
- mythical themes emerging in long-range continuities in Leopard nomenclature and symbolism as a perspective on the world history of shamanism (van Binsbergen 2004b, and in press(h))
- African cosmogonic ('creation') myths, the Out-of-Africa package c. 140,000 Before Present (BP), and the mythical implications of Back-to-Africa return migration from Asia as from ca. 20,000 BP.¹²⁴

In conclusion, it is the Leopard theme that I will now discuss in some detail.¹²⁵

3.9. The Leopard's unchanging spots: Example of an interdisciplinary approach to an African mythical complex

Using such auxiliary approaches as Lévi-Straussian structuralism, long-range comparative linguistics (in terms of such macro families as Nostratic, Dene-Sinocaucasian *etc.*), population genetics (Cavalli-Sforza and his school, meanwhile largely supplanted by the more recent molecular biology), archaeology, the history of art, the study of ancient astronomies and other specialist knowledge systems, cultural anthropological perspectives on the distribution of specific traits (especially with regard to ritual and belief) in space and time, and multivariate statistical analysis, I have engaged in a form a long-range myth analysis whose main results may be summarised as follows:

¹²² van Binsbergen 1996d, 1997a / 2011a, 2000a, 2000b, 2005d / 2015; ch. 12.

¹²³ In the late 2000s I have returned to comparative mythology in the context of the Ancient Mediterranean, because it is here that important clues may be found as to the provenance and interethnic relations of the Sea Peoples who, at the end of the Bronze Age, destroyed the Hittite empire and threatened Egypt; cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. To my delight, Goto 2005 covers much of the same ground but far more succinctly and with a different objective.

¹²⁴ Cf. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Hammer *et al.* 1998.

¹²⁵ van Binsbergen, in press (h); an extensive slide presentation covering much of the proposed book's argument is available in 2004b.

Rather than exclusively committing oneself to one pole of the rupture / fusion tension in the study of myth, a combination of these stances is the most productive choice for innovative research; thus, in the best fusionist tradition, my Leopard project started out on the basis of an existential puzzle imposed on me by a high priest in Botswana during my final confirmation as a Sangoma, but it has triggered an analytical rupturist endeavour whose value, if any, is no longer dependent on these anecdotal origins; the same incidentally applies to my geomantic studies.

Continuity in myth, across continents and across millennia, is not merely the perspectival illusion of those who, constitutionally, happen to be ‘lumpers’ rather than ‘splitters’¹²⁶ – on the contrary such continuity is a very well established empirical fact (cf. Table 3.1). But of course, the scientific value of such an assertion is fully dependent upon the theoretical and methodological care with which such a position, or its opposite, is elaborated. The main finding in my Leopard research to support the claim of continuity is: the disconcerting constancy, not only in the lexical nomenclature of the leopard from Khoisan (now in Southern Africa) to Sinotibetan (East Asia), Afroasiatic (northern Africa and West and Central Asia) and Indo-European (Europe, West and Central Asia), but also and particularly of the mythical significance of the notion of *speckledness* – as if throughout the Old World (and probably also in the Dene domain of the Nearctic New World) a 15,000-years-old mythical cosmology may be traced hinging on the juxtaposition of speckledness versus textural homogeneity, dark versus light, evil versus good, female versus male.

Classic diffusionism, cultural anthropology’s main stock-in-trade in the late 19th and early 20th century, lacked a theory of cultural borrowing and cultural integration, and was therefore rightly replaced by the (now again obsolete) paradigm of structural functionalism stressing narrow horizons of time and place, virtually total cultural integration within such a local horizon, and participatory field-work as the standard anthropological technique to explore such narrow horizons. Diffusion as a paradigm deserves to be revived, provided the well-known and well-taken criticism levelled against it by structural-functionalism is seriously answered at the theoretical and methodological level. And it is being revived (cf. Amelle 2001), notably in the context of studies of (proto-) globalisation, and of a rapprochement between anthropology and archaeology.

One methodological problem in this respect is *the recognition, or rejection as the case may be, of underlying similarity or identity in the face of manifest dissimilarity on the surface*. Here Lévi-Straussian structuralism remains a uniquely powerful and intersubjective analytical tool. It allows us to see myths in adjacent spaces and times as systematically interrelated through specific transformations, underneath of which the same deep structure may be systematically detected. It has managed to create order throughout New World mythologies, illuminates Indo-European mythologies (cf. Oosten 1985), helps us to argue Egyptian / Greek continuities in myth, and deserves to be systematically extended to African and Ancient Near Eastern mythologies, as in my own work. Reading the well-known Graeco-Roman myth of Aristaeus’s bee cultivation and *bugony* (the generation of bees from rotting

¹²⁶ The juxtaposition of lumpers and splitters, which I have already used once above, has a long history in historical linguistics, cf. Baxter & Ramer 2000. For instance, Martin Bernal, in the context of the *Black Athena* debate, prided himself on being a lumper rather than a splitter (Martin Bernal, contribution to the discussion, Leiden conference ‘Black Athena Ten Years After’, September 1996).

bull's carcasses)¹²⁷ from the perspective of Ancient Egypt, I present in Table 3.2 an example¹²⁸ of the kind of analysis that suggests very extensive Egyptian-Greek continuity in myth.

episode in the classical Greek myth	comment	interpretation in Ancient Egyptian terms ¹²⁹
1. Aristaeus,	= 'The Best', and as such a standard epithet of several principal Greek gods	Osiris, being the final compromise produced by the confrontation between the Neith cult and the Heliopolitan, masculine, bureaucratic offensive
2. son of Apollo		Horus, Ḥpr̄, or Rē', the Sun-god and male Creator-god
3. and Cyrene,	= 'Sovereign Queen' / Libyan town of Cyrene	Neith
4. (Aristaeus,) master of bee-keeping,		bit, 'Bee', high-priestess of Neith and Ruler of Lower Egypt ¹³⁰
5. has, or covets, illicit sex	narrative adornment, but perhaps also	an evocation of attempted amalgamation of the Neith cult with the Heliopolitan theology
6. with Eurydice, the wife of	'Wide Justice', an evocation of the Moon, to whom human sacrifice was made by way of poisoning with snake's venom; in Ancient Mesopotamia, it is the all-seeing Sun which is the Heavenly personification of justice	Nut; Tefnut (by contrast to Ḥorus, Ḥpr̄, or Rē')

¹²⁷ Main classical sources on Aristaeus are: Virgil, *Georgica* 4; Pindar, *Pythia*, 9, 26-70; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, II 500 f.; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 10, 17, 3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 5. Cf. Rose 1958: 142.

¹²⁸ This table formed part of my unpublished book manuscript repeatedly announced, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as: *Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World — Beyond the Black-Athena thesis* (van Binsbergen 1998). After my work on the *Black-Athena* debate from 1996 on, this marked my increasing distancing from Bernal's mistaken and (in his case) empirically unfounded Afrocentricity (which was only mistaken to the extent to which Ancient Egypt must be counted as an African society and nothing more), and my active re-engagement in the study of the Ancient Mediterranean as of vital interest to African history. However, my work in this connection soon made such progress as to render the earlier book MS obsolete. Parts of it were replaced by: van Binsbergen 2012a, 2015; and van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. The original MS contained a large section on the reconstruction of Egypt's Early Dynastic socio-political dynamics, which has so far remained unpublished. I have no intention any more to rescue the MS from its computer grave.

¹²⁹ With the typical inconsistency of transliteration, I have dropped the somewhat pompous Egyptological transliteration of divine names, without vowels, whenever a standard North Atlantic rendering is available.

¹³⁰ #3.8. ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN BEE SYMBOLISM. Of course, the priestly and/or divine Bee complex is not peculiar to the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Delta, but (as exemplified by the priestly offices called *Melissa* in Asia Minor and the Aegean especially in the cult of Artemis and of Cybele, the role of the Bee as saviour in the Hitrite Telepinu epic – Pritchard 1969 – and Bee motifs on Minoan Crete – Woudhuizen 1997) pervades the entire eastern Mediterranean from the Neolithic on, in a linguistic context that is Palaeo-Mediterranean or Indo-European speaking, rather than Afroasiatic (Ancient Egyptian is generally reckoned to belong to the latter language family, but not without problems, cf. Kammerzell 1994, Ray 1992, and references cited there). For the authoritative feminist archaeologist Gimbutas (1982, 1991), the Bee is an attribute of the mother goddess – which suggests that even the extensively pocked or indented wall of the Neolithic temples of the Malta islands could be interpreted as representing beehives; however, my Leopard research (see below) suggests that in the Maltese case an interpretation in terms of the universal theme of speckledness (also an attribute of the mother goddess, as I argue) is more convincing. Note however the correspondence in colour scheme (black/yellow) between certain popular Bee races, and the Leopard.

7. Orpheus.	'Hereditary Prince' (Ancient Egyptian: <i>iri p'ḥ</i> ; Bernal 1987: 71f.; Hannig 2000: 991). Orpheus is claimed to have visited Egypt (Diodorus Siculus, <i>Bibliotheca Historica</i> , IV.25.2-4)	Geb (Bernal 1987: 71f.); Shu. Graves's idiosyncratic etymology (1964) of Orpheus' Greek name as 'Him of the River Bank(?)' cannot be supported, although it does suggest a link with Osiris and Neith as water-gods
8. Eurydice then flies,		confrontation of the Heliopolitan theology and the Neith cult
9. trips on a snake, is bitten and dies.	an extension of the Neith motif to that of the primordial snake enemy, Apophis, whom Neith produced by spitting (Hart 1993, s.v. Apophis)	power of the Neith cult evoked
10. Eurydice's sisters	other goddesses of the Sun-god's entourage	Isis and Nephthys (or <i>W3ḏyt</i> and <i>Nḥbt</i> as the Two Ladies (<i>nbtj</i>) accompanying the pharaoh as Horus?)
11. subsequently kill Aristaeus's bees.	i.e. his power as bit, or the power of bit in itself, or his bit retinue, the Neith priest(ess)hood, curtailed	Heliopolitan theology curbing the Neith cult; Neith priestesses killed as funerary human sacrifices at First Dynasty royal tombs
12. Aristaeus, on the advice of his mother Cyrene,		insistence on the power of the Neith cult or of Libyan (more of less, = Delta) culture in general
13. fetters the Pharus-based oracular sea-god Proteus.	Proteus = 'The First', cf. above, row (1).	a narrative adornment, evoking the Delta and oracular possibly indicative of divination as a cultic innovation; but since Neith is called 'One' and often considered 'the First', and a water goddess, the male minor god Proteus may well be a transformation of Neith rendered harmless ¹³¹
14. Aristaeus thus learns that the bees have died in retaliation for Eurydice's death.		the Neith cult's powers curbed by the rise of the masculine, bureaucratic pharaonic state as religiously and symbolically underpinned by non-Neith related themes; the Neith priestesses killed
15. Aristaeus kills four bulls and four cows as propitiatory sacrifice.	Neith cult has to symbolically defer to the Heliopolitan theology revolving on the Ennead headed by the male Sun-god who, as the 'Bull of the Ennead', has usurped Neith's creative prerogatives ¹³²	the bull element has to be transmuted into the original Bee/bit element through a process of transformation. The bull element evokes the Heliopolitan cult with its Nine Gods (minus one), but probably also the various Egyptian cults of divine bulls, e.g. Apis, and <i>K3mtf</i> , – in the latter name, 'bull of his mother', again a reference to the mother goddess can be detected)
16. Aristaeus, on Cyrene's advice,		insistence on the power of the Neith cult or of Libyan culture in general
17. leaves the bovine carcasses in a copse	the arboreal element stems from Thracia, where some of the goddesses involved in the Greek version appear as dryads, i.e. tree (specifically oak) goddesses	the bull element (evocative of the Heliopolitan cult) has to be transmuted into the original Bee/bit element through a long process of transformation
18. for eight days.		the Heliopolitan Ennead minus its leader and progenitor, Atum ¹³³

¹³¹ However, in our below chapters on Flood myths I shall argue a further interpretation of Proteus as a shape-shifting water god: not so much a transformation of the Mother of the Waters, but an evocation of the capricious, chance-driven forces of nature such as they confront the hunter and fisherman in the (extremely extensive) period of cultural history (from ca. 4 million years BP to ca. 12 ka BP) when such productive activities constituted practically the only modes of production available.

¹³² There is an alternative interpretation possible, in terms of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, i.e. the eight deities of Khemnu (Greek: Hermopolis, modern: al-Ashmunein), who appear in neat, gendered pairs; but I do not see the point.

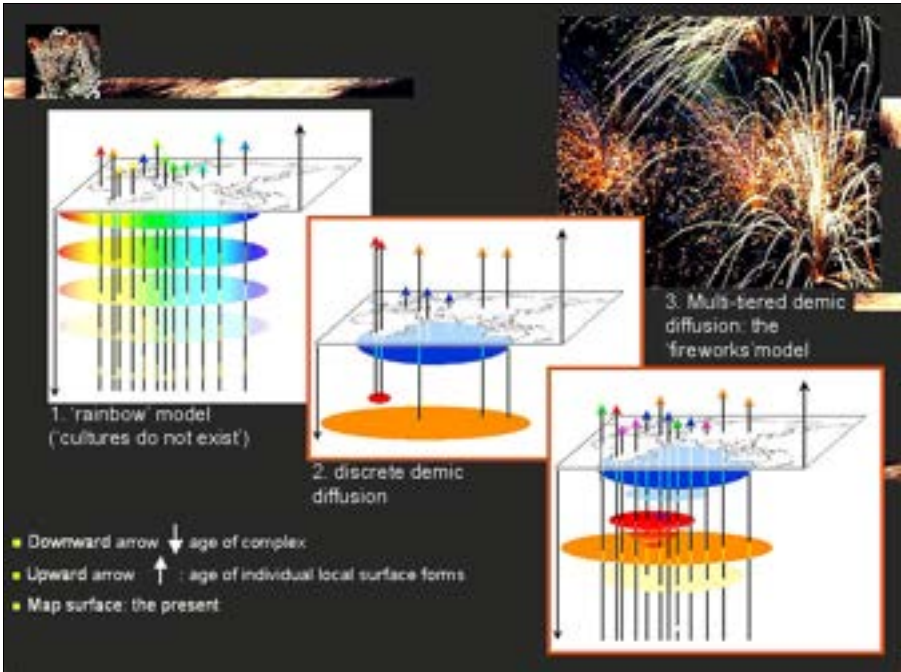
¹³³ Atum is a male primordial god who produces the first creatures, Shu and Tefnut, in a way which involves bodily fluids and which is variously described (masturbation, spitting; cf. Re's creation of humankind from his tears) but always in terms implying the absence of female reproductive organs. In my 1998 reading of early Egyptian history in the context of the abortive *Global Bee Flight* project, Atum represents the male usurpation, in the course of the consolidation of the Early Dynastic Egyptian state, through the Heliopolitan theology among other means, of a hypothetical female centred cosmology exemplified in the Neith cult. This perspective still appears to be quite plausible.

19. After a funerary sacrifice to Orpheus, who had meanwhile died, ¹³⁴	narrative adornment but also –	evocation of Neith as the mistress of death and the Underworld
20. on the ninth day		the Heliopolitan Ennead
21. the carcasses are teeming with bees		the bees as the sign of life resurrected from death; but also a symbolic triumph of Neith's living emblems over the dead and decaying substance of the masculine, bureaucratic state cult; all this amalgamated in the character of Osiris who is at the same time the expression of masculinisation, and (as Neith's vizier, and as the ultimate larva resurrecting from death) the continuation of the Neith cult in a new form.

Table 3.2. The Graeco-Roman myth of Aristaeus interpreted in the light of Ancient Egyptian religion: Evidence of Egyptian-Greek continuities.

Such a structuralist historical reading of myth complexes may help us to solve the perennial question of *how to demarcate the effects of parallel invention and of innate parallel programming of the – Anatomically Modern – human mind, as against diffusion*. Another problem is how to pinpoint the specific kind of diffusion that may be informing such widespread continuity. Accepted anthropological wisdom is that (contrary to the model of *demic diffusion* favoured in archaeology and genetics) often it is not populations that travel, taking both their gene pool, their language, and their distinctive culture with them, but that populations tend to remain more or less immobile or move only very slowly across the earth's surface, whereas the travelling of ideas, objects, and isolated individuals is largely held responsible for such diffusion as in fact has unmistakably taken place. This model works well for parts of sub-Saharan Africa I am familiar with, *e.g.* the continuity between the Congo basin and South Central Africa, or the so-called Bantu Expansion. My Leopard research, meanwhile, suggests that the model of demic diffusion yet has also some utility for the long-range study of both myth and language family. The distribution of myths, therefore, can be demonstrated to be related to that of genetic patterns and language (macro-) families – a pet idea of Witzel's, and also of the once leading Italian geneticist Cavalli-Sforza. However, in order to account for such unexpected long-range continuities as the nomenclature and symbolism of the leopard bring out, a multi-tiered model of demic diffusion seems required, where relatively constant nuclei are carried from one major wave to the next, somewhat comparable with the genetic immortality of human procreative cells from generation to generation. I have called this multi-tiered model the 'fireworks model'; Fig. 3.1. The succession of tiers brings out a historical sequence whose phases (each coinciding with a particular tier) do not necessarily have the same contents and structure. While in every tier, myths create life worlds and make these saturated with truth and meaning for the myth owners, these life worlds are demonstrably different.

¹³⁴ To which a late version of the myth adds: 'after having tried, in vain, to rescue Eurydice from Hades with the power of his music; his head [perhaps embalmed in honey?] was set up as an oracle but was ultimately silenced by Apollo'. Oracles from deceased's hero's heads and the conservation of venerated human remains in honey were standard features of Bronze-Age East Mediterranean societies.



(3) the 'fireworks' model: within a previous tier a kernel is engendered that grows into the next tier, which is highly different yet represents some continuity with the tier from which it has sprung – like cascading fireworks. The 'fireworks' model (3) is here contrasted with

(2) the 'rainbow' model (which is in line with my earlier theoretical position to the effect that 'cultures do not exist'): differences and boundaries between cultures are fluid, both horizontally (in space) and vertically (in time); and with

(1) the model of discrete (or simple) demic diffusion, which is based on the simple succession of totally discontinuous cultures. (This illustration derives from van Binsbergen 2004b).

Fig. 3.1. A model of multi-tiered demic diffusion.

My long-range, comparative research into Leopard symbolism has yielded evidence to postulate the following sequence informing a systematic of cosmologies in identifiable spatio-temporal contexts throughout the Old World:

- the mythical cosmology hinges on the mythical leopard–ungulate juxtaposition, which reflects Lower and Middle Palaeolithic situations (4,000 ka to 40 ka BP) directly inspired by natural conditions (for the ungulates are the leopard's natural prey), in a context inspired by the unpredictability of a hunting mode of production, images of the leopard help to give rise to the widespread mythical figure of a Divine Trickster

The mythical Leopard–Lion juxtaposition hinges on speckledness and brings together, because of the powers of human symbolic thought, two species that (although competing for the same preys and therefore occasionally mortal enemies; but also occasionally fertile together) usually avoid each other under natural conditions but that are eminently 'good for thinking' (Lévi-Strauss), in considerable abstraction from naturally given situations (for Lion and Leopard are not each other's natural partners or prey – although their competition over

the same prey animals may lead them to confront each other); this reflects an Upper Palaeolithic condition (40 to 10 ka BP)

The Leopard–Lion juxtaposition was subsequently, in early Neolithic times (Çatal Hüyük, and the fertile Neolithic Sahara), worked into an elaborate, utterly dualistic (also gendered) ‘Cosmology Of The Lion And The Leopard’, traces of which are found all over the Old World, in Kammerzell’s lexical pair *prd/*prg (‘leopard’, where the -pard element itself is an example of this root) versus *rw/*lw-/*LB’/*leu (‘Lion’), and mythically elaborated in von Sicard’s Luwe (*cf.* von Sicard 1968–1969; with a great many name variants) mythical figure, paired with a female companion Mwari (also with a great many name variants). Perhaps significantly, we are here in the domain of the few language families that have gender: Afroasiatic, Indo-European, and Khoisan; for all three families a West Asian origin c. 15,000 BP may be very tentatively postulated.

Cosmological/astronomical notions accrue to these figures, so that the leopard’s skin comes to represent the star-spangled sky especially the circumpolar northern sky and the night, while the celestial axis, noon, and the ecliptic comes to be associated with the Lion; the pole, spear, stick, club (representing the celestial axis; *cf.* Heracles/ Hercules) is one of Luwe’s most conspicuous attributes.

#3.9. IMMANENTALISM AND TRANSCENDENTALISM. This cosmology is implicitly immanentalist, in that its paired constituent elements are complementary, and readily transform into each other, without very sharp boundaries. However, the emergence of the logocentric achievements of writing, the state, organised priesthood and proto-science in Late Neolithic times created the conditions for the emergence of transcendentalist modes of thought. When transcendentalist thought emerges, the ancient Cosmology Of The Lion And The Leopard offers the mythical framework for dualist cosmologies of death and rebirth, often expressed through leopard or tiger skin garments (what I have called *pardivesture*), whose converging symbolism can be traced throughout the successive civilisations of the Ancient Near East (Indus, Sumer, Egypt, Greece, with ramifications into South Asia and China). A cluster of leopard-associated goddesses (Cybele, Hera, Aphrodite, Circe; with male figures vicariously associated with them: Dionysus, Orpheus, Jason, Menelaus, Antenor), merges with goddesses displaying both stereotypical feminine attributes (spinning, childbirth; *cf.* Bloomberg 2001; Degh 1993; Graber 1925; Reichard 1997 – who stress the spider connotations, *cf.* ch. 12, below) with military prowess: Neith, Athena, Anath, Anahita (*cf.* Cumont 1911), with more distant resonances in the weaving goddesses Proserpina and Harmonia as well as Germanic Frigg; with the African Spider goddess Anansi / Nzambi / Nyambi, where North African Antinea (Lhote 1959; Benoit’s 1920 Atlantide) constitute the connection with the Mediterranean. and with the leopard or tiger associated South Asian goddesses of death and transformation Durga and Kali. From this complex but consistent repertoire springs the Osirian / Orphic / Dionysian / Christian tradition – a prime source of transcendentalism that has largely shaped Europe and the Near East in the last few millennia. All this testifies to a gradual but most fundamental shift in gender power, with male (especially sky-associated) gods and male prerogatives replacing female ones in the millennia between the early Neolithic and the early Iron Age.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 6.4, p. 142. Ye Shuxian 2003 makes clear that also for China there is evidence of the early prominence of a female goddess (identified by him with the 女媧 Nü Wa of Chinese tradition), to be subjugated and eclipsed by a male god (identified with the culture hero 伏羲 Fu Xi of Chinese tradition). This is in line with the Chinese strands in my own analysis of Leopard symbolism, which tends to revolve on the mother goddess and/or her junior male companion. These strands include: the conspicuous



The five prominent instances of pardivesture ('the ceremonial or ritual wearing of leopard skins') in Africa during the second millennium CE are, from west to east and from north to south: *bards; Islamic saints; Nilotic Leopard-skin chiefs; kings; and diviner-priests in the Southern African Sangoma tradition*. My intercontinental comparative and historical analysis of Leopard symbolism suggests that these five instances may be interpreted as being situated at the interface between two very extensive cultural domains, and as resulting from the recent (2nd millennium CE) interaction between these domains: (a) the implicitly transcendentalist domain of the Leopard-skin wearer as the Sacred Outsider (usually with shamanistic connotations), widely distributed in the Old World except in West and South-West Africa; and (b) the implicitly immanentist domain of the Leopard-skin wearer as the Exalted Insider (usually without shamanistic connotations), in West and South-West Africa. This illustration derives from van Binsbergen 2004b, with indebtedness to: Probenius 1954: 208f., map 27. Note that here insider / outsider are both implicit emic categories, and have nothing to do with the insider-outsider debate within anthropology, as introduced in a footnote to section 1.6, above.

Fig. 3.2. The five prominent instances of pardivesture in Africa during the second millennium CE.

In post-Neolithic Africa the Luwe complex is widespread but fragmented and little incorporated in current cultures, as if it were a remnant of a West Asian / Northeastern African context which (at least, according to my tentative reconstructions, which are in part inspired by recent genetic findings – mentioned and referenced above – as to a Back-into-Africa return migration from Asia), appears to have coincided with the emergence of Khoisan and Nigercongo as language families. The Cosmology Of The Lion And The Leopard has not survived in Africa as an integrated dualist complex, instead the Leopard has largely shed its complement the Lion, and has taken on (or reverted back to) the immanentist shape of the Exalted Insider – power-hungry and treacherous. Nonetheless, Sacred Outsiders, full of Leopard-skin symbolism, are to be found in an eastern and northern fringe of sub-Saharan Afri-

place of the [Dene-]Sinocaucasian linguistic group in Leopard nomenclature in four continents; and 'Dionysian' and 'Osirian' themes (not necessarily to be taken to have diffused from a postulated origin in the Ancient Near East and South East Europe) in classical Chinese iconography and symbolism, especially in the imperial context, where also the Leopard, bao 豹, is conspicuous.

can, as an interface with the Eurasian domain of transcendentalism centring on the Sacred Outsider. (Fig. 3.2, whose basic bifurcation (although not its designation in terms of Sacred Outsider / Exalted Insider), and basic south-westerly vector, owes much to Frobenius 1993 / 1933)

These are some of the findings which I have been trying, for the past decades, to work into a book draft provisionally entitled *The Leopard's Unchanging Spots: Long-Range Comparative Research As A Key To Enduring Patterns Of African Agency* (now in the press). I have no illusions about the reception that is to be expected for such a book.¹³⁶ In African Studies and in anthropology, myth is no longer the hot issue it was in the 1950s and 1960s; new researchers's myths, such as globalisation, multiculturalism, and identity, have taken that place. And I have obliged by incorporating these themes into my work. Given this relative unpopularity of myth (especially in African Studies), my current mythical studies (in the stricter sense of the word) are likely to be relegated, in their own right, to the status of pseudo-scientific myth, and to be denied validity; as it is, I never received the slightest recognition nor institutional facilities for my extensive and intercontinentally acclaimed work on myth in the last decades, at either of the two institutes with which I was associated (the African Studies Centre Leiden, and the Philosophical Faculty, Rotterdam). In terms of the framework sketched above, however, such rejection would amount to rather high praise, even though probably undeserved.

Ultimately, such an analysis conveys the following lesson: Myth cannot be studied in isolation – far more illuminating is an interdisciplinary approach that combines a number of long-range research efforts, from genetics to archaeology and from linguistics to comparative ethnography.

¹³⁶ A first indication is already given in the scornful and dismissive treatment of my 'neo-diffusionism' in the otherwise commendable book by my friend Jean-Luc Amselle (2001: 31 f., 98 f.).

Chapter 4. The spiked-wheel trap as a cultural index fossil in African prehistory (2010)

An exercise in global distribution analysis based on Lindblom's 1935 data¹³⁷

ABSTRACT. Reading geographic distribution patterns and turning them into models of historical reconstruction of diffusion, is not only a work of science, but also a fine art, in which the experience gathered in the previous analysis of similar or complementary distributions contributes considerably to our perception and interpretation. Elsewhere I have spelled out the methodology I have developed for this kind of problem, albeit with particular application not to comparative mythology but to the long-range, global analysis of *head-hunting* (van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 12). In the present chapter's argument, the global distribution of one particular item of material culture will serve as an-example of such strategies in distributional analysis: *the spiked-wheel trap*, a common hunting device in Africa and parts of Eurasia, but apparently not attested anywhere else in the world. Africa and Africans are commonly depicted as totally different from the rest of the Old World. Much of my work over the past two decades has been aimed at combating this misconception. The distribution pattern of the spiked-wheel trap (first analysed by Lindblom in 1928 / 1935) is so pertinent to this question, that this implement may serve as an 'index fossil' in African prehistory, bringing out the merits of the 'Pelagian Hypothesis' which I have advanced, and which is summarised and referenced by the end of this chapter. The far greater incidence on African soil, linked with the Afrocentrist Hypothesis according to which major developments in global cultural history have an African origin, might tempt us to consider the spiked-wheel trap as an African invention which gradually trickled into Eurasia. However, this paper argues the opposite model:

(a) a rather localised origin in the Neolithic Extended Fertile Crescent (by which is meant the extended region stretching from the then still fertile Sahara to China), probably in Central Asia; ...

(b) followed by spread, in the wake of the general diffusion of pastoral and agricultural technologies but particu-

¹³⁷ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010c, 'The spiked-wheel trap as a cultural index fossil in African prehistory: An exercise in global distribution analysis based on Lindblom's 1935 data', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/spiked_wheel_trap.pdf

larly intensified with the rise of horse-riding and chariot technologies – both being technological innovations emerging in Central Asia c. 6 ka BP and 4 ka BP, respectively;

(c) not only were these pastoral technologies responsible for cultural spread and proto-globalising homogenisation of the Eurasian Steppe Belt from Anatolia to the Pacific – from the Late Bronze Age onward they also succeeded in making inroads into sub-Saharan Africa, both along the Nile valley and along Sahara desert routes (where rock art representations of chariots abound from the Late Bronze Age on).

Sparingly inhabited by hunter-gatherers that lacked both these specific formal cultural systems and the military technology that privileged their owners, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa was then available for expansion of these new items. Hence their preponderance there in historical times, which however is to be interpreted in terms, not of origin, but of the occupation of an empty niche of cultural ecology. In the last two to three millennia, African cultures in sub-Saharan Africa consolidated themselves as a result of the interaction between Palaeo-African populations with their specific cultural traits, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, inputs from outside Africa, including those from the Pelasgian Realm of West Asia and the Mediterranean. The spiked-wheel trap, however insignificant in itself, is an index fossil of the Pelasgian side of this process. The spiked-wheel trap shares this position with a few other formal cultural systems, such as the mankala board, the family of geomantic divination systems, and the belief in a unilateral mythical being, whose similar distributions we examine as a stepping-stone towards a summary presentation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis.

*Key words: Pelasgian Hypothesis; Hamitic Hypothesis; *Borean Hypothesis; Out of Africa Hypothesis; Back-into-Africa Hypothesis; spiked-wheel trap; distributional analysis; genetic, linguistic and cultural continuity between Africa and Eurasia; mankala; geomantic divination; unilateral mythical being*

4.1. Introduction¹³⁸

Reading geographic distribution patterns and turning them into models of historical reconstruction of diffusion, is not only a work of science, but also a fine art in which experience gathered in the previous analysis of similar or complementary distributions contributes considerably to our perception and interpretation. In this way we become gradually aware of the possible implications of distributional particularities, and can we build, refine, test, and if needed reject, our models of historical reconstruction.

For instance, if a common Eurasian trait (such as elaborate Flood myths) also has an attestation in the New World, this has implications for the dating of that trait. The common assumption is that the New World was largely populated by migration from North-eastern Asia across the Bering Strait ca. 11 ka BP, which would suggest a *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of that trait, although recent research also made us aware of a continuous trickle of trans-Bering migrations in more recent millennia (Jett 2002). By the same token, state-of-the-art molecular genetics has revealed that Anatomically Modern Humans emerged in the African continent c. 200 ka BP, then only c. 80 ka BP made a first sally ‘Out of Africa’ along the Indian Ocean reaching the Andaman Islands, South East Asia, New Guinea and Australia but not spreading any further, only to populate the entire globe as a result of a Second Sally ‘Out of Africa’, c. 60 ka BP (Forster 2004). As a result, a trait which occurs in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea and Australia, but no where else, may be proposed to have been part of Anatomically Modern Humans’ original cultural package (which I have termed

¹³⁸ This paper is an instalment in my exploration of Africa’s transcontinental connections in pre- and protohistory. I am indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for funding and otherwise facilitating this research, and to Christoph Gasser for stimulating criticism.

'Pandora's Box'), developed inside the African continent between 200 and 80 ka BP, and spread as a result of the First Sally out of Africa.

In this way, by linking distributional patterns to roughly datable events and processes, I have tried to reconstruct the early history of the mythologies of Anatomically Modern Humans (van Binsbergen 2006, 2007; this book chs 5 and 6).

In the present chapter, the global distribution of an item of material culture will serve as another example of such strategies in distributional analysis: the spiked-wheel trap, a common hunting device in Africa and parts of Eurasia, but not attested anywhere else in the world. Clearly, as a specialist in African religion and (proto-) globalisation, and as an intercultural philosopher, my chief interest is not in hunting techniques as such, but in distributional clues to remote global cultural history. The questions of cultural diversity and the possibility or impossibility of intercultural communication, knowledge, and truth dominate today's world politics, and a theoretical and empirical understanding of remote cultural history greatly assists in identifying both the communalities and the differences between human cultures. As an Africanist I have been particularly interested in one instance of such continuity, or discontinuity, notably: *that between Eurasia on the one hand and Africa on the other hand, as the two habitually distinguished components of the Old World*. Whereas it has been customary to speak of Eurasia as a recognised continuous cultural domain, Ancient usage in terms of *Ethiopians* (Graeco-Roman) and *Kushim / Cushites* (Bible), reinforced by the history of conquest and marginalisation of Africa, and the attending racialism, in the last few centuries, has installed the image of Africa and Africans as being totally different from the rest of the Old World. Much of my work over the past 20 years has been aimed at dispelling this misconception. Here again recent developments in genetics have brought to light a major influx from Asia into sub-Saharan Africa from c. 15 ka BP onward.¹³⁹

We will see that analysis of the distribution pattern of the spiked-wheel trap is highly pertinent to this question. Very widespread in Africa, this implement has only a very limited distribution in Eurasia. Form and function of the various types attested converge to such an extent that the Eurasian and African distributions must be considered as continuous, and reverting to a common historical prototype. The far greater incidence on African soil, linked with the Afrocentrist Hypothesis according to which major developments in global cultural history have an African origin, would tempt us to consider the spiked-wheel trap an African invention which gradually trickled into Eurasia.

Although I have repeatedly identified as an Afrocentrist (van Binsbergen 2000b, 2005d), also in connection with these specific cultural systems, in the present paper I will argue a different model:

- a rather localised origin within the Neolithic Extended Fertile Crescent (by which I understand the extended region stretching from the then still fertile Sahara to China), notably in Central Asia
- followed by spread, in accordance with the general diffusion of pastoral and agricultural technologies but particularly intensified with the rise of horse-riding technology and especially chariot technology – both being technological innovations emerging in Central Asia c. 6 ka BP and 4 ka BP, respectively (cf. Fig. 4.2).
- not only were these pastoral technologies responsible for cultural spread and

¹³⁹ Hammer *et al.* 1998; Coia *et al.* 2005; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Underhill 2004.

proto-globalising homogenisation of the Eurasian Steppe Belt from Anatolia to the Pacific – from the Late Bronze Age onward they also succeeded in making inroads into sub-Saharan Africa, both along the Nile valley and along Sahara desert routes (where rock art representations of chariots have abounded from the Late Bronze Age on; cf. Fig. 4.1). Sparsely inhabited by hunter-gatherers that lacked these specific formal cultural systems as well as the military technology that privileged their owners, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa was available for expansion of these new items. Hence their preponderance there now, which however is to be interpreted in terms, not of origin, but of the colonisation of an empty niche of cultural ecology.

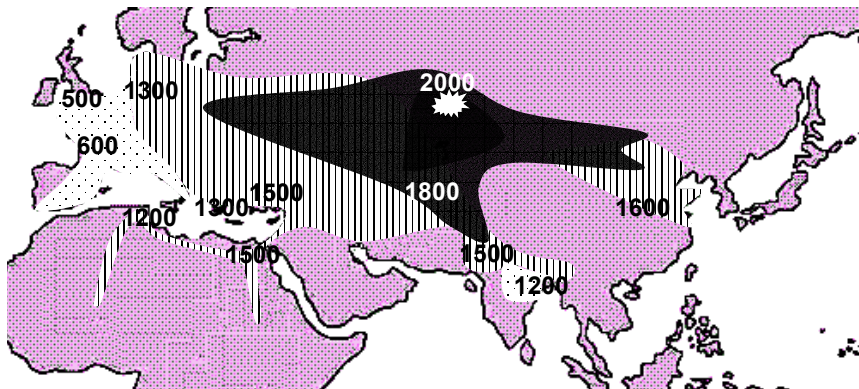
	
<p>Garamantes chariot, Garama, Libyan desert (© Boudjou 2006)</p>	<p>Garamantes chariot, Libyan desert (© The Oriental Caravan 2005)</p>
	
<p>Chariot in Saharan rock art (© Becker <i>et al.</i> 2007)</p>	<p>Chariot depicted in Air mountains, Niger (© Lyon 2004)</p>

NB: 'Le dernier inventaire des gravures de chars en 1982, dénombre 631 exemplaires réparties dans le massif du Tassili n'Ajjer, le Hoggar (Algérie), l'Air ou Azbine (Niger)' (Boudjou 2006)

Fig. 4.1. Chariots depicted in Saharan rock art

In the last two to three millennia, African cultures in sub-Saharan Africa consolidated themselves as a result of the interaction between Palaeo-African populations and their cultural

traits, on the one hand, and Northern inputs, on the other hand.¹⁴⁰ The spiked-wheel trap, however insignificant in itself from a comparative-mythological point of view, is an index fossil in this process. The spiked-wheel trap shares this position with a few other formal cultural systems, such as the *mankala* board game, the geomantic family of divination systems, and the belief in a unilateral mythical being, whose distributions we will examine towards the end of this argument.



Dates approximate by 0.1 ka. *White*: area of the earliest known spoke-wheeled chariots (Sintashta-Petrovka culture); *black*: 1900 BC: extent of the Andronovo culture, expanding from its early Sintashta-Petrovka phase; spread of technology in this area would have been unimpeded and practically instantaneous; *dark grey*: 1800 BCE: extent of the great steppes and half-deserts of Central Asia, approximate extent of the early Indo-Iranian diaspora at that time; note that early examples of chariots appear in Anatolia as early as around this time; *vertical hatching*: combines 1700 BCE: unknown, early period of spread beyond the steppes – and 1600-1200 BC: the Kassite period in Mesopotamia, rise to notability of the chariot in the Ancient Near East, introduction to China, possibly also to the Punjab and the Gangetic plain (*Rgveda*) and Eastern and Northern Europe (e.g. the Trundholm Sun Chariot), assumed spread of the chariot as part of Late Bronze Age technology; *dotted*: 1000-500 BCE: Iron Age spread of the chariot to Western Europe by Celtic migrations.

Fig. 4.2. The origin and diffusion of the chariot, from Kazakhstan, 2000 BCE¹⁴¹

In the background my analysis is informed by state-of-the-art long-range linguistics, specifically Starostin's (1998-2008, 1999, 2000; cf. Fleming 2002) *Borean Hypothesis: the idea that very ancient language forms can be reliably reconstructed, and that such reconstructions reveal the existence of some parent form, designated *Borean and supposed to be spoken in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic. Extensive traces of *Borean have been detected in most linguistic macrophyla spoken today: Eurasiatic / Nostratic (including Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic, Dravidian etc); Afroasiatic; Sinocaucasian and the related Denē

¹⁴⁰ Adopting the term coined by Cavalli-Sforza (*et al.* 1994), under Palaeo-African I I understand genetic and cultural elements that, inside the African continent, have been in direct continuity with the 'Pre-Out-of-Africa' genetic and cultural inheritance of Anatomically Modern Humans.

¹⁴¹ My synthesis on the basis of: Anthony & Vinogradov 1995; Anthony 1995; di Cosmo 1999; Litauer & Grouwe 1996; Sparreboom 1985. Diagram and caption after Anonymous, *n.d.* (b); African extensions my own.

cluster in North America; Austric, Amerind, as well as in the African macrophylum Khoisan. When the designation ‘*Borean’ was chosen, Georgiy Starostin already objected (Anonymous, *n.d.* (a)) that (since that name implicitly refers to the Northern, ‘boreal’, hemisphere) it was based on the prejudgment that Eurasiatic / Nostratic, Afroasiatic, Dene-Sinocaucasian and Austric would be more closely related to one another than to the African macrophyla Nilosaharan and Nigercongo, and possibly Khoisan.¹⁴² This inspired me to argue elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2008, reporting on an extensive statistical analysis) that also Nigercongo – including Bantu – may be seen within the same perspective as presented here for the spiked-wheel trap: as the result of local African (to some extent including Palaeo-African) interaction¹⁴³ with incoming transcontinental elements. As much as 27% of the¹⁴⁴ reconstructed *Borean lexicon can be argued to have reflexes in Proto-Bantu.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile it is interesting to observe that the great majority of African attestations of the spiked-wheel trap are in the realm of Nilosaharan and not of Nigercongo languages. Perhaps this suggests a rather early Neolithic Northern association, connected with the spread of agricultural and of bovine rather than equestrian pastoralism; whereas *Borean-associated, Pre-Nigercongo / Bantu, inroads into sub-Saharan Africa from West Asia via Egypt and the Maghrib (a process we partly studied in the later chapters of van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) are rather

¹⁴² #4.1. NILOSAHARAN AND NIGERCONGO AS BRANCHES OF ‘SUPER-NOSTRATIC’. Already two decades ago, leading linguists (Kaiser & Shevoroshin 1988) included Nilosaharan and Nigercongo as branches of ‘Super-Nostratic’, where Nostratic is synonymous with Eurasiatic. By some sort of condescending affirmative action, understandable and justifiable in the light of the humiliations Africa and Africans have suffered at the hands of the wider world in the most recent centuries, Africanists today are largely in agreement that African cultural and linguistic features should only be analysed and explained by reference to things African, and not to transcontinental connections. This is a quasi-Politically-Correct idea I have repeatedly contested, 2019, 2020. It is as if in the historiography of the Christianity, as a dominant North Atlantic religion, we would for ideological reasons be prohibited from tracing that world religion’s roots through to the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Buddhism; or as if the history of modern global music and dance would be written exclusively by reference to North Atlantic achievements, while obscuring all African roots of these cultural expressions.) The *Borean nature of Khoisan was accepted, on formal linguistic grounds (*e.g.* its affinities with Northern Caucasian are obvious), but also in the light of Cavalli-Sforza’s hypothesis of modern Khoisan speakers being the descendants of a hybrid Asian/African population whose Asian ancestors still lived in the Asian continent 10 ka BP. *Cf.* Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: 176, *pace* Vigilant *et al.* 1989. However, I reject Cavalli-Sforza’s view (shared by many others) of African languages as constituting isolated and archaic branches of the world genealogy of languages.

¹⁴³ *Cf.* the comments by Oliver and Simiyu Wandibba in Oliver *et al.* 2001, in response to Ehret 1998, *cf.* 2001. Considering the affinities between Austric and Bantu, and linguistic specialists’s preception of non-Bantu elements in the southern half of the African continent, the linguistic process of Bantu genesis was probably much more complex than I propose here to have been the case (with my appeal to an ‘unoccupied niche of cultural ecology’) for the spiked-wheel trap. The disagreements concerning Guthrie’s magnum opus on Bantu (1967-1971; *cf.* next footnote) also suggest such complexity..

¹⁴⁴ #4.2. IT IS PROBLEMATIC TO SPEAK OF A PROTO-BANTU CORPUS. Strictly speaking, the compilation of a Proto-Bantu corpus has been too controversial to pretend there is just one Proto-Bantu lexicon, *cf.* Dalby 1975, 1976; Meussen 1980; Vansina 1979-1980; Flight 1980, 1988; Maho 2003. In the end however Guthrie’s (1967-1971) reconstruction offers a useful if far from ideal compromise. Since *Borean is here claimed to account for only a limited part of the Proto-Bantu lexicon, and the Pelasgian influx is claimed to amount to primarily a cultural influence with only slight demographic impact, we need not enter here into a discussion of the obvious heterogeneity and possible polygenesis of Bantu and the rejection of the popular, simple Bantu migration model (Bennett 1983; Vansina 1979-1980, 1995).

¹⁴⁵ I do not have the corresponding data for Nilosaharan but I am somewhat confident (*cf.* Argyle 1994, 1999) that a statistical analysis would return a similar pattern of *Borean affinities as for Nigercongo / Bantu. The work of Ehret (*e.g.* 1993, 2001c) might supply the required data, but I have lacked the opportunity to test his Nilosaharan data on those in my possession for Bantu (< Nigercongo).

to be dated to the Late Bronze Age.

But let us first discuss the spiked-wheel trap and its distribution.

4.2. Introducing the spiked-wheel trap

The Swede Sven Hedin was one of the principal European explorers of the decades around 1900. Invited to contribute to the 1935 *Festschrift* for Hedin, the Africanist Lindblom decided to concentrate on spiked-wheel traps, since these had been given some attention in Hedin's work – our insight in their Asian distribution mainly derived from Hedin. For this occasion Lindblom revamped an earlier treatment of the same topic, published in 1928 (cf. 'M.', 1929).

The spiked-wheel trap consists of a circular construction, whose internal periphery is set with spikes that prevent the quarry to escape once caught in the trap. The following pictures (selected from Lindblom's 1935 article) make the form and function of this trap abundantly clear.

The iconographic evidence Lindblom adduces (on the basis of a depiction out of context in Capart 1905) as attestation for the spiked-wheel trap in Ancient Egypt is open to criticism. The detail from Hierakonpolis is part of a much larger fresco (Fig. 5a-b, below), to be found in Painted Tomb 100 (Naqada IIC, c. 3500 BCE). The alleged spiked-wheel trap is in the bottom left of the fresco. Note, to the left below this detail, the 'Master of Animals subduing two quadrupeds' – a theme which is often invoked as an indication of Sumerian influence in predynastic Egypt.¹⁴⁶ The iconography does not compellingly suggest a spiked-wheel trap; the circular arrangement of the animals is also found in Egyptian gaming discs of the same period, without an obvious connection with the trap.

4.2.1. Lindblom's original illustrations

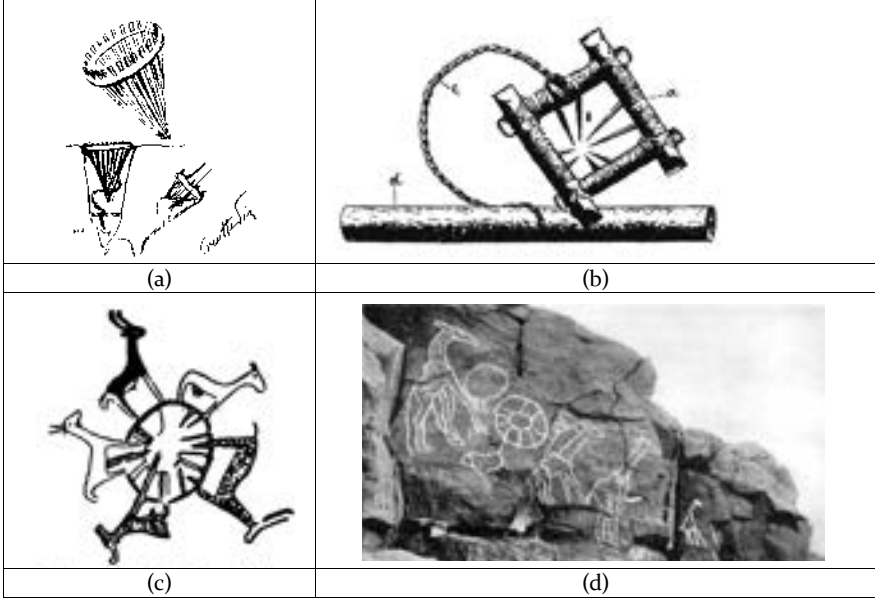
Lindblom considers the Fezzan rock art showing a spoked wheel as an attestation of the spiked-wheel trap. This is a distinct possibility, especially since the trap occurs there in historical times (Matkhandoush Natural Museum 2006-2009, cf. Fig. 4); the rock art has been interpreted in these terms by the Italian specialist Fabrizio Mori (1965; 1998: 179), whose comments on the depiction in Fig. 3d may be summarised as follows:

'An engraving showing how trapping stones were used to catch large animals like giraffe. According to Professor Mori, who illustrated modern Tuareg examples of the trap, the animal places its foot on the big circle, the hoop, onto which were threaded a number of palm leaves with their pointed heads pointing towards the centre, and as a result the animal's foot gets caught. The stone thus ends up attached to the animal's leg, and eventually wears the animal out and slows it down, to be caught by the chasing hunters. (...). The whole trap is buried and therefore is invisible to the victim.' (Matkhandoush Natural Museum 2006-2009)

Fig. 4.4, showing the same rock engraving in more detail, shows a unique, deep line (cf. my black arrow) from the alleged wheel trap (/solar symbol?) to an irregular, flattish outline which may well represent a stone. There is however a strange problem with this rock engraving: when the photographic imaged is digitally enhanced, the trap (/solar depiction?) appears to be on a jutting piece of rock (its upper part seems to even break off from the main rock) obscuring the right-hand part of the engraved scene, and in colouring and shade so different from the rest that (if the authority of Frobenius and the Matkhandoush Natural

¹⁴⁶ Under my Pelasgian Hypothesis, this would amount to Pelasgian continuity between Mesopotamia and Egypt in the late 4th mill. BCE.

Museum did not attach to the image) one would almost be inclined to see it as a product of creative use of a digital graphic application such as TMPhotoshop.



(a) antelope trap, Karakorum (India / Tibet), drawn by Hedin; (b) trap from Amur region, South-eastern Siberia (c) Tomb painting, Hierakonpolis, predynastic Egypt (after Capart) (d) ancient rock carvings, Fezzan, Libya (after Frobenius)

Fig. 4.3. Some of Lindblom’s original illustrations



(adapted after Matkhandoush Natural Museum 2006-2009), showing the connecting line (see arrow) issuing from the trap/solar element; and showing (see broken outline) the latter to be strangely detached and jutting out from the rest of the engraving

Fig. 4.4. Detail of the rock engraving shown in Fig.4.3.d

However, even though the interpretation in terms of a spiked-wheel trap may be acceptable in this particular case, rock art from regions as diverse as Australia (see below) and Scandinavia shows similar devices, which scholarship has so far preferably interpreted as solar; we will come across some of this iconography in the other chapters of this book.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 4.5. An alleged spiked-wheel trap depicted on the fresco of Hierakonpolis Tomb 100 (a), with detail (b); *Naqada IIc* (c. 3500 BCE)¹⁴⁷

4.2.2. Lindblom's distributional analysis

By contrast with the patchy distribution in Asia, and the absence of the spiked-wheel trap in the Americas, Lindblom found a rather dense distribution in Africa (Fig. 4.8, redrawn and completed by me as Fig. 4.9, below) and for the rest of the world at large (my Fig. 4.11), for which he offers extensive bibliographic evidence (Table 4.1). A few additional examples of spiked-wheel traps from Africa appear in Figs. 4.6 and 4.7.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Quibell & Green 1902: 20f., pl. 67, 75-79; Vandier 1952: I, 561-571; Case & Payne 1962; Crowfoot-Payne 1973; Kemp 1973; Cialowicz 2001: 100f., 157-161. For further parallels from the Ancien Egyptian realm (for which I am indebted to Christoph Gasser), cf. Huard & Leclant 1973; Leclant & Huard 1980.

¹⁴⁸ Spiked-wheel traps were also included in Lagercrantz's 1938 discussion of African hunting traps; I am indebted to Christoph Gasser for drawing my attention to this publication.



Fig. 4.6. Modern spiked-wheel trap from Nalut, modern Libya (Matkhandoush Natural Museum, Libya, 2006-2009)



Fig. 4.7. Modern spiked-wheel trap from the Western Nilotic (Nilosaharan) speaking Acholi people, Southern Sudan (Sparks 2006)

Sparks (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d) offers further evidence on spiked-wheel traps from Nilotic speaking peoples in East Asia, but this information overlaps with that already included in Lindblom 1935.

Number	Location (following the usage in Lindblom's time)	Bibliography and/or collection
01	Trans-Himalaya	Hedin 1909: II, p. 274
02	Etsingol district	No. H 3695, fig. 2 collected from the Etsingol district by Dr. Nils Horner
03a	Moro tsonch, a ruined watch-tower situated ca. 10 km. SSE of Khara Khoto	As above
03b	Mu durbeljin, the ruin of a small fort on the western banks of the Etsingol, ca. 15 km. W of Khara khoto	As above

o3c	Bukhen toreï, a ruined watch-tower on the eastern bank of the Etsingol, ca. 52 km. SW of Khara khoto	As above
o4	oasis of Tun Huang (Su-Chou)	Stein 1921: II, p. 704, 782, IV, Pl. LIV; Joyce, <i>n.d.</i> ; Stein, 1928: I, pp. 382, 421, Pl. XLVI
o5	Tibet, 300 km. N. E. of Tengri-Nor	Bower, 1894: 117
o5a	Tibet, Champas (Eastern Tibet)	Rockhill 1895: 714
o6	the State of Bikanir (the northernmost section of The Rajputana agency)	Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology
o7	southwestern Caucasus, the district of Suchum	Pobiter (von Kadich), 1907: 196
o8	Graeco-Roman (or general European?) Antiquity	Reid 1922: 282f; Berg 1933: 17f, figs. 2-5; Engelstad 1934: 81, Pl. V, XLIII-XLIV
o8a	Modern Europe: forest district on the border between Hungary and lower Austria, westward of Lake Neusiedler (Siegraben, Hochwolkersdorf, Kaiserwald)	Pobiter (von Kadich), 1907: 84, fig. 1
o9	Graeco-Roman Antiquity	Xenophon, <i>Cynegetica</i> , 9, 11(1828: III, p. 1515)
o10	Graeco-Roman Antiquity	Pollux 1900: Lib. 5. 32
o11	Graeco-Roman Antiquity	Gratius Faliscus, <i>Cynegeticon</i> , 92, 1826: 8 («Quid, qui dentatas iligno robore clausit venator pedicas?»)
o12	General Africa	Lindblom 1928
o13	Amur	Silantjew 1898: 195-196
African attestations marked A before their number:		
Ao1	Ancient Egypt (early dynastic?). ¹⁴⁹ Tomb-painting at Hierakonpolis (fig. 7)	Quibell & Green 1902: II, Pl. LXXVI; via Capart 1905; the Pitt-River Museum in Oxford possesses a trap dating to either the 20th or the 22nd dynasty
Ao2	Ababde	Murray 1923: 421; and Pitt-River Museum, Oxford
Ao3	Arabs of Dongola (the late Turkish province)	
Ao4	Arabs of the Abu Hamed district (the tribes Rubatab and Mansir)	Jackson 1926: 12
Ao5	Arabs of the Bayuda steppe (probably Shaique or Kababish, probably the latter)	Brehm 1862: III, 59, 1863: 148
Ao6	Kordofan, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in general	Kotschy 1862; Von Heuglin 1862: 108
Ao7	Baggara, the tribe Beni Selim, Gebelein	Thomas 1924: 112, fig. 231
Ao8	Dar Fertit, southern Darfur	Thomas 1924: 112, fig. 232
Ao9	Hamran	
A10	Beni Amer (district of Kassala)	
A11	The nomads of Samchara, the narrow strip of desertlike country between the Red Sea and the highland region of the interior	
A12	eastern border of Gallabat	
A13	Galla, on the upper reaches of Dinder, a tributary of the White Nile	
A14	Shilluk	Lips 1928
A15	Nuer	Jackson 1923: 138; photograph. Bernatzik 1929: fig. 6
A16	Bari	
A17	Madi	Lloyd 1911: 271
A18	Shuli (Acholi)	Kitching 1912: 1174
A19	Lango	Pitt River Museum
A20	Elgumi	

¹⁴⁹ This is Lindblom's surmise. In fact, the Hierakonpolis tomb 100 is considered by specialists to belong to Naqada IIC, c. 3500 BCE, three or four centuries before the onset of dynastic times.

A21	Turkana	Oxford Museum; Cf. Emley 1927: 191. fig. 8
A22	Suk.	
A23	Ndorobo	
A24	Nandi	
A25	Bantu in Kitosh, N. Kavirondo	
A26	Baganda	
A27	Banyoro	
A28	Kiziba	
A29	Kafue River, Northern Rhodesia	Film 'Africa untamed, W.D. Hubbard and W. Earle Frank, Warner First National
A29	'throughout Eastern Africa, from Nubia down to the vicinity of Nyasaland	Johnston 1902: 874
A30	Libyan desert	Harding King 1925: 267 with fig.
A31	Imangassaten Tuareg and 'les serfs Fezzanais' of Ubari	Breuil 1923: 160, fig. 2; Frobenius 1933: 117 sq., 142, fig. 34, Pl 22; Harding King 1925: p. 267 with fig.
A32	Region of Touzeur	
A33	Region of Khenchela	
A34	The Muidir plateau, S E of In Salah	The Museum of Copenhagen (Nr Gl:160. Olufsen's Sahara expedition 1922-23)
A35	Azджер Tuaregs	Berlin Museum (No. III. B. 1972)
A36	The Hoggar Tuaregs, Tamanrasset	
A36	Amdjid / Amgid / Amguid, a well N E of the Muidir plateau	Chudeau 1909: 202 Voinot 1908, supplém., p. 86
A37	Tuaregs of Air	Oxford Museum, collected by Rodd and Buchanan
A38	Central Domergu, Kalilua	Oxford Museum, collected by Rodd
A39	Lake Chad region	Chudeau 1909 : 202. Paris 1909
A40	Northern Territories of the Gold Coast	The Oxford Museum (Mamprussi, Konkomba, Gambaga district) at the White Volta; British Museum (North-Western and Southern provinces)
A41	Tem, northern Togo	Cologne Museum
A41		Lips 1927: fig. 90
A42	Bariba, Borgu	Berlin Museum
A43	Bolewa, Ngano and Kare-Kare of N. Nigeria	Meek 1931: II, p. 296
A44	Bachama	
A45	Lakka	Frobenius, 1925: 94
A46	Maka	
A47	S. Rhodesia	Cipriani 1932: 28

Empty bibliography cell: Lindblom's source can no longer be ascertained but is yet considered reliable

Table 4.1. Detailed data on world distribution of the spiked-wheel trap, compiled by the present author on the basis of Lindblom 1935

It is typical for the state of the study of material culture in the 1930s, that Lindblom is hardly interested in proposing an unequivocal explanation for the distribution patterns he so painstakingly established. *Such explanation will be the purpose of my present re-analysis.* All Lindblom does is to appeal to the Hamitic Hypothesis (see below), now discarded

The present *distribution* of the trap in Africa is therefore in all probability to ascribe to Hamitic influence, and it is also possible that it is of Hamitic *origin* — it existed, as we know, already in ancient Egypt (...). As regards Asia, our knowledge of it in that continent is as yet all too imperfect, and the data too sporadic, to allow of any definite conclusions to be drawn. There it would seem to constitute a survival, confined to regions that ethnographically, as well as in other respects, present archaic and isolated forms (Tibet, Caucasia). That also in Asia it is of great antiquity is evident from the archaeological finds that have been made. What has here briefly been said of Asia is also generally applicable to

Europe. That this trap is a very ancient culture element may be regarded as quite certain, it may perhaps even date back to the Palaeolithic Age. In fact, this theory has been advanced by Lips who as nothing but wheel-traps looks upon certain [sic; this sentence is muddled in the original – WvB] of the well-known figures from the later Palaeolithic era existing in the Pyrenean peninsula and the south of France, which hitherto by most scientists have been interpreted as huts. (...) It is yet too early, however, to pronounce any definite opinion on that point. But if it could be proved — and many things speak in favour of it — that the wheel-trap is represented in the rock-carvings of North Africa and the Sahara, the oldest ones of which would at least be of Late Palaeolithic age, this would undoubtedly strengthen the probability of Lips' theory.

The spiked wheel-trap presents a form so highly specialized that there is every reason for supposing a unity of origin. Whether this is to seek in Central Asia, or northern Africa, or among the ancient Mediterranean cultures that were connected with Asia, of which northern Africa formed a part, is a point not easy of determination. The possibility of the trap having occurred in Southern Europe and northern Africa already in the Palaeolithic age is apt to make this question still more complicated.¹⁵⁰ (Lindblom 1935: 630 f.)

#4.3. INTRODUCING THE PERNICIOUS HAMITIC THESIS. Lindblom's use of the term 'Hamitic' requires further comment. In the first half of the 20th c. CE, many Africanists supported the Hamitic Thesis, which – given the racialist stereotype of Africans' inability at cultural initiative – sought to explain the achievements of African cultures, which even to a prejudiced eye were undeniable, by reference to the postulated proto-historic influx of so-called Hamites, *i.e.* West Asians and North Africans, with lower levels of skin pigmentation than common in sub-Saharan Africa, typically speaking an Afroasiatic language (then usually designated 'Hamitic', after Ham, the son of Biblical Noah who in *Genesis* 10 is particularly associated with locations in Northern Africa, and bringing such cultural achievements as metallurgy and pastoralism (*cf.* Johnston *et al.* 1913; Seligman 1913; Aaron 1995). Modern African studies have completely discarded the Hamitic thesis (Sanders 1969; Zachernuk 1994) because of its racialist overtones. The problem however is that the scholars launching that thesis in the first place, ranked among the principal Africanists of their generation, had (contrary to the belief of modern Africanists, who tend to believe that serious African Studies started only with the generation of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, and in Great Britain) a profound personal knowledge of Africa, and while children of their racialist age and continent, were not particularly bent on slighting Black Africans. I must admit that my argument in the present chapter at first glance appears to come close to reviving of the Hamitic thesis, albeit with an essential difference which I will point out in the conclusion (also *cf.* van Binsbergen 2011k). Recent scholarship has occasionally (*cf.* Bernal 1987 on Meyer and Montelius) advocated the vindication of views held around 1900 CE, and in the meantime discarded for later paradigms.

¹⁵⁰ Lindblom here expresses the view held by many archaeologists: various common motifs from Franco-Cantabrian Upper Palaeolithic rock art might be representations of animal traps. Many of the 'tectiform' motifs shown here have been so interpreted in the archaeological literature. He even goes to the extent of claiming that some of these images might be interpreted as spiked-wheel traps, but such a specific suggestion is not borne out by my Fig. 6 (from Leroi-Gourhan 1968, the great mid-20th specialist interpreter of such images, as reproduced in Carr 1995); nor does Lindblom offer additional examples to back his claim.

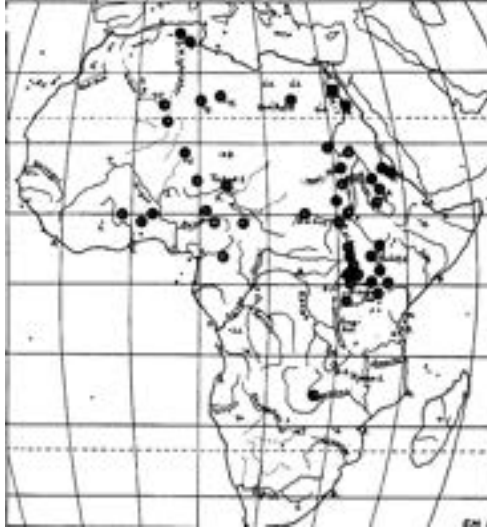


Fig. 4.8. Lindblom's original distribution map for Africa



Fig. 4.9. African distribution of spiked-wheel trap redrawn⁵¹

⁵¹ Lindblom's original reference to Cipriani 1932 refers, not to the Kafue region in the then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), but to the 'ruins and mines' of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and as such turns out to be omitted from Lindblom's African distribution map. I have added this data point in the present map.



Fig. 4.10. 'Tectiform' motifs from the Franco-Cantabrian Upper Palaeolithic suggested to depict traps (© Leroi-Gourhan 1968 via Carr 1995)



for sources: see Above, this chapter; and Lindblom 1935; inset (obscuring a part of the world map where there are no attestations): modern spiked wheel from the Acholi people, Southern Sudan (Sparks 2006).

Fig. 4.11. World distribution of the spiked-wheel trap (as typical of Pelasgian distributions)

4.3. Discussion

Remarkable about the African distribution of the spiked-wheel trap are the following features:

- a. The two southernmost, isolated data points are in Zimbabwe, and in Zambia on the Kafue River (a tributary of the Zambezi River): Ila (the Ila-Tonga speakers are supposed to descend from pastoralists moving south from the Intralacustrine region in East Asia about 1 ka BP – the Ila are in many respects indistinguishable from the Eastern Nkoya named Mashasha, with whom I have been closely associated for over half a century)
- b. The rest of the African distribution virtually confined to Northern hemisphere
- c. Note the concentrations along the Nile River (including White Nile and Blue Nile), Lake Victoria, Niger, Eastern Maghrib, and in a straight (caravan-trail?) line South South East across the Sahara

The world distribution of the spiked-wheel trap (provided we can really consider this a true type, and not an accidental and artificially constructed sub-group of a wider category of hunting devices) poses a number of remarkable features.

1. Predominantly African

Below we will consider the very similar, also predominantly African distributions of *mankala*, geomantic divination, and the belief in the unilateral mythical figure

2. However, in Africa almost exclusively the Northern hemisphere

This is puzzling, and suggests that the spiked-wheel trap, though predominantly African, is not primarily associated with the Bantu branch of Nigercongo languages, nor primarily with Khoisan languages (the remaining African language phyla are Nilosaharan and Afroasiatic); immediately before the Arab and European inroads into Africa (mainly 2nd mill. CE), Africa south of the Equator was predominantly Bantu- or Khoisan speaking.¹⁵²

3. A handful of attestations in Central to West Asia, but nowhere else in Asia

This suggests that the spiked wheel-trap is associated only with one particular, relatively recent, phase in the cultural and linguistic history of Eurasia, and with fairly limited linguistico-cultural clusters emerging in that connection: Eurasiatic > Altaic, possibly also Sinocaucasian > North Caucasian, but what appears to be a Causasian attestation could also be Altaic or Uralic.

4. No attestations in the Americas¹⁵³

In many global distributional analyses (notably in the field of comparative

¹⁵² It used to be part of the ideological construction of Afrikaander identity in pre-majority-rule (pre-1993) South Africa, to insist on the recent nature of Bantu-speakers in Southern Africa – often they were claimed to be just as much newcomers as the Europeans undeniably were. Even devoid of all racist ideology, there is little reason to attribute to Bantu in Southern Africa a longer time span than 2 to 3 millennia. Were the local predecessors exclusively Khoisan-speaking? Was there (as detected in some East African branches of Nigercongo) a substratum of Austric speakers brought by the proposed Sunda expansion since the onset of the Holocene? Were there other forms of Palaeoafrikan languages which have largely eluded scholarship so far?

¹⁵³ Perhaps the spiked-wheel trap did occur in the New World, after all, *cf.* Fig. 4.12. However, my extensive bibliographic search could not confirm any other attestations than those already listed by Lindblom 1935. Tufton's (1899, 1901) fairly exhaustive discussions do not mention this type of trap. Perhaps specialists in the comparative study of the material culture of hunting could bring clarity on this point.

ethnography and comparative mythology), a tendency is found towards cultural (e.g. mythological) parallelism between the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa;¹⁵⁴ the absence of American attestations suggests that the spiked-wheel trap was an isolated invention made after the majority of American parent populations had already left West, Central and North East Asia for the Americas. This indicates that as a cultural invention the spiked-wheel trap is not connected with the linguistic (macro)phyla of Amerind and Dene, nor with Sinocaucasian which is closely affiliated with Dene. In that case the attestation of the spiked-wheel trap in Tibet may not be linked with Sinotibetan but with Eurasiatic > Altaic or Uralic. My glottochronological explorations (Table 8.1, below) provisionally set the separation of Amerind from African offshoots within the Peripheral Branch of disintegrating *Borean at c. 10 ka BP. The spiked-wheel trap would then be younger than that, as an invention.

5. No attestations in Oceania

Again, this indicates that the spiked-wheel trap is relatively confined in space and relatively recent in time; it is not connected with the linguistic macrophylum of Austric – but perhaps limited opportunities for larger game hunting in Oceania led to the spiked-wheel trap being dropped as a cultural item when, in recent millennia, Oceania came to be populated, from East or South East Asia. The separation of Proto-Austric from the disintegrating offshoots leading to African and Amerind languages is estimated to be at 20 ka BP.

6. No attestations in Australia / New Guinea, even though here hunting and collecting has continued to dominate to a larger extent than in most other continents

Despite the extensive African distribution this confirms that the spiked-wheel trap does not belong to Pandora's Box, in other words does not predate the Out of Africa Exodus 80-60 ka BP; this also makes a spread of this artefact *into* Africa (along with the Back into Africa migration from c. 15 ka BP) more likely than the other way around, a spread out of Africa¹⁵⁵

7. A few attestations in Europe: several literary ones in Graeco-Roman Antiquity,¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Berezkin 2007, 2008a, 2008b; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b. Also cf. the close relationships between the African macrophyla and the Amerind macrophylum (as well as Austric), as branches of *Borean – see below.

¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile there is an important methodological point to be considered here. Lindblom easily assumed spoked circular patterns to be evidence of the spiked-wheel trap, but there are other possibilities, as the common Australian rock art motif of Fig. 4.13 suggests: an un-datable specimen of Australian rock art, of the fairly common type, estimated to be at least 6 ka old (Stubbs 1978: 21). In the context of Australian studies, such patterns are commonly considered solar. Rival interpretations would consider this a spider's net (but there is a widespread mythological / cosmological identity of the Spider and the Sun). Formally, there is a remote possibility that we are dealing here with a representation of a spiked-wheel trap; however, Lindblom's global distribution of attested spiked-wheel trap and their representation seems to defy such an interpretation, in this Australian case. In general, the circle and spiral as a cosmological motif associated with time, seasons, emergence, energy etc. is so widespread and ancient (cf. Mal'ta, Siberia, Central Asia Upper Palaeolithic – this is the presumable region and period of the speakers of *Borean), that an interpretation of such common motifs in terms of a particular type of animal trap seems too simple and too materialistic

¹⁵⁶ Lindblom mentions Xenophon, Pollux and Gratius Faliscus. On Graeco-Roman nomenclature of this type of trap, he adds (Lindblom 1935: 6):

for the spiked wheel-trap the Romans used the appellation *pedica dentata* (*pedica* being the generic

and one in the Central Danube valley



Fig. 4.12. Rock art from Northern California¹⁵⁷



Fig. 4.13. Solar or web-like pattern in prehistoric Australian rock art (after (Stubbs 1978))

word for foot-snares), or *podagra*, the Greek term. Another Greek name for it is *podostrapha*. Both these words were, however, no doubt used for denoting foot-snares in a general way. Although no positive assertion is likely to be forthcoming on this point, it appears to me not unlikely that the Romans learnt from the Greeks the use of this trap'.

My explanation is different: both the Greek and the Roman attestations are to be attributed to the Mediterranean-Pelasgian cultural substrate (van Binsbergen 2009, see below).

¹⁵⁷ © Source: Institute for Research on World Systems, *n.d.*, with the caption: 'Figure 2: Rock Art from Northern California – From: Chase-Dunn & Lerro 2005). The central dot is also found, for instance, in the Australian example of Fig. 4.13 in the 'Solar' motif on Carschenna rock 3 (Rethic Alps, Graubunden, Switzerland), Arca 1996; and at Capisca, Lluta, Northern Chile (van Hoek, *n.d.*). A relatively old, Mesolithic, spider depiction appears in the Cingle de la Mola Remigia, Gasulla cañon, Castellon, Spain (Bandi & Maringer 1952: 139). The motif is so elementary and so close to nature (the actual spider's web) that any suggestion of a historical connection between these and numerous other instances worldwide must be treated with caution and cannot be taken as evidence of diffusion from a central origin; as we shall see in ch. 12, the Spider mytheme was probably not in Pandora's Box, despite my earlier suggestions to the contrary (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, included in this book as chs 5 and 6).



Fig. 4.14. Dotted spirals and, on the reverse, snake-like lines on a centrally perforated tablet from the Mal'ta site, Lake Baikal, ca. 21 ka BP (© Irkutsk museum, Siberia, Russian Federation).¹⁵⁸

4.4. Towards alternative models of historical reconstruction explaining the geographic distribution of the spiked-wheel trap

In Fig. 4.11, not only the typical Pelasgian distribution is shown, but also the attestations in Northern Africa, in continuous lines along the Nile valley and across the Sahara, hint at probable North-South transmission routes – of which the Sahara one abounds with protohistoric rock art depicting chariots.

Looking at this distribution map, the obvious question is: why not take the region with the greatest incidence (sub-Saharan Africa) as the origin, and postulate historical transmission to other continents from there – or multilocal independent invention, for that matter. In fact, my answer to this question informs much of the analysis in the present chapter, and of my second thoughts about Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis. The challenge of this kind of geographic distributions of traits (high African incidence, sporadic Eurasian incidence, yet a probable origin in Eurasia) is one of the reasons why I formulated the Pelasgian Hypothesis. I consider the *spiked-wheel trap*, a simple hunting device, as the 'index fossil' for this kind of distributions, cf. the very similar distributions of the *mankala* board game, of geomantic divination, and that of the belief in a Unilateral Mythical Being (van Binsbergen 2016, 2010c). In some cases it is possible to argue the greater Eurasian antiquity on archaeological grounds. My general argument is that, by the Late Bronze Age in the Mediterranean / West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa constituted a relatively vacant, defenceless cultural niche, into which relatively archaic Pelasgian traits (including Nigercongo > Bantu?) could be diffused and where they could continue to thrive while in the Pelasgian core land (West Asia, the Mediterranean) they were already being superseded by local cultural innovations.

Considering these many salient points in the puzzling distribution of the spiked-wheel trap, a limited number of alternative explanations present themselves.

4.4.1. The spiked-wheel trap derives from Pandora's Box (the Pre-Out of Africa cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans)

1. A *sub-Saharan African origin*, which also would suggest a dating no later than the second

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Soffer et al. 2001 and references cited there.

sally out of Africa (c. 60 ka BP), for that would be the most conspicuous context for sub-Saharan African traits to make an impact on Europe and Asia (Fig. 4.15). What strongly argues against this explanation is that traits from Pandora's Box, as the original cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans, should be far more universally distributed – in fact, such traits are primarily identified by their near-universal distribution amongst cultures in historical times. Strictly speaking, the Out-of-Africa Exodus, in two Sallies (c. 80 ka BP and c. 60 ka BP) were not the only opportunities for African cultural material to massively spread to Europe and Africa: while the Anatomically Modern Human population of Europe largely derived from Africa from c. 40 ka BP, bringing cultural forms that had been very considerably diversified, transformed and innovated *inside Asia* after the Exodus from Africa (cf. van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b; this book, chs 5 and 6), we may also assume that a trickle of Palaeo-African (*i.e.* Pre-Out-of-Africa traits locally evolved inside Africa after the Exodus) was directly transmitted North, from sub-Saharan Africa into Europe and West Asia, bringing such archaic traits as the mytheme of the Earth as the primary origin of humankind, hence the cult of the land; the veneration/taboo of the Spider, *etc.*; however, also such Palaeo-African traits directly transmitted North would have resulted in much wider distributions in Eurasia, Oceania and the Americas, than now found in regard of the spiked-wheel trap.

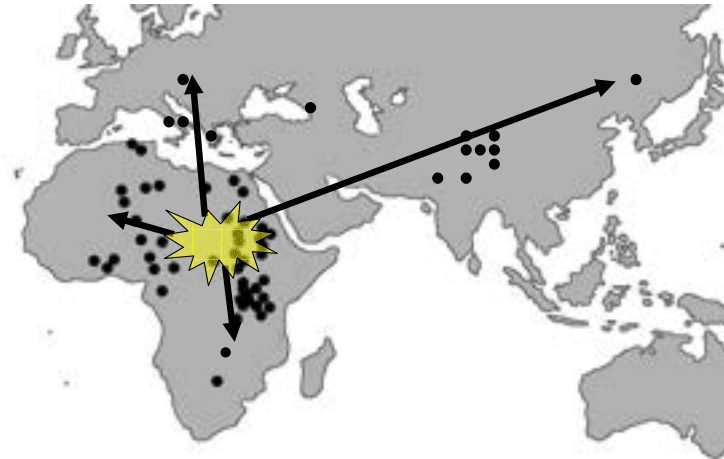


Fig. 4.15. Proposed historical reconstruction (a) African origin.

4.4.2. The spiked-wheel trap has Eurasian origins

2. **Borean*: An origin in Central to East Asia, with subsequent expansion on the wings of the disintegration of **Borean*, which means a proposed dating c. 25 ka BP (Fig. 12).¹⁵⁹ Conver-

¹⁵⁹ In an earlier draft of this argument I had included a discussion of the possible origin of the spiked-wheel trap in the region where North Caucasian languages are spoken, as a branch of the Sinocaucasian macrophyllum. I have suppressed this discussion, partly because of the now despised, Biblical and Hamitic-Thesis connotations of the idea of a Caucasian origin; and partly because the Caucasus seems less attractive as a proposed epicentre of long-range linguistic and cultural dispersal. (But this may be myopic; *e.g.*, note the invention and spread of agricultural and metallurgy; and the striking

gence between Altaic (Mongolian), Uralic, and even African (e.g. modern Bantu-speaking) and Northern American cultures can be seen in several fields of life, e.g. basketry, hunting techniques (although the present type of trap apparently did not make it to America), puberty rites, games and gaming/divination objects of material culture. This suggests that the spiked-wheel trap, as an invention, could belong to the period when, in Central Asia, *Borean was disintegrating into its constituent branch phyla, and when within Eurasiatic Proto-African, Altaic and Uralic had not yet dissociated, although Proto-Amerind and Proto-[Dene-]Sinocaucasian had. However, if we thus situate the invention of the spiked-wheel trap to the earlier phases of the disintegration of Eurasiatic, i.e. to the Late Upper Palaeolithic (c. 15-10 ka BP), we run again into the difficulty that such a remote past, and such an association with a linguistic macro-phylum, would almost inevitably produce a very wide and smooth distribution pattern, extending (like Eurasiatic itself) over most of Northern and much of Southern Eurasia (in addition to Africa, with the phyla Nilosaharan and Nigercongo – the latter probably in a daughter relation vis-à-vis the former). What we find instead is a very local and narrow, patchy distribution in Eurasia, coupled with a more generous distribution across the Northern half of Africa only.

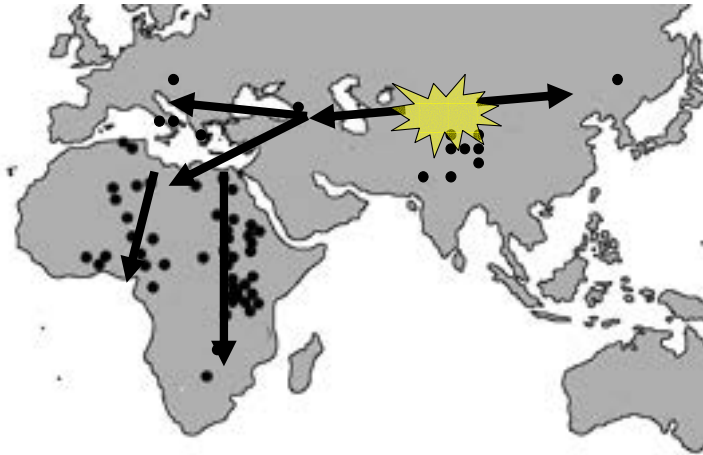


Fig.4. 16. Proposed historical reconstruction: (b) *Borean

A note on the Pelasgian Hypothesis. Ever since the late 1960s, and especially during the last fifteen years, I have been occupied with the collection and analysis of a large volume of distributional ethnographic, linguistic, archaeological and mythological data, relating to such topics as the socio-religious structure in the eastern outskirts of the Atlas mountains, Tunisia, southern shore of the Mediterranean; the nature and origin of royal court culture and mythology among the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa; the comparative history of cults of affliction and of divination systems in Africa, Asia and Europe; the ethnicity of the Sea Peoples of the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean; the Black Athena debate as initiated by Martin Bernal (1987-2006); a world-wide comparative study of Leopard-skin symbolism; African cos-

apparent affinities between Khoisan and the North Caucasian phylum?) If we accept Starostin's and Fleming's *Borean Hypothesis, then the disintegration of *Borean into Sinocaucasian, Eurasiatic (Uralic, Altaic, Indo-European, Dravidian, Kartvelian, etc.), Afroasiatic, Austric, and American and African languages, did not in the first place take place in the Caucasus, but most probably far more to the East, in Central Asia – not too far from the proposed 'primary Pelasgian Realm' of the Pelasgian Hypothesis, but c. 15 ka earlier.

mogonic myths in global diachronic perspective; the comparative methodology of Flood myths worldwide; Stephen Oppenheimer's (1998) Sunda Hypothesis, which claims a decisive constitutive cultural influence emanating from Indonesia upon Western Asia including the Ancient Near East and the Bible world from the early Holocene onward; the nature and origin of the Greek god of Fire and metallurgy Hephaestus; a cyclical transformation system of elements, found in all three continents of the Old World, and probably at the root of the primal matter identified by the Presocratic Greek philosophers as Water (Thales), Air (Anaximenes), Fire (Heraclitus), and all three plus Earth added (Empedocles); Japanese creation myths. Admittedly, this list looks like an inventory of work of a scholar who, unwisely, acknowledges no boundaries between specialised fields of scholarship and who (against all probability) sees no limits to his own competence; yet all these topics hang closely together since they were all initiated and executed as logical further steps in a sustained process, in which I sought to offer the empirical data and the interpretative models relating to the underlying unity of Old World cultures and languages, of which my ethnographic, historical, comparative and intercultural-philosophical work made me increasingly aware at an intuitive, pre-scientific level.

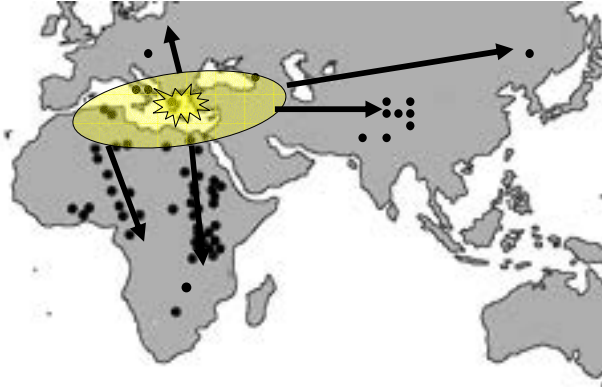
#4.4. INTRODUCING THE PELASGIAN HYPOTHESIS. As one of the tools promising to create order and sense of the unmistakable comparative trends emerging from this corpus, I have formulated (van Binsbergen 201k, and in press (a; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) the Pelasgian Hypothesis, as an integrative perspective on long-range ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia. This hypothesis proposes an original, primary Pelasgian Realm in Neolithic Central Asia, which due to westbound population movements in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (greatly facilitated by Central Asian pastoralists' achievements the rise of horse-riding and of chariot technology) led to the establishment of a secondary Mediterranean-Pelasgian Realm by the Late Bronze Age. Although linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous (so that the term 'Pelasgian' can only be employed as an analytical label, without one-to-one correspondence to the ethnic distinctions the historical actors themselves were making), the primary and secondary Pelasgian realms stood out by a package of traits; individual 'Pelasgian' population groups never displayed the entire package, but displayed a tendency to adopt a fair number of them selectively, and on that basis yet had a basis for ethno-political identification with other such groups. As many as 80 Pelasgian traits have been identified.¹⁶⁰ The distribution maps suggest that also the spiked-wheel trap may be interpreted as a Pelasgian trait, as under the following points (3) and (4)

As a fertile explanatory hypothesis, the Pelasgian Hypothesis will come back at various other points in the present book, e.g. in ch. 14.

3. *Secondary, Mediterranean-Pelasgian*: An origin in the proposed Mediterranean-Pelasgian Realm, which suggests a Bronze Age dating, with subsequent spread to Central and East Asia, and into Africa, on the wings of horse-riding and chariot technology (Fig. 13). What argues against this interpretation is that the Mediterranean attestations are so few, and

¹⁶⁰ A full list is presented in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chapter 28. Here also the distributional structure of the 'cross-model' is demonstrated: emerging in West Central Asia as the Primary Pelasgian Realm, and spreading, throughout the Bronze Age, westward in the West Asia and the Mediterranean, from the Middle Bronze Age on, and largely on the wings of horse-riding and chariot technology, Pelasgian traits are selectively transmitted in all four directions: west to the Western Mediterranean and the Celtic World; north to the Uralic and Germanic world; East across the Eurasian Steppe to East Asia (and even beyond, into South East Asia and Oceania), with diversions to South and South East Asia; and south across the Sahara into sub-Saharan Africa – notably the area where Nigercongo (> Bantu) is spoken in historical times. A selection of proposed Pelasgian traits includes (order is arbitrary): gold mining and metallurgy, gold-smithing; relatively early adoption and transmission (if not invention) of iron-working technology; veneration of a Mother goddess associated with bees; male genital mutilation in at least part of the realm; territorial cults centring on Earth shrines, often in the form of *herms*, with divination function; a central Flood myth and a creation mythology centring on the primal emergence of Land from Water, with the Primal Waters personified as a virgin Creator Goddess; military prowess and pre-marital sexual license of (young) women; veneration of a divine pair of opposite gender (e.g. Athena and Poseidon, Athena and Hephaestus, Nü Wa 女媧 and Fu Xi 伏羲 associated with the installation of culture and world order – there are indications that the Graeco-Roman claim of *Lacus Tritonis* / *Šott al-Jerid* (in modern Southern Tunisia) as birth place of Athena mirrors an earlier, more eastern, Central Asian birthplace by a major inland lake, and such mirroring occurs in other ancient place names including Iberia, Libya, and Africa / Ifriq; relatively early adoption and transmission of chariot technology; veneration of a solar god; headhunting and skull cult; common genetic background; boat cult, perhaps associated with the afterlife.

while there are (in horse-riding and chariot technologies) recognised mechanisms to explain cultural transmission from the Mediterranean to the entire Eurasian Steppe belt all the way to the Pacific, there is no such mechanism to explain such transmission exclusively to Central Asia (where the spiked-wheel trap is relatively frequent), skipping both West Asia and East Asia (where the trap is virtually absent).



Primary, Central Asian Pelasgian: However, if the Mediterranean Pelasgian Realm is seen as only a secondary branch of a more original Pelasgian Realm situated in Central Asia by the Late Neolithic, then it is more likely that the Central Asian attestations are the oldest ones, and the East Asian, Mediterranean, other European and African ones derived from there with the spread of horse and chariot technologies (Fig. 14).

Fig. 4.17. Proposed historical reconstruction: (c) Mediterranean-Pelasgian origin, then into Asia and Africa)

If the spiked-wheel trap was invented in Central Asia, we have indeed found the limited, and rather recent, context in space in time which would be commensurate with the distribution of that implement. It would then also have diffused into the Mediterranean region, and further into Africa, with the diffusion of the chariot, as marked by Sahara rock art (Lhote 1959; Mauny 1947, 1955). Therefore what emerges as the most likely explanatory model for the distribution of the spiked-wheel trap is the Pelasgian model.

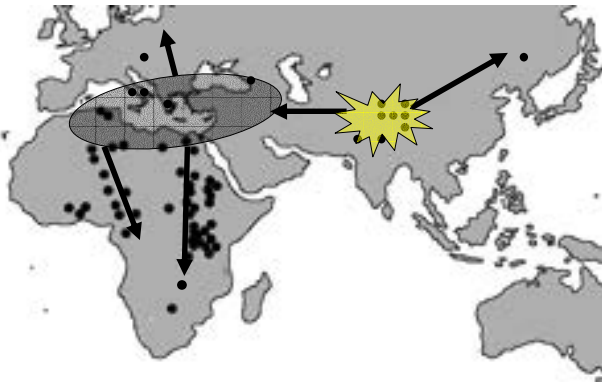


Fig. 4.18. Proposed historical reconstruction (favoured): (d) Primary Pelasgian origin in Cen-

tral Asia, then to secondary, Mediterranean Pelasgian Realm, then on into Africa)

4.5. Formal cultural systems whose distribution is similar to that of the spiked-wheel trap: Mankala, geomantic divination, and the belief in a Unilateral Mythical Being

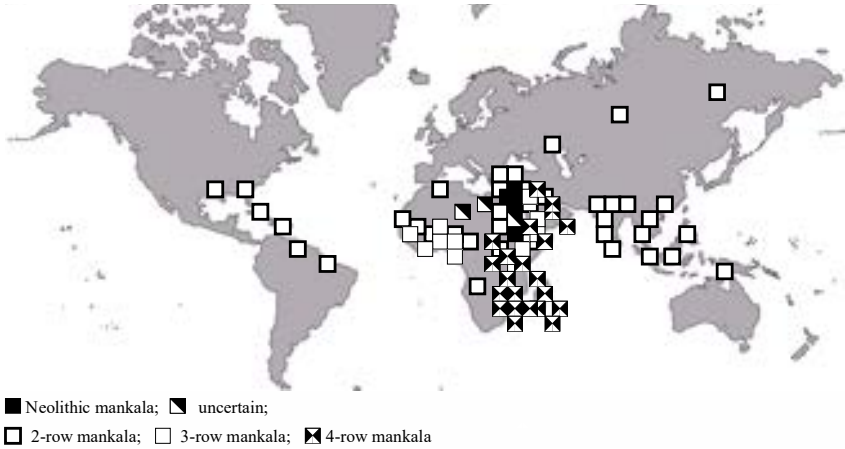
Although we have now arrived at a convincing alternative explanation, above I mentioned the possibility of interpreting the preponderance of the spiked-wheel trap in Africa as a sign of origin from that continent. The same argument has been made (Culin 1896; Kassibo 1992; Traoré 1979; van Binsbergen 1997)¹⁶¹ for a few other formal cultural systems which have an Old-World distribution well comparable with that of the spiked-wheel trap:

- the *mankala* mathematical board game (revolving on the rule-regulated redistribution of a given number of tokens among a given number of ordered positions, arranged in two to four rows), and
- geomantic divination, where a random generator (the casting of wooden or ivory tablets, shells, *etc.*) produces a finite (usually 2^n) number of specific and named configurations, which are subsequently interpreted by reference to a fixed, memorised, intersubjective interpretational catalogue.

Moreover, in the mythological domain, also the mythical figure that has only one side

¹⁶¹ #4.5. A DILEMMA IN THE FACE OF AFROCENTRIST IDEOLOGY: FROM AFRICA OR ENDING UP IN AFRICA? The conspicuous and consistent African presence for each of these four distributions, has given earlier interpreters (including myself) the impression of an essentially African phenomenon that happens to have spilled over transcontinentally into Eurasia. Thus geomantic divination (known under such famous African forms as Ifa, Sikidy, Hakata), the *mankala*, board game, and the Luwe Unilateral Mythical Character have been presented as essentially African cultural elements occasionally wandering off into Eurasia, *e.g.* in the wake of major population movements from Africa to Asia, trade, voluntary labour migration, and forced migration in the context of slavery. No unequivocal evidence of such African-Eurasian movement at a substantial scale in Holocene times is however available. In Afrocentric circles the case of highly pigmented populations in the Caucasus / Pontic area (Abkhazians *etc.*), and that of the often highly pigmented Dravidian-speaking populations of Southern India and Sri Lanka as well as the so-called 'Untouchables' (*Dallit*) often with similar levels of pigmentation, is often cited as proof of substantial African settlement in Upper Palaeolithic times or more recently. However, so far these claims have little found support (beyond Arnaiz-Villena *et al.*'s 2001 claim as to the sub-Saharan origin of the Greeks) in modern molecular genetics, which allows (albeit at the price of huge error distributions, in other words with great uncertainty, as far as dating is concerned) for somewhat detailed reconstructions of population movements. But as we have seen above, state-of-the-art genetics sees, instead, a *Back-into-Africa* movement from the Upper Palaeolithic onward (Hammer *et al.* 1998; Coia *et al.* 2002; Cruciani *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004). Therefore, contrary to my earlier Afrocentrist interpretation of *mankala* and geomantic divination (van Binsbergen 1997), I now believe that the proper interpretation is just opposite: these are essentially West Central Asian traits, taken in all directions by the dynamics of the cross model, but incomparably more successful in sub-Saharan Africa than in other parts of the Old World., because sub-Sahara Africa, with its hunting-and-gather population and relative absence of logocentric institutions, formed a relatively open niche welcoming such innovations from Asia.

to his or her body (described by von Sicard 1968–1969 under the generic term of ‘Luwe’) has a similar Old-World distribution. The world distributions of these traits are given in Figs 4:19–21.



(after van Binsbergen 1997. Note: the New World distribution is entirely due to forced trans-Atlantic migration in the second half of the 2nd mill. CE

Fig.4. 19. Mankala: Distribution of the various types

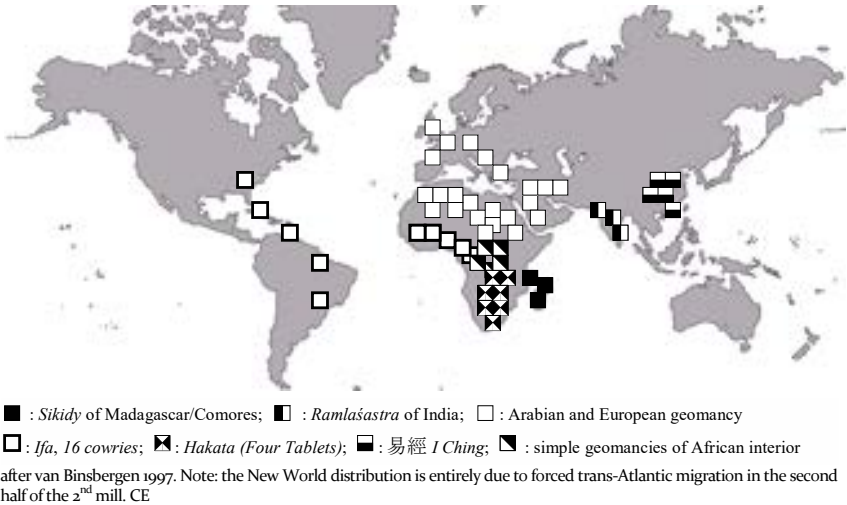
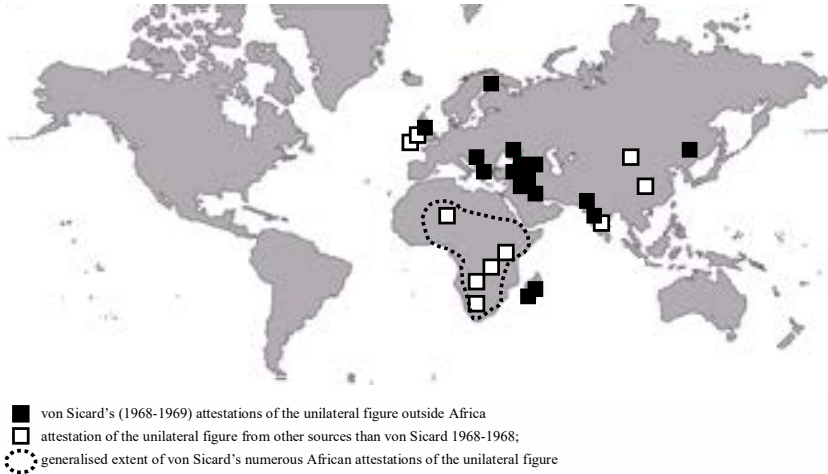


Fig. 4.20. World distribution of geomantic divination



Sources for this map: Von Sicard's 1968-69 sources are fully referenced. Additional references are the following. Willis 1994: 108 (the Mongolian 'old white man' – apparently belonging to a widespread class of white cosmogonic gods –, who was once a shamanistic god ruling Heaven and Earth; he was converted by Buddha, and on that occasion his magic wand became his walking stick – the pole is a major attribute of the unilateral figure in von Sicard's analysis. Then there is the Irish Fomhoriens (Willis 1994: 180), descendants of Ham son of Nual, so by traditional implication dark-skinned; they are supposed to have only one leg and one arm, so are unilateral. The club theme reappears (Cotterell 1989: 8) in Irish mythology with the mythical Dagda obese, 'dragging a gigantic club on wheel' (cf. Ions 1980: 151) and in other sources he, too, is reputed to be white. Among the African Lughbara (Congo and Uganda) we find (Cotterell 1989: 182) the god Adroa, good as Sky god, evil as Earth god, and having only one side to his body. In Indian mythology we meet (Cotterell 1989: 186) Vinata, one of the daughters of the Prajapati Daksha, who lays two eggs, Garuda (the mount of the primal god Vishnu) is born from one unbroken egg but Aruna (dawn) comes from the broken egg, hence is only unilateral; not the parallel with the Greek mythological character (to be further discussed elsewhere in the present book; see Index) Leda and her children Helena, Clytaemnestra, and the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux. Also among the 'Hottentots' (now preferably referred to as Nama) there is (Cotterell 1989: 204) the unilateral monster Hai-uri. In Chinese mythology the bird Jian 兼鳥 has only one wing and one eye, hence is effectively unilateral. A unilateral being is also attested among the Masai (Julien 1959), as, characteristically, an attorney of the High God Engai: a former god subdued by a more dominant newcomer god, and with considerable parallels in the Ancient Near East and the Bible.

Fig. 4.21. World distribution of the belief in a unilateral mythical being

4.6. Conclusion

Overlooking these four distributions, of spiked-wheel trap, mankala board games, geomantic divination, and the belief in a Unilateral Mythical Being, all four with their abundant African incidences and relatively patchy Eurasian ones, one could, admittedly, try to take recourse to the hypothesis – implicitly favoured by recent Afrocentrist thought – of an African origin, with subsequent spread to Eurasia. However, the overwhelming flow of genes, languages, culture traits and mythologies, from the Neolithic onward, appears to be *into* Africa much rather than out of sub-Saharan Africa,¹⁶² but we know that scholars's paradigms tend to reflect the geopolitics of these scholars's times and their class position within the world system – it is therefore conceivable

¹⁶² As has been brought out convincingly in the *Black Athena* debate, the case of Ancient Egypt is clearly different, which is why it figures massively in Afrocentrist arguments; however, too complex to be discussed here, my views on this point are extensively covered in my contributions to this debate.

that the impression of a receptive Africa – even if advanced by me, who identifies as African, anti-hegemonic and anti-racist – is merely a hegemonic imposition and nothing more. In the Neolithic, the then fertile Sahara formed the southwestern part of a region of ecological and cultural innovation – the *Extended Fertile Crescent* reaching – via the Nile Valley and Anatolia – all the way to East Asia, and featuring as the seed bed for all the great Old World civilisations, from Ancient Egypt to Sumer and the Chinese Shang Dynasty. In this Extended Fertile Crescent, considerable exchanges of genes, languages and cultural items must have taken place, and for all we know Africa participated and contributed to this system (e.g. as a site where major animal and plant species were domesticated) as much as the other constituent regions. However, in post-Neolithic times, there is hardly any hard evidence of a cultural flow *out* of sub-Saharan Africa *before* the massive, initially mainly forced, slavery-related intercontinental migrations of the second half of the second millennium CE. Hence the general insistence of Afrocentrists that Ancient Egypt was an African culture in total continuity with sub-Saharan Africa,¹⁶³ so that the impressive achievements of Egypt over three millennia (which demonstrably had an enormous impact on sub-Saharan Africa, cf. ch. 8 of this book) could be claimed as *African* achievements.

But then, Afrocentrists might object, *should not our above four distributions in themselves be taken to constitute evidence for an African origin of the spiked-wheel trap?* That question can be answered if we are able to situate these distributions in time. For *mankala* that is not difficult: the oldest attestations are from the West Asian Neolithic (Palestine and Jordan), c. 6–5 ka BP.¹⁶⁴ The typological varieties of the unilateral mythological being have been exhaustively explored by von Sicard (1968–1969), and its complex and heterogeneous associations as a god of the hunting, weather (which is mainly important in an agricultural context), cattle, and metallurgy bring together themes that, with the exception of hunting, revolve on food production, in other words are Neolithic and later. What few non-modern specimens of the spiked-wheel trap Lindblom could identify (and I have not been able to find any more) is late predynastic Egyptian (3500 BCE) at the earliest – if the Hierakonopolitan depiction qualifies as such a trap, after all. For geomantic divination there seems to be scarcely any direct archaeological evidence,¹⁶⁵ but the comparative evidence (van Binsbergen 1997, 2009) suggests that it is closely related to a cosmological system revolving on a transformative cycle of a handful of elements (Water, Fire, Air, etc.), traces of which are found all over Eurasia and even in sub-Saharan Africa, which might suggest a Neolithic context but more readily the kind of Pan-Old World distribution associated with the horse and chariot technologies of the advanced Bronze Age. Although the evidence is not conclusive, all this does not suggest a unique sub-Saharan origin for our four items of formal culture.

It is my contention that *mankala* board games, geomantic divination, and the belief in a Unilateral Mythical Being have a distribution similar to that of the spiked-wheel trap, *because their cultural history has been essentially the same*: an origin in the primary Pelasgian Realm, subsequent sporadic spread to other parts of Eurasia, and from the Late Bronze Age onward immensely successful spread all over sub-Saharan Africa. If *mankala*, geomantic

¹⁶³ My disenchantment with the later, Afrocentrist reformulations of Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis concerned precisely this point: in his eagerness to appear Politically Correct, Bernal had largely underplayed the enormous formative impact which Neolithic and Bronze-Age West Asia had had on the Early Dynastic Egypt – as well as the continued effect of the (originally also West Asian) Pelasgian substrate. Cf. van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011.

¹⁶⁴ Rollefson 1992; Kirkbride 1966.

¹⁶⁵ With the exception of finds from South Central Africa, dated as late as Early Modern times – but that is scarcely any help in our present context. Cf. Bent 1892 / 1969; Robinson 1959.

divination (and we may add: the spiked-wheel trap, and in the linguistic field perhaps even substantial elements towards Proto-Nigercongo and Proto-Nilosaharan), were traits that after minimal beginnings in Neolithic Central Asia, and after a westbound itinerary via Egypt and possibly the Maghrib, happened to end up in Africa and there underwent very massive expansion so as to develop into African items *par excellence* – so much so even that to suggest a non-African provenance is an almost an act of sacrilege and racism – this says a lot about the nature of cultural dynamics inside the African continent in the last few millennia. It is as if sub-Saharan Africa constituted, for the purpose of these formal cultural systems, a *relatively empty ecological niche* – a fallow cultural territory that could be taken over by culturally and technologically superior immigrants. Although painstakingly collected and processed factual data do not seem to leave me an alternative, I must admit that this sounds unpleasantly like the Hamitic thesis. But there is one essential difference that, ideologically, may constitute the saving grace of the present analysis: the Pelasgian-associated groups making inroads into Africa from the Late Bronze Age onward, and bringing, presumably, the formal cultural systems under consideration here, were not in the first place or primarily ‘Hamitics’, in the sense of what this term would have meant among early 20th century scholars: speakers of Afroasiatic’. Although they may have been culturally and linguistically heterogeneous groups, they were not invading non-Africans, but rather *Proto-Africans, in fertile cultural, linguistic and genetic interaction with the populations they found already settled in the African continent, and they were carrying *Borean elements towards the two principal African language phyla Nigercongo and Nilosaharan, as well as the formal cultural systems that were to be installed at the heart of the modern African cultures emerging in that continent from the Late Bronze Age onward.*¹⁶⁶



Source: this photograph was adapted, with thanks, from: Anonymous, n.d. (c).

Fig. 4.22. An African drum constructed, essentially, as a spiked-wheel trap tautly covered with skin

¹⁶⁶ For a more extensive discussion of the fundamental differences between my Pelasgian Hypothesis and the Hamitic thesis of the early 20th century, cf. van Binsbergen 201k.

The Pelasgian Hypothesis does far more than explaining the remarkable distribution pattern of such a relatively insignificant cultural item as the spiked-wheel trap: it allows that humble implement to be raised to the status of an index fossil, revealing essential steps in the cultural history of Africa.

There even appears to be a link between the spiked-wheel trap, and what many Africans and outside observers would consider the central feature of traditional African life: the African drum. In these musical instruments (*cf.* Fig. 4.22), often the skin is stretched over the circular end of the drum cylinder, and fastened by pegs driven into the cylinder – thus if the skin is removed, we have something that looks very much like a spiked-wheel trap. This type is certainly common in South Central Africa (Zambia, Zimbabwe) – where the spiked-wheel trap hardly occurs. In other parts of Africa (*e.g.* the West African *jembe* drum), the skin is more typically stretched with cords, like in West and South Asia. Is the South Central African drum a transformation of the spiked-wheel trap – or perhaps the other way around?

By a very long shot, we might even suggest that

- (a) the spoked wheel, the major technological advance informing the chariot revolution that conquered the Old World from Kazakhstan c. 2000 BCE, and
- (b) the spiked-wheel trap

derived from a common technological inspiration. In that case we may be inclined to give precedence to the more ancient mode of production, that of hunting, and see the spoked wheel as descending, in part, from the spiked-wheel trap; however, the restrictive global distribution of the spiked-wheel trap, arguably originating from Central Asia, also makes it conceivable that the relationship is the other way around.

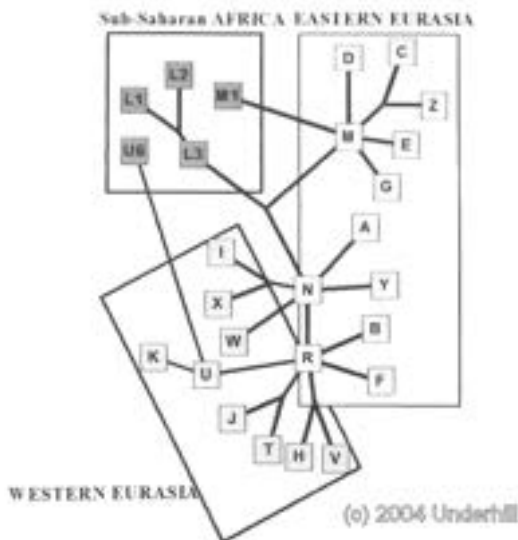


Fig. 4.23. Transcontinental continuities in the 'Back-into-Africa' movement (Underhill 2004)

Meanwhile we should realise that the Pelasgian Hypothesis identifies only one of several major processes informing African cultural pre- and proto-history in the last handful of mil-

lennia. Geneticists have discovered that the ‘Back-into-Africa’ movement, in addition to a Western Eurasian component, had a major component from East and South East Asia (Fig. 4.23). Clearly the Pelasgian Hypothesis needs to be combined with a model highlighting the latter kind of influences; Oppenheimer’s (1998) Sunda Hypothesis appears to offer part of the answer, and although I have elsewhere disputed its claims in the comparative mythological field (van Binsbergen with Marc Isaak 2008), for other aspects of African cultural history it looks very promising (van Binsbergen, 2019, 2020; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ In addition to the specific references to the present chapter, I have completed and expanded Lindblom’s original references to the distribution of the spiked-wheel trap; in the present book’s end bibliography such references have been marked by a final asterisk*

Chapter 5. Mythological archaeology (2005 / 2006)

Situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective¹⁶⁸

There is all Africa and her prodigies in us' (Browne 1642: I, 15; cf. Shreeve 1996: 57)

ABSTRACT. The present argument reflects an attempt to write a coherent world history of mythology along strict methodological lines of empirical enquiry. Point of departure is the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis. The argument seeks to identify the mythological content, if any, of the Out-of-Africa package (80 – 60 ka BP). For this purpose a corpus of c. 200 mythemes is constructed from sub-Saharan Africa cosmogonic myths as attested in historical times. The corpus is then subsumed under 20 Narrative Complexes, whose number is further reduced because some turn out to be implied in others. The Narrative Complexes are subjected to elaborate methodologies of absolute and relative dating, based on considerations from the fields of astronomy, genetics, archaeology, modes-of-production analysis,¹⁶⁹ ethnographic distributional analysis, and hermeneutics;¹⁷⁰ these are also argued to offer clues as to the location of origin of each Narrative Complex. It turns out that, as an abstract model with mainly heuristic¹⁷¹ claims, all Narrative Complexes may be situated, in space and time, along what is taken to constitute a sustained global mainstream process of mythological development spanning the entire existence of

¹⁶⁸ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006a, 'Mythological archaeology: Situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Osada, Toshiki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds, Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN [Research Institute for Humanity and Nature] and 7th ESCA [Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia] Harvard-Kyoto Round Table, Kyoto: RIHN, pp. 319-349, also at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/kyoto_as_published_2006_EDIT2.pdf.

¹⁶⁹ van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985a; van Binsbergen 1981, 2012c.

¹⁷⁰ *Hermeneutics* is the art of explaining / exegesis of an item of cultural production into a (usually both specialist and intersubjective) meta-language that brings out implied and hidden meanings and connections, including such meanings and connections as may not have entered the conscious minds of the original authors of the item in question.

¹⁷¹ A heuristic claim does not answer a specific question, but rather suggests what might be important questions and in what directions answers may be expected to be found.

Anatomically Modern Humans (ever since 200 ka BP). This starts out in South East Africa with a Pre-Out-of-Africa package, subsequently follows the recursive path (first eastward along the Indian Ocean coast, then westward) of Anatomically Modern Humans across the Old World in the Out-of-Africa Exodus;¹⁷² finally to be fed back, secondarily, into Africa through the 'Back-into-Africa Movement'. In the process, the successive Narrative Complexes emerge, spread, and interact, in argued relation with innovations in the fields of modes of production, socio-political organisation, and languages (more specifically, linguistic proto-macrophyla). In this way a small original Pre-Out-of-Africa mythical package becomes discernable, revolving on the themes of the Earth, the eminently cosmogonic Lightning Bird, and the Rainbow. All the other Narrative Themes in the recent African data set are continuous with Asian material and are argued to have originated on Asian soil, or (in the case of the most recent Narrative Complexes) to originate in the Neolithic 'Extended Fertile Crescent'¹⁷³ ranging from the (then still fertile) Sahara through West and Central Asia, to China. Meanwhile from the Upper Palaeolithic onward, the mainstream East-West recursive movement has interacted with a direct Northbound diffusion of Pre-Out-of-Africa material (Earth-Lightning-Rainbow) into North Africa, Europe and Asia, provided Anatomically Modern Humans had already arrived there; this has resulted in a Palaeo-African (Pre-Exodus (b)) substratum (in myth, ritual and folklore) that complements the otherwise prevailing Asian antecedents. In the present perspective, sub-Saharan African mythology at long last sheds its habitual isolation from world mythology, and turns out to be, in its own right, world mythology *par excellence*. Extensive continuities between African, West and South Asian, and European mythologies can then be revealed and explained. While predicated on Witzel's seminal long-range approach to world mythology, his Laurasian/Gondwana dichotomy does not arrive at such transcontinentalk continuity, and therefore needs to be replaced by a systematically argued combination of continuity, transformation, interaction, and feedback. In the postscript, this chapter's argument is defended against allegations of being dismissable as mere Afrocentrist ideology.

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. The problem

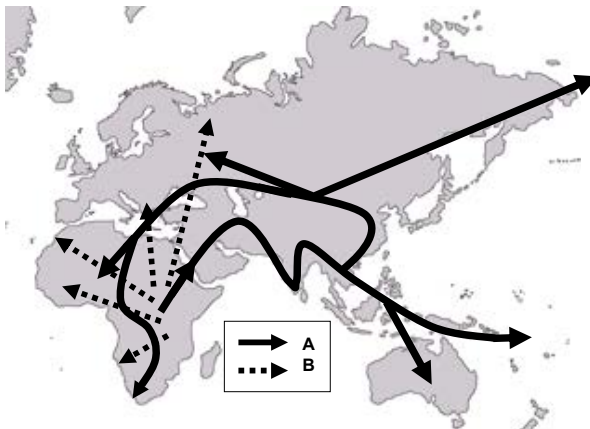
Based on the analysis of a corpus of African cosmogonic ('creation') myth as attested in historical times, this chapter constitutes an attempt to write a coherent world history of mythology along strict methodological lines of empirical enquiry.^{174 175}

¹⁷² #5.1. ON THE POLYSEMY OF THE TERM 'EXODUS'. 'Exodus' (a) (the Latinisation of the Greek word Ἔξοδος as the name of the second book of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint Greek translation; the Hebrew designation of that book is, however, שמות Šəmōṭ, "Names") has been used, ever since the 3rd c. BCE, for the legendary (and probably scarcely historical or fairly minimal) migration of a postulated Israelite Egyptian minority population into Palestine by the end of the Bronze Age. The 'Out-of-Africa' Exodus (b), recently postulated on the basis of state-of-the-art molecular-biology / genetics, has nothing to do with the Biblical process, although the geographic direction of the initial vector (North-East bound) happens to be the same.

¹⁷³ As a technical term, the concept of the 'Fertile Crescent' was originally launched by archaeologists and Ancient Historians, up to the middle of the 20th century, to designate the seethings of innovation in the domain of food production (agriculture and animal husbandry) in West Asia and North-East Africa (Egypt, but excluding the Sahara) in the Neolithic. Later the need arose to *extend* the region in question both to the West, and to the East.

¹⁷⁴ This is a greatly revised version of a paper for the comparative myth section of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) Pre-Symposium / 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table on 'Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia', organised by RIHN, NIHU / Harvard University, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, and held at Kyoto, Japan, 6-8 June, 2005. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude: to the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), and to Harvard University (the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies), for inviting me to this exciting intercontinental intellectual event; to the conference participants for their stimulating discussions; to Michael Witzel for seminally offering a new framework for my long-standing passion for myth; to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for creating a stimulating environment in which the present, and related, research is being conducted; to Noriko Hase, for excellent editorial assistance; and to Patricia Saegerman for sharing with me, as usual, the excitement and the frustrations of the present research, and being my sparring partner at all stages of the project. This chapter's argument (first written in 2005) constituted my first attempt at specifically the New Comparative Mythology of the Witzel signature, under circumstances set out in the Introduction to this book. After nearly two decades I still stand by the overall thrust of the argument, but in the final editing towards the present book I had to make many minor and major specific changes.

Subsaharan Africa has usually¹⁷⁶ been left out from comprehensive intercontinental myth comparisons, for a number of practical scholarly reasons (to which we might add another likely reason, notably the hegemonic ethnocentrism of the North Atlantic region). Deriving from largely illiterate traditions,¹⁷⁷ the construction of an African mythological corpus appears highly artificial – especially since dominant approaches to African religion have stressed ritual's praxeological microdramatics over the *in vitro* logocentric verbiage of myth. The available African material tends to be fragmentary, heterogeneous, often poorly collected and poorly published, and rather inaccessible to non-Africanists. It often appears to be contaminated with Islamic, Christian, and general West- or South Asian influences, which may be held to obscure what may be assumed to be older, presumably more original and local layers. Africanists have gone on to concentrate on more topical subjects, seeking to debunk modern myths with their respective disciplines' North Atlantic rationality, rather than studying old myths whose logic leaves them confused – confronting them with forms of African Premodernity which political correctness has a problem appreciating. It is mainly in certain domains, widely apart, that African myths still manage to captivate Africanist researchers: political history and legitimation, African literature, the analysis of cosmologies informing present-day daily and ceremonial life, African philosophy, and rock art studies. A number of salient themes have been recognised in African myths, such as stories on the origin of death, and more in general cosmogonic or creation stories, on which the present study will concentrate.



A. Out-of-Africa migration and subsequent major migrations of Anatomically Modern Man; B. Local spread of the Pre-Out of Africa cultural package. In order to highlight the basic west-East-West movement, secondary spread and feedback effects have largely been ignored.

Fig. 5.1. Simplified model of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80–60 ka BP) and the Back-to-Africa return migration (from c. 15 ka BP)

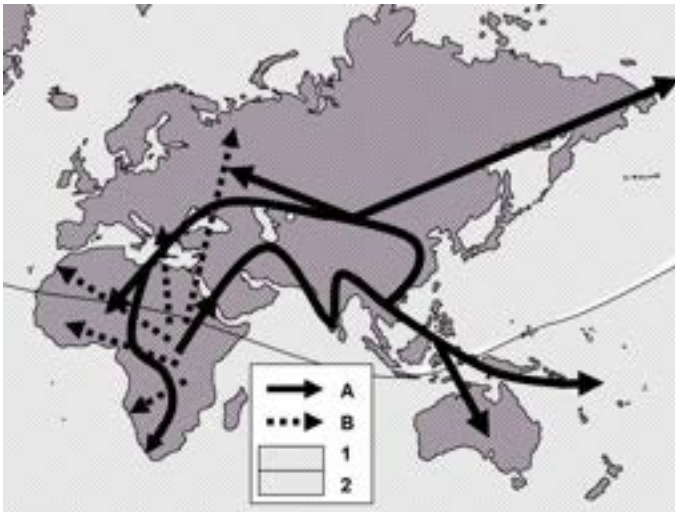
¹⁷⁵ In this article, I must concentrate on results and can only cursorily indicate my methodologies even though these largely determine the merits of this exercise; the same applies to bibliography. Book-length treatment will be given in van Binsbergen, in preparation, available in draft at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/mythical_archaeology/mytholog.htm.

¹⁷⁶ E.g. Eliade 1949, 1960, 1963, 1968, 1969; Fontenrose 1980; Ginzburg 1966, 1989, 1992.

¹⁷⁷ Although the habitual claim of Africa as illiterate needs considerable qualification. Ancient Egypt was one of the cradles of literacy, and major parts of North Africa were literate in Antiquity. Christian Ethiopia and the world of African Islam were literate throughout most of the last two millennia.

Now that the past two decades' concerted efforts (by geneticists, linguists, archaeologists, anthropological comparativists, and comparativist mythologists) is beginning to yield an increasingly coherent and convincing long-range picture of intercontinental population movements, cultural flows, exchanges and feed-backs with a time depth of tens of thousands of years and more, it is time that Africa's myths are reconsidered from this perspective. All the more so, because the African continent plays a pivotal role in the geneticists's reconstructions, not only as the original cradle of humankind perhaps 4 million years ago, but also as the cradle of Anatomically Modern Humans (subsequently spread across the globe as a result of the 'Out of Africa' movement, ca. 80,000-60,000 (80-60 ka) BP; Cruciani *et al.* 2001; Coia *et al.* 2005; Hammer *et al.* 1998; Underhill 2004), and as the scene of considerable re-immigration from Asia in far more recent periods (from 15 ka BP on).

Was there really any original 'Out of Africa' package to spread across the world, and did it contain any detectable mythical material? Only a few years ago such a question would be dismissed to the realm of science fiction. Yet it is with this kind of questions in mind – ultimately leading us to identify mankind's oldest stories – that Michael Witzel (2001) proposed a radical distinction between the 'Laurasian' (Asia-North America) and 'Gondwana' (sub-Saharan African, Australia and New Guinea) mythical complexes, to be compared not so much by individual traits but as wholes.



A and B, see Fig. 5.1.

1. 'Laurasia' mythologies (≈ A)
 True cosmogony and anthropogony
 Cosmic Egg
 Father Heaven / Mother Earth
 History as epic/linear
 Flood myths
 Kings and Heroes

2. 'Gondwana' mythologies (≈ B)
 No true cosmogony or anthropogony
 'From the tree'
 Other Laurasian traits may be absent, e.g. no Flood myths
 History as cyclical

Fig. 5.2. Michael Witzel's recent proposal for absolute discontinuity in comparative world mythology, projected onto a simplified model of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80,000 – 60,000 BP) and the Into-Africa return migration (from c. 15,000 BP).

'While Laurasian mythology can be described as being highly interested in origins, especially the origins of the universe and the succession of the various generations of the gods and that of four subsequent ages, the mythologies of Africa and Australia, New Guinea generally do not take notice of this question and generally confine themselves to describe the emergence of humankind in an already existing world. (...) It is significant that certain motifs are altogether missing in this Gondwana belt. Typical examples are the lack of cosmogonic myths that tell the origin of the world, or the lack of Flood myths, or of details such as the lack of female witches.' (Witzel 2001: 5).

On the other hand, the notion of mankind's origin from a tree-trunk appears, to Witzel, a positive Gondwana trait, peripherally retained in some Laurasian contexts and perhaps revealing the oldest 'Pan-Gaia' layer.

In the present chapter I seek to answer the following questions:

1. *Can we identify any mythical contents that arguably belonged to the postulated 'Out of Africa' package, subsequently to spread across the world?*
2. *After the Out-of-Africa migration, was there any primal mythical material left to percolate inside Africa, and can we identify it?*
3. *What, if any, was the effect of more recent return migration into Africa, on the corpus of African myths now available?*
4. *Can we propose systematic reasons why the intercontinental dynamics of world mythology may have taken the form speculatively reconstructed here?*

5.1.2. The method to be followed in this argument

The method I will follow is straightforward and obvious, and consists of the following steps:

1. Construction of a corpus, as representative and as complete as possible, of mythical material from sub-Saharan Africa, and rendering that corpus in one language of analysis (English). Large problems are to be confronted here, of recording method, language mastery, contamination of the data with the collectors' own (as typically North Atlantic, Christian, evolutionist¹⁷⁸ diffusionist, hegemonic *etc.*) mythical beliefs. A discussion of these problems falls outside our present scope in that chapter, but they will come back throughout this book. The present argument is predicated on the assumption that these methodological and knowledge-political shortcomings do not totally invalidate the corpus. My main reason for this assumption is that the pattern emerging from my analysis of this (admittedly highly defective) corpus yet turns out to make considerable sense and to manifest consistency; but I am aware of the circularity of such an argument.
2. Identification of individual mythemes in that corpus.
3. Combining of these individual mythemes into a much smaller number of explicit Narrative Complexes.

¹⁷⁸ In the sense of a paradigm, dominant in late 19th c. CE North Atlantic scholarship, according to which human cultures, including expressions in the fields of religion, literature and art, typically traverse fixed evolutionary stages from more primitive to more civilised, with the highest stage being, inevitably and revealingly, reserved for the militarily and politically dominant European colonising nations at the time. Such evolutionism is clearly a hegemonic Eurocentrist ideology, and is completely divorced from the modern biological evolution theory that underlies state-of-the-art, scientific Palaeoanthropology.

4. Perhaps the most difficult, and certainly the most crucial part of the whole exercise: designing an explicit methodology that allows us to advance explicit and systematic reasons (derived from astronomy, genetics, linguistics, archaeology, ethnographic distributions, modes-of-production analysis, hermeneutics, *etc.*) for situating each of these Narrative Complexes at a particular place and time within the overall long-range Out of Africa.
5. Integrating the emerging pattern into an overall, again very highly tentative scheme encompassing the entire Old World since the putative Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80,000 – 60,000 BP).
6. Taking a very relative view of such a scheme, as merely a heuristic framework inviting a future growth of knowledge and insight in world mythology.

5.2. The empirical data



Although other numbers have been analysed, the word 'one' is ignored in this analysis because its frequency in the data set cannot be determined with precision: in English translations it often has a syntactic function that has nothing to do with counting, *e.g.* 'the red one', *etc.*

Fig. 5.3. Graphic summary of the frequency distribution of the most frequent key words in our data set of African cosmogonic myths.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Basing ourselves upon a data set of published cosmogonic myths from sub-Saharan Africa, inevitably we are limited to mythological texts collected since the onset of European expansion in Early Modern times. Much older cosmogonic mythological texts from Africa are available, *e.g.* from Ancient Egyptian sources, but as far as I know (there might be scraps of such material in ancient Arabic sources) not from sub-Saharan Africa. The relative recent nature of our data set is manifest in the frequency with which apparently Neolithic or later concepts appear notably 'king', and 'cattle' – whereas we have reason to assume that also the word 'Heaven' suggests a post-**Borean* dating – the concept is hardly attested in the reconstructed **Borean* lexicon (van Binsbergen 2018), and the 'invention of Heaven' constitutes a landslide achievement in Anatomically Modern Humans' progression towards naked-eye astronomy, shamanism, and transcendence.

5.2.1. Construction of a corpus

For the current provisional and exploratory analysis, I have approached the problem of the construction of a sub-Saharan mythological corpus in a very pragmatic way. What is required is a data set that is sufficiently rich and comprehensive to bring out repetitive patterns of major mythemes, and show these mythemes in the context and in connection with other mythemes. Much like the set of literary works on the basis of which a literary scholar provisionally reports on a national literature in a particular period, such a data set need not be totally complete, up-to-date, philologically impeccable, nor randomly representative, as long as it covers a large part of the available sources, and contains the more salient types and cases. For the sake of comparative treatment of the mythemes, the data set must also be rendered in one language of analysis, for which I have preferred English. Moreover, in the present case, the construction of the data set needed to be concluded within a short time (in time for the 2005 Kyoto Round Table), leaving enough time for analysis. A practical solution was offered by the presence of an extensive electronic collection of African mythical fragments in Rens van der Sluijs' (n.d.) *Mythopedia* collection; my general acquaintance with the African material allowed me to recognise this collection's weaknesses, but also its usefulness and considerable level of representativeness, to trace the provenance and bibliographic background of the materials included when these were not yet given with adequate scholarly detail, and to augment the material on the basis of my own primary data collection in various parts of Africa since the late 1960s. Although I consider the resulting sub-Saharan mythological corpus of sufficient scope and quality to base the present exploratory study upon, still my tentative conclusions will have to be carefully checked, in the near future, on the basis of a much more systematic and comprehensive data set still to be constructed.

5.2.2. Identification of individual mythemes relating to cosmogony in Africa

After constructing the provisional data set, we are ready to isolate a number of mythemes.¹⁸⁰ However, before we do so it is instructive to subject the data set to a different, less sophisticated form of content analysis: by listing – without any attempt at exhaustiveness, so omitting obvious words such as house, food *etc.* – words or concepts that occur, in the data set, with conspicuous frequencies. Fig. 3 gives a graphic summary of the relative frequency with

¹⁸⁰ #5.2. THE AARNE–THOMPSON NUMERICAL MOTIF INDEX AND AFRICA. Against the background of the established tradition of research into myth and fairy tales, any attempt at the classification of motifs must be evaluated and calibrated against the Aarne–Thompson numerical motif index, for which Aarne laid the foundation in the beginning of the 20th c. CE. (Cf. Aarne & Thompson 1973.) Although a wealth of mythical material from all over the world has been processed according to this index (cf. British Columbia Folklore Society 2000, which provides an impressive bibliography), the exclusion with which sub-Saharan Africa is treated in comparative mythology is clear from the fact that hardly any African material has been thus indexed. (With the exception of the unpublished PhD thesis by Clarke (1958) for West Africa; and two collections of Ancient Egyptian material (Maspero 2002; El-Shamy 1980).) It would be a major task in its own right to process, in terms of the Aarne–Thompson index, the sub-Saharan African cosmogonic material on which the present study is based. Without denying the desirability of such processing, I submit that my present purpose is not classification but exploration. Therefore I feel justified to postpone till some other time, and preferably to leave to some other researcher, the task of bringing my own tentative classification of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myth in line with the Aarne–Thompson classification. Probably such a further analysis will cast additional light on the long-range connections I claim to discover in the present chapter, and in that respect it would be an obvious next step. On the other hand, the present argument implies the claim that much of the global mythical material may be subsumed under the twenty Narrative Complexes I tentatively distinguish, and in that respect my approach implies an attempt to establish the kind of comparative connections for which the Aarne–Thompson index was initiated but which research along those lines appears to have seldom delivered.

which the most frequent key words occur in our data set.

Narrative Complex	
1. The Separation of Heaven and Earth	11. The Primal Waters and the Flood
2. The Re-Connection between Heaven and Earth after Separation	12. From under the Tree
3. What is in Heaven?	13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake
4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg)	14. Fundamental Duality
5. The Mantis	15. The Spider And Feminine Arts
6. The Ogre	16. Shamanism, bones
7. From the Mouth	17. Spottedness and the Leopard
8. The Stones	18. Honey and Honey-beer
9. The Moon	19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and Her Son/ Lover
10. The Earth as primary	20. Contradictory Messengers Bring Death

Table 5.1. Overview of a set of twenty cosmogonic Narrative Complexes as constructed on the basis of the set of over two hundred individual mythemes

5.2.3. Combining the over two hundred individual mythemes in our data set of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic mythology, into twenty Narrative Complexes

Two hundred distinct mythemes is too large to handle in a qualitative analysis looking for historical patterns. Through an extensive process of classification and close reading that cannot be discussed in our present scope we end up with twenty Narrative Complexes (Table 5.2) that together systematically accommodate all the mythemes encountered in the data set.

5.2.4. Reducing the number of cosmogonic Narrative Complexes: Which Narrative Complexes may be considered transformations of other Narrative Complexes in the sub-Saharan African mythological material?

We may now proceed to assess whether all the twenty Narrative Complexes as distinguished in Table 5.2 are irreducibly independent, or whether, on the contrary, some of them may be considered transformation or equivalents of the other Narrative Complexes. If the latter is the case, we will end up with a somewhat smaller number of Narrative Complexes for dating and for reconstructing of the Pre- and Post-Out-of-Africa history of Old World.

5.3. Situating each of the remaining Narrative Complexes in time and place

5.3.1. Preliminary remark: The rate of cultural change

The kind of long-range intercontinental connections and continuities we are looking for in the present argument are only conceivable under at least one condition: that items of culture may remain relatively stable and unchanged across centuries, even millennia, even tens of millennia. This is not the experience of many people now living, who have seen their world change almost beyond recognition during their lifetime. Of course, both

- adaptability to a changing environment and to new influences, on the one hand, and,

on the other hand,

- a *Gestalt*-like propensity to continuity,

are essential, and complementary, features of any cultural patterning. If we implicitly claim cultural continuities across millennia, even across the huge time-span separating us today from the 'Out-of-Africa' migration, a theory of cultural retention is required, which is to provide a radical explanation for such retention. Such a theory is not currently available at any level of sophistication and persuasiveness. At a weaker and more intuitive level, one might attribute long-range retention to two factors:

- ritual enshrinement (often implicit, and non-verbal) of ancient cultural patterning
- the (remote, and contentious) possibility that thought patterns that fundamentally organise the human experience (such as basic myths) spill over from the realm of what one has acquired through individual learning processes ('culture'), and become somehow hereditary on an organic basis ('nature'); this is a reformulation of Jung's controversial idea of the collective subconscious.

Identifying the ritual factor leaves unanswered the theoretical question as to why the ritualisation of a cultural item should be particularly conducive to its inertia. This presses all the more since we know that ritual itself is far from exempted from change (e.g. van Binsbergen 1981). How then could ritual enshrinement of ancient cultural patterning bring about long-range spatio-temporal continuity of culture items (such as myth) across dozens of millennia and many thousands of kilometers? Perhaps the following answer may be suggested. Ritualised cultural items (which usually have a strong practical anchorage in bodily routines such as prayer gestures, dancing, music, breathing exercises, trance, etc.) may display high inertia because the historical participants possessing these items *tend to think of them as inert, and idealise them as such*. Collectively owned and managed myths, much like the personal narratives of psychic trauma that appear to be the individual counterparts of such myths, do not carry *date tags* – they are practically considered to be outside history, *in so far as the conscious reflection of the owners of these myths is concerned*. Whenever myth appears, it represents an all-overwhelming mythical *present*, that imposes its illuminating but often tyrannical (as distorting!) order upon everything else. Yet myths were, unmistakably, *created in history*, they *have* a history, and the central problem of my argument is to try and assign some kind of relative date to the various mythemes, and complexes of mythemes, to be identified in the African mythical material.

5.3.2. Defining methodologies for dating the cosmogonic mythical material

In the earlier steps in the present argument I have engaged in a straightforward and highly predictable form of data reduction: from a raw data set of latter-day African mythical material, to over two hundred specific mythemes; and from the latter, to a score Narrative Complexes. The possible merit of my argument does not lie there, but in the next step: *seeking to situate each Narrative Complex in space and time*, as the decisive step towards an argument provisionally identifying the likely composition of the (postulated) original Out-of-Africa mythical package, and allowing all Narrative Complexes as distinguished to be subsumed as part of one sustained history of humankind's earliest discourse, first Out of Africa, then along the Indian Ocean coast to South East Asia, branching off into Australia, then westward across the Asian continent, branching into Europe, and finally back to Africa in a feedback return migration, more recently – ultimately to spill over into the Americas and

Oceania, from East Asia. Most scholars today would reject such an argument off-hand as far too speculative, as wishful thinking: trying to reduce the infinite complexities of the human mythical inventiveness to one, coherent, unilineal (albeit sweepingly recursive)¹⁸¹ historical development.. Taxing the scholarly imagination and credulity almost to breaking point, such an argument can only pretend to have left behind the phase of science fiction, or of New Age pseudo-scholarship, if it can be based on a explicit, richly argued and, in combination and mutual reinforcement, rather convincing set of explicit methodological prescriptions for dating / periodisation. This is what the present section intends to offer, as the methodological and scientific backbone of my argument.

My surprising point of departure in this decisive methodological section is that we have actually far more clues to date mythical material from the remotest past, than is generally realised – so that a triangulation between several such dating methods applied to the same mytheme or Narrative Complex, is likely to yield results that, although fundamentally provisional, may yet claim considerable plausibility.

The available clues to dating a particular Narrative Complex range from astronomy to population genetics, comparative historical linguistics, and archaeology, to three less obvious methods which I need to present in some detail here:

- modes of production analysis;
- distributional analysis; and
- hermeneutical analysis.

5.3.3. Modes of production as a clue to dating

#5.3. INTRODUCING MODES OF PRODUCTION ANALYSIS. Modes-of-production dating revives a concept that was very much en vogue in the anthropology and archaeology of the 1970s-80s, but has since shared the fate of all Marxian-inspired approaches. A *mode of production* is a coherent, historical set of practices for a human group's exploitation of nature, combined with the particular ideology, imagery and ritual that unite, legitimate, and lend meaning to, these practices. Relative dating of narrative themes is often possible on the basis of the idea¹⁸² that in human history a number of modes of production have appeared in such

¹⁸¹ #5.4. THE CONCEPT OF 'RECURSION'. 'Recursive' is used here in a simple, non-technical sense of 'going back again'. Meanwhile there is also a technical sense in which the notion of *recursion* may be used by comparative mythologists: if the relationships between parts at one level, mirror and repeat the relationships at a higher or lower level, or as I defined it (adj. 'recursive') in relation with Late Bronze Age Mediterranean iconography:

'...the situation in which a class of objects or methods [is] defined by a simple basic case and where specific rules derive from, and reduce to, this basic case all other cases. In iconography, repetitive patterns of ornamentation (...) [notably accumulations or concatenations of two twosomes] constitute examples of recursion. In social organisation, segmentation, the segmentary lineage, and the genealogy represented as a dendrogram also amount to recursion.' (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 147n; cf. van Binsbergen 2012: 206 f.)

Thus considered, recursion is a fairly primitive thought procedure to deal with the puzzle (which is in fact one of the perennial challenges of philosophy) of how to combine similarity with difference. Range semantics, the cosmology of cyclical element transformation, and triads as a mode of thought, are similar devices.. Probably these devices may be ordered in a historical sequence marking the increasing sophistication of Anatomically Modern Humans towards thinking difference, to forge the tools of sophisticated thought, and to construct proto-science.

¹⁸² Cf. van Binsbergen 1981, 1992, 2012a; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985a, especially 1985b.

a way that an earlier mode (such as hunting and collecting)

1. may be retained (in some 'articulated', encapsulated, and exploited form) in a later phase when other modes (*e.g.* food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; kingship as a mode of exploitation based on central organisation, tributary extraction and raiding) are available,
2. whereas a typologically more advanced mode cannot obtain at a particularly early historical moment.

The modes of production perspective helps us to understand some of the material conditions under which the concrete, specific imagery of certain mythemes may be understood in relation to the specific productive circumstances of the people inventing and managing these mythemes. The same perspective may also help to explain why certain mythemes do not disappear although they belong to an older mode of production, that was largely supplanted by a later one, as dominant mode safeguarding the reproduction of a specific social formation. Modes of production typically do not disappear completely – they become linked ('articulated') to other, later, more advanced and more dominant ones, becoming subservient to the latter, but derive from such encapsulated subservience an extended lease of life, also for the imagery that forms part of the ideological repertoire of a particular mode of production. Thus it does not run counter to our theory that the Trickster motif is found, both in Africa, Australia, and New Guinea, but also, and with considerable prominence, in the New World: the hunting and gathering mode of production to which the Trickster idea typically belongs (as an image of the capriciousness of Nature, the chance-ridden vicissitudes of production through hunting and gathering), was also that of the Asians venturing into the New World, and has not been completely eclipsed when some of these New World immigrants turned to agriculture – as a henceforth dominant mode of production to which hunting and gathering, until quite recently, remained articulated as an appendix.

Modes of production analysis yields dating clues based on an anthropological / archaeological examination of mythical contents. Myths invoking kingship may of course be regurgitating much older pre-kingship themes in a more recent kingship-orientated idiom, but to the extent to which they do invoke kingship, they must belong to a relatively recent phase in the history of Anatomically Modern Humans: kingship depends on the accumulation and circulation of more or less durable surplus, which normally presupposes food production through agriculture or pastoralism. The same kind of argument may be extended to other modes of production, for whose occurrence and dating archaeology often provides the empirical evidence. We shall return to these themes in chapter 16, below.

Sometimes the mythical material contains not only symbolic clues, but also specific material clues to be interpreted in terms of modes of production. *E.g.* when it is said, in the Bushong (Vansina 1955, 1971) cosmogonic myth, that after the appearance of plants, humans and animals came into being, as well as

'...the basic implements (...) razor, healing tools, and meteorites',

then we may believe to be in the presence of

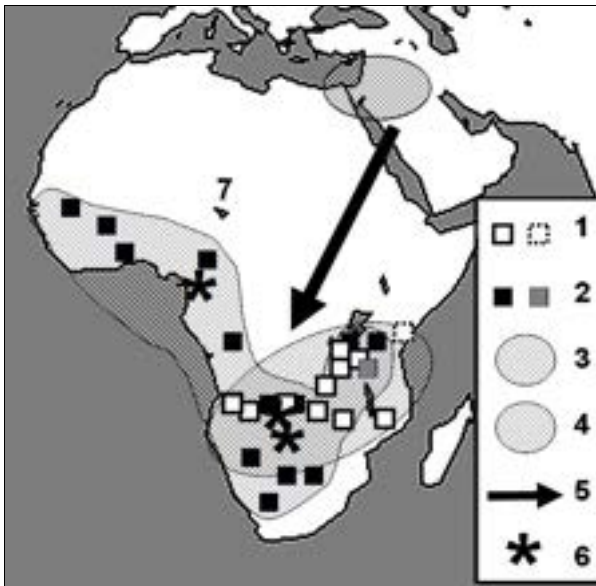
1. circumcision (until well into recorded history, including the Age of Metallurgy, genital mutilation widely continued to be executed with stone tools),¹⁸³
2. leechcraft (which in view of humankind's manifest survival throughout the several

¹⁸³ This in itself provides a nice example of how ritual (circumcision is never just an anatomical operation but always involves a local cosmology, and religiously sanctioned image of humankind) may serve as a repository for cultural inertia.

million years of its history may be deemed to have been of all ages, but whose specific growth into a specialisation may well be argued to mark the emergence of *shamanism*, for which a date of 20 ka BP has been suggested, and

3. the earliest metallurgy (for which meteorite iron was used).

These three references to modes of production are typically diverse, and seem to refer to different periods. This reminds us of the fragmented, layered, internally heterogeneous form in which cosmogonic myth usually occurs in the African context during in historical times – an important theme (also because it defies Witzel’s 2001 exhortation to study myths as wholes)¹⁸⁴ but outside our present scope. But even if we cannot treat the Bushong cosmogonic myth as one whole, and fix one convincing date to it, we may still assign relative, and even absolute, dates to some of its components, largely on the basis of modes of production analysis.



Source of this figure: van Binsbergen 2019a: 41 / 2020: 335, Fig. 10.23

1. African Tower mytheme attested (dotted outline = conjectural); 2. African Flood mytheme attested (crosshatched symbol = conjectural); 3. African and Ancient Near Eastern distribution of (1); 4. African and Ancient Near Eastern distribution of (2); 5. surprising gap; 6. attestations of the name Mbedzi as mythical being. The gap (5) made it – until recently – unlikely that

¹⁸⁴ #5.5. ON STUDYING A CULTURE AS A WHOLE. Such an exhortation, however lofty and sympathetic, is reminiscent of the exhortation underlying classic anthropology: *study cultures as wholes*. It reflects the basic orientation of structural-functionalism, and implicitly it is an oblique, but justified, critique of the lack of theory characteristic of the dominant approach of an earlier vintage, notably diffusionism. The exhortation presupposes the unit of study to be already internally fully integrated rather than internally divided. The truth however is that the components of myths, and of cultures, have been thrown together from different provenances usually greatly varying in both space and time, and that their integration is an ongoing, precarious process, resulting, not from some innate quality of cultures or myths, but from the active powers of integration and consistence at work in the minds and the actions of the human owners of such myths, or cultures; usually we hit on a myth or culture while it is still only in the process of integration, and therefore not yet in the least yet forming a whole. With such well-intended shortcomings, Witzel shows himself to be a mere anthropological sorcerer’s apprentice, never mind the length of his anthropological bibliography.

borrowing into Africa took place from South West Asia where both mythemes occur together; however, the work by Dierck Lange (2004, 2012, 2019) has now established beyond doubt a substantial cultural borrowing from West Asia to West Africa in the mid-1st mill BCE. This figure after van Binsbergen 2006: 329, Fig. 4); sources include Frobenius 1931: Introduction and pp. 166 f, 169; van Binsbergen 1992; Isaak 2006; Hastings 1909-1921; Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; van der Sluijs *n.d.*; van Binsbergen 2006, in preparation (a); Willis 1994: 273; Dolisane-Ebossé Nyambé, 2005; Kahler-Meyer 1988. A general study of Tower myths departing from the Biblical Tower of Babel is Borst 1957-1961.

Perhaps the restricted distributions suggest recent introduction related to return migration into Africa

Fig. 5.4. An example of distributional analysis as a clue to dating a Narrative Complex: (1) Tower myths (a form of Narrative Complex II: the connection between Heaven and Earth) and (2) Flood myth ('Primal Waters' Narrative Complex) in Africa in historical times: not absent (*pace* Frazer and Witzel)¹⁸⁵

5.3.3.1. A Narrative Complex's geographic distribution as a clue to dating

From the Out-of-Africa perspective, we may expect a Narrative Complex's geographic distribution to be in principle a clue to its dating. For instance, if we find a particular complex in both Africa, New Guinea and Australia, but nowhere else, we have reason to consider it a candidate for inclusion in the original Out-of-Africa package.

One example of distributional dating is studied in Fig. 5.4, where I present the African distribution of two mythemes which partly overlap with the Narrative Complexes highlighted in the present chapter: the mythemes of the Tower and of the Flood. That both mythemes are by no means confined to Africa is clear to any reader of the Bible or of the Qur'an.

The parallels between the Biblical and the sub-Saharan African Flood myths can be astonishing, for instance in the following myth from the Masai pastoralists in East Africa:

'Tumbainot and his wife Naipande had three sons, Oshomo, Bartimaro and Barmao. In those days the world was thickly peopled, but men were not good ... But at last, one unlucky day, a certain man named Nambija knocked another man named Suage on the head. Then God commanded Tumbainot to build an ark of wood with his family and some animals. When they were all safely aboard, (...) God caused it to rain so heavily and so long that a great Flood took place, and all men and beasts were drowned, except those which were in the ark; for the ark floated on the face of the waters. Tumbainot let a dove and a vulture fly out. He fastened an arrow to the tail-feathers of the vulture. As he stepped out of the ark, Tumbainot saw no less than four rainbows, one in each of the four quarters of the sky, and he took them as a sign that the wrath of God was over.'

The two themes happen to combine in the Bible (*Gen.* 6-11) although not in Ancient Mesopotamia (the Flood story of the Gilgamesh epic). To judge by distribution these two themes may be mutually independent in Africa,, although overlap occurs in Zambia and East Africa.

The *Tower* mytheme is also known from South Asia, notably among Austroasiatic speakers. In Africa, it largely follows the lakes belt towards the interior, and coincides with the distribution of sacred kingship, to which Austroasiatic and Indian (moghul, Chola; *cf.* van Binsbergen, in press (b)) influences may have contributed (*cf.* the peopling of Madagascar from Indonesia via Sri Lanka). There is a very convincing argument why this mytheme may be considered to be extra-African in origin, and specifically South Asian. In South Central Africa, *a fortiori* in Zambia, this mytheme is elaborated in the story of the king who built a Tower into Heaven from forked branches; the name of that king is given as *Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda* 'Kapesh joiner of forked branches' (van Binsbergen 1992, and chapter 20 below; Jensen 1932: 76). *Kamununga mpanda* is straightforward

¹⁸⁵ Sources include Frobenius 1931: Introduction and pp. 166f, 169; van Binsbergen 1992; van der Sluijs *n.d.*

Bantu, but the name Kapesh has no Bantu etymology. It could derive from Afroasiatic, notably Hebrew¹⁸⁶ קפס, *qps*, used for a capering movement as of a fleeing deer, with the remote possibility of containing a reference to the hobbling gait of the divine king for whom, allegedly, the forced displacement of the hip joint was often part of the initiation (Graves 1948, 1964). However, much more probable is an Indo-Aryan etymology **gabhasti-*, ‘forked carriage pole, hand’ (de Vries 1958, s.v. ‘gaffel’). Both phonologically and semantically the fit is perfect, albeit that the horseless environment of the African savannah south of the rain forest could not accommodate the reference to the wheeled vehicle; however, it does retain the implied reference to the celestial pole as one of the principal connections between Heaven and Earth, along with the Tower. I take the distribution area of the Tower theme in Fig. 5.4 as an indication of massive cultural influence, upon outh Central Africa, from South Asia (and, via South Asia, from South East Asia), one of whose items was kingship with an elaborate court culture in which musical instruments and orchestras played a major role. At the courts of Mwene Kahare and Mwene Mutondo, two major kings of the Nkoya people in Zambia, who have become my close relatives since I started research in their area in 1972, many royals have names straight out of the Mahabharata, such as S(hi)kanda and Mangala (although, as we shall see in ch. 18 below, Mungala could also be a strictly African name variant of Mwali). Karst (1931: 535 f.) claims (but without giving sources) that under the name Kale, Gypsy groups have penetrated Africa from India. Indeed, Gypsy groups have been studied in Sudan (Streck 1996), Kale (‘Black’) as a Gypsy name is widespread in Eastern Europe, and Kale is indeed the alternative name of the Kahare royal title (Smith & Dale 1920). The trajectory of Indo-Arian speaking, horse- and/or chariot-orientated groups can be traced through Mitanni in West Asia (late 2nd mill. BCE), and leads perhaps on to the mysterious (somatically Modern African) X-Group, Nubia, early 1st mill. CE (Kirwan n.d. / 1963).

The *Flood* mytheme, by contrast, has a very wide distribution globally, and possibly echoes (Anati 1999) the historical dramatic rising (by 200 m) of the ocean level in the beginning of the Holocene (10,000 BP). In Africa, this mytheme seems to follow the coast rather than the lakes. This could be because any actual rising of the ocean level would be felt on the coast and not on the interior. On the other hand, the distribution of the *Flood* mytheme brings out a pattern of continuity similar to that apparent in the distribution of geomantic divination, divination bowls, and perhaps the name of Mbedzi (marked by triangles in Fig. 5.4) as a mythical ancestor/ divine saviour – which suggests that this mytheme may not have originated in Africa but spread there from elsewhere, probably from (South West) Asia, and mainly by sea – notably under Sunda influence. Meanwhile sporadic potentially Bantu lexical elements in the Biblical world (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2021d), including the name Cainan (in the *Septuagint*, Talmud and Islamic tradition, cf. Proto-Bantu **-káán-*, ‘to refuse’; also cf. *Canaan*, later the name of Palestine, originally used for Noah’s son who *refused* to follow his father into the Ark, suggest either

- an African *origin* for the Flood complex, or
- a major African *influence* on the Flood complex, or
- *Africa-bound diffusion* of a Flood complex from some hypothetical originally Proto-Bantu region in West or South Asia.¹⁸⁷ However, Proto-Bantu is now generally considered to have arisen near Lake Chad, 8,000 BCE (marked by a black asterisk in Fig. 5.4).

¹⁸⁶ I am indebted to the Hebraist, my brother Peter Broers for sharing, on this point, his vast knowledge of Hebrew with me; but he is no accessory to my etymological sins.

¹⁸⁷ This is the old Trombetti scenario (cf. Trombetti 1923), which is my opinion (but I am not a Bantu linguist) is rather plausible although now completely discarded by mainstream scholarship.

This analysis of Flood and Tower myths concentrates on Africa, but involves comparison with other continents. When we are exclusively dealing with the distribution of traits *inside* Africa, their interpretation in terms of dating is less straightforward. Given the extreme complexity and heterogeneity of African socio-cultural formations and their incomparably longer history (under the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis) than those in other continents, it is not realistic to expect the traces of the most ancient mythemes, of the *Pre-'Out-of-Africa'* mythical repertoire, and of subsequent re-immigration into Africa from Eurasia, to be noticeably concentrated in any specific part of the continent. For throughout the continent, such traces may be expected to be overlaid, and combined, with later mythical innovations and inventions. Yet, perhaps not all parts of sub-Saharan Africa show this phenomenon of combination of mythemes to the same extent. It is reasonable to expect that the part of Africa farthest removed from Eurasia, *i.e.* West and South West Africa, would have least influences of Eurasian re-immigration. In fact, there are extensive indications to this effect:

1. Frobenius's (1954: 169 *f.*) idea of the inroads of shamanism apparently eclipsing the African tradition of sculptural representation, but leaving the westernmost parts of the African continent more or less untouched, 'pristine';
2. van Binsbergen's (2004b, in press (h)) inroads of Leopard-skin associated symbolic specialism, notably (from North West, via North and East, to South East Africa) a chain of, successively, bards, saints, mediating Earth priests, kings and mediums)

These inroads date from relatively recent periods (1st mill BCE and later; mainly later), and although that tallies with recognised historical or prehistorical movements into Africa from South and South East Asia (Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Iran, Arabian peninsula), the Eurasian re-immigration into Africa must have started very much earlier: on general molecular-genetic grounds (15 ka BP), and also for the ancestors of today's Khoisan speakers a West Asian environment has been argued for c. 12 ka BP. Khoisan movement, pastoralist movement across the African continent southward (which may have overlapped with Khoisan expansion southward and eastward), and the Nigercongo / Bantu migration from an epicentre near Lake Chad from 8,000 BCE onward (but mainly from rather more recent millennia) – these three movements created such percolation throughout the continent that (perhaps with the exception of Frobenius's 'pristine' West Africa) no neat localisation of Pre-Out-of-Africa mythemes, or of re-immigration mythemes, can be expected. Instead, fragments of such mythemes may be expected to be stacked with others mythemes in kaleidoscopic variety all over the continent; in addition, there may be specific regions where the oldest mythemes have a greater tendency to come to the surface – the Kabyle region in North Africa is claimed to be such a region. If Cavalli-Sforza (1991; Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994) is right (what seems to be confirmed by very recent linguistic insights) the case of the Khoisan speakers has taught us (also *cf.* Wilmsen 1989) that archaic and peripheral life styles by no means indicate a genetic background that is at the same time primordial and local.

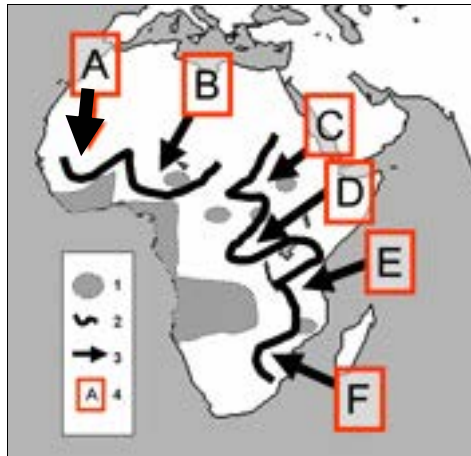
Clearly it will be immensely difficult to identify Pre-Out-of-Africa mythemes in Africa today, merely on the basis of an internal comparison of the African data set alone. We will need to find more effective clues to dating.

One such a clue, and a powerful one, may still be found in an analysis of distribution patterns, notably in *triangulation of African mythical materials with New Guinean and Australian mythical materials*. Although we cannot exclude the possibility of recent diffusion into New Guinea and aboriginal Australia from other parts of the Old World (or even the New World, perhaps), yet, if a trait occurs in Africa, New Guinea and Australia, we

may take this as a suggestion that it belonged to the Out-of-Africa package, especially in the following conditions are also met:

- a. that trait is not conspicuous in Eurasia
- b. we can produce an additional argument, not based on distribution but on formal or content criteria (such as mode of production analysis, or the hermeneutical analysis to be indicated below), as to why that trait should be particularly old.

Another way to identify any mythical components of the Out-of-Africa package, if any, is by *reasoning backwards*: we try to identify such mythemes (or, preferably, at a higher level of aggregation, such Narrative Complexes) as can be argued to be associated with Eurasian return migration back into Africa, and when we subtract those recently introduced Narrative Complexes from the entire set of Narrative Complexes present in a latterday data set of African mythical material, we are likely to come closer to identifying the original Out-of-Africa package. 'Reasoning backwards' effectively means that we seek to interpret, for dating purposes, the presence of apparently West and South Asian themes within the dataset of sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths. Here we have to make a tripartite distinction between (continued after Figure):



- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Main areas of figurative and plastic arts in Africa | 2. Frontier of advance of ecstatic cults | 3. Inroads of shamanism according to Frobenius |
| 4. specific ecstatic cults entering in historical times: | | |
| A. Jegu | C. Zar | E. Pepo |
| B. Bori | D. Mandva | F. Shave |

Fig. 5.5. West Africa as relatively pristine: Map rendering Frobenius' ideas concerning the inroads of named shamanistic cults (arrows) and the main regions of representative art (later second millennium CE) Africa

- a. such West Asian themes as are known to have entered sub-Saharan Africa in the last two millennia under the influence of Islam and Christianity,

- b. those that appear to belong directly to West Asia and North-western Africa (to the ‘Extended Fertile Crescent’¹⁸⁸ of Neolithic food production through agriculture and pastoralism)
- c. those that resulted indirectly from such Neolithic expansion in the sense that this expansion pushed Khoisan speakers from West Asia into Africa, where (due to continued type (b) pressure) they ended up in the Southern African *cul-de-sac*; these Khoisan speakers comprised both hunter-gatherers exhibiting a Pre-Neolithic mode of production, as well as early pastoralists.

5.3.3.2. *Hermeneutics as a clue to dating*

A risky but potentially highly insightful dating method is one based on the *hermeneutics* of mythical contents. Here we try to put ourselves in the place of the conscious historical actor owning, managing and transmitting a particular *mytheme* or, as coherent combination of a number of mythemes, a *Narrative Complex*. And we ask ourselves: what sort of specific discourse characterises, at the hermeneutical level, a particular mytheme or a particular Narrative Complexes – and how can we arrange two specific discourses (a) and (b) into a sequence where (b) can be argued to be only possible, only thinkable, provided the conscious actor has first had (a) at her disposal, secondarily transforming (a) so as to arrive at (b), typically at a point in time later than the period typically associated with (a). I propose a number of specific procedures through which hermeneutics can be argued to offer concrete clues to the *relative* dating of mythemes, and *a fortiori* of Narrative Complexes.

In the first place these involve formal content analysis. A close reading of the mythical contents of two different Narrative Complexes may allow us to consider one Complex older or younger than another by the following differences between the two (in the following itemised lines, the first clause is taken to refer to the older story):

- *integrated consistency versus chaotic and heterogeneous fragmentation (but here the temporal ordered might also be reverse, as in:)*
- *chaotic and heterogeneous fragmentation versus newly constructed consistency*
- *hierarchy versus equality and vice-versa*
- *alien origins versus kinship*
- *shifts in specific hierarchical positions*
- *gender shifts*

A number of conceptual transformations must be noted whose implications in term of historical sequence is not immediately clear:

- *a plurality of protagonists may be conflated into one person,*
- *the conceptual juxtaposition of opposites is personified and epicised as the concrete fight between two concrete protagonists,*
- *in similar fashion, we may see some of the abstract concepts of a specific Narrative Complex transformed into a more concrete evocation*

Another set of hermeneutical dating devices considers *contents*. Our analysis will indicate

¹⁸⁸ A term I coined in 1997, to designate the region of primary Neolithic domestication of food crops and animals, ranging from the fertile Sahara to Iran, and thus explicitly joining North-eastern Africa and West Asia.

that incidental meteorological phenomena such as Lightning and the Rainbow have captured Anatomically Modern Humans' mythopoeic imagination from the very beginning, but a consistent, enduring contemplation of the Heaven and a fascination with verticality can be argued to be a relatively recent development, perhaps coinciding with the emergence of shamanism, presumably in Central Asia c. 20,000 BCE. Humankind's gaze was only gradually turning upwards, as inspection of the reconstructed *Borean lexicon reveals.¹⁸⁹ These celestial and meteorological themes provide possible clues to dating Narrative Complexes. By the same token, complementarily, the notion of an Underworld offers another such clue. Moreover, I argue that the conceptualisation of evil and the occult, in later periods up to the present day, constitutes a domain where the oldest Narrative Complexes are likely to lurk. Linked to the increasing insistence on verticality, the world of the sacred gradually gives rise to the conception of *routinised transcendence*, cast in politico-religious institutions such as the kingship, and *a fortiori* the priesthood as a manifestation of organised religion – themes which I take to be relatively recent (certainly no older than the Upper Palaeolithic, and probably mainly Neolithic and later).

Since our sub-Saharan African corpus consists of cosmogonic myths, it is a pertinent question whether *the idea of origin in itself* could serve as a possible clue to dating Narrative Complexes. Witzel's contention is that Gondwana cosmogonies (which would include sub-Saharan African ones) would not display a true sense of origin, contrary to Laurasian ones; however, this is not borne out by close inspection of the African corpus, so that no relative dating can be based on it. On the contrary, the African cosmogonies are permeated with a dramatic sense of beginning, of which Lightning is the principal emblem.

5.3.4. After periodisation, the problem of localisation in space

Much as myths do not carry a date tag but impose the illusion of an all-overriding, immutable present upon the situation in which they are found, so myths are also essentially unmarked in terms of place of origin, of provenance. *The myth is not only the ultimate now, but also the ultimate here.* The world evoked in myth, is implicitly the world of the here where the myth is being recounted or enacted.

#5.6. TIMELESSNESS AND THE MYTHICAL TOWER INTO HEAVEN IN PRESENT-DAY ZAMBIAN MYTH. In the penultimate chapter of this book we shall hit on a nice example of this condition. There a nonagenarian headman dwelling on a tributary of the Luena River, Kaoma District, Western Province, Zambia, was supposed, in 1999, to be a survivor of the collapse of the great Tower into Heaven (not very different from Nimrod's in *Genesis 11*, probably) by means which his forbears had attempted to steal the Moon from Heaven in order to make it into a pendant for the Heir Apparent; but 'fortunately he stepped aside in time'; I was sent on a fool's errand to go and interview this senile fount of ancient knowledge.

#5.7. SAINTS AS MYTHICAL PROTAGONISTS PROJECTED ONTO THE LOCAL LANDSCAPE IN NORTH AFRICA. Other examples I encountered frequently during my first fieldwork into shrine veneration and popular Islam in the Humiri highlands of North-western Tunisia, 1968. The region is dotted with major and minor shrines, each associated with a particular (deceased) Islamic saint, some shrines contested between saints. Often the shrine-saint association took the form of a myth according to which the shrine was one of several stopping places of the saint's mount on the journey to the saint's final place of enternment – the latter usually a major local shrine firmly believed to be the saint's tomb

¹⁸⁹ Yet we must be careful with such conclusions, especially in the context of comparative mythology. The Cosmic or Rainbow Snake has been reconstructed as part of Pandora's Box, and it implies at least some conception of Heaven,, if not anywhere near an astronomical conception.

(although often a mere cenotaph). Other ways to press the local landscape into service included myths according to which the saint had spent the night there during his peregrinations in the region. Not all these saints were local: some, like Sidi ʿAbd al-Salam ben Mashish, and particularly Sidi ʿAbd al Qader al Jilani, are Pan-Maghribine even Pan-Islamic saints (the latter healed from Baghdad, Iraq, and founded the well-known Qadiriyya brotherhood also found in Ḥumiriyya), and their association with the local landscape was pure fantasy. Even the Prophet Muḥammad, who never left the Arabian peninsula when alive (c. 570–632 CE), in some local myths was narrated to have roamed the Ḥumiri mountains, and spawning shrines (sometimes springs) there.

Yet in the present analysis, the problem of situating a particular myth in *space* does not seem to pose the same tantalising problems as that of dating. Often the distribution of a Narrative Complex already gives a rough indication as to where to locate it in space. More importantly, if we adopt, as our organising frame of reference, the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis, and see the subsequent development of myths as one sustained process in step with the more or less traceable peregrinations of Anatomically Modern Humans, across Asia, into other continents, and finally back into Africa, then we could propose an abstract formal model (extremely simplified in the sense that only primary innovations are acknowledged in the time and place where they occurred, while secondary spread, interactions and feed back effects are ignored at this stage of the analysis) according to which almost automatically any dating implies a particular position along the calibrated curve that swings from out of Africa to South East Asia, New Guinea, Australia, into Asia, and back into Africa, with secondary ramifications into Northeastern Asia, the Americas, and Europe.

This means that our by now familiar line of Anatomically Modern Humans Out of Africa, across Asia, and back into Africa (Fig. 4.1) will also be the itinerary along which we may project primary innovations in world mythology (in the sense of the emergence and mutual accommodation of our score of Narrative Complexes), in such a way that rough indications of the time of innovation (along a non-linear, irregular, but by and large ordinal time scale) also gives a rough indication of place of innovation, and the other way around.

5.4. *Situating the Narrative Complexes in time and place*

Against the background of the great variety of complementary and mutually reinforcing dating methods (and localisation methods) discussed in the previous section, in Table 4.4 I have listed the main reasons for proposing a particular dating and original location of emergence, for each Narrative Complex.

Some Narrative Complexes as initially distinguished turn out to be superfluous – they are better subsumed under other major complexes. The emerging model is highly abstract and simplified, and gives only the most cursory, streamlined indication of what in reality were complex and contradictory, often stagnant or abortive, processes of mythological development. However, the model presents a systematic and methodologically underpinned framework, not only for sub-Saharan mythology but for major forms of mythology throughout the Old World since the Middle Palaeolithic (200 ka BP).

The significance of such a scheme is *not* that it lays claims to truth or permanence, but that it will be of considerable heuristic and theoretical value, inspiring more focussed future research. I stress that *all* identifications in space and time as contained in the following table

are highly provisional and even contentious. Many or most of these identifications are likely to prove untenable – yet the overall coherence and consistency of the emerging picture, and the explicit methodology (however capable of improvement) underlying these identifications, suggest that the exercise as a whole is basically scientific, and, if subjected to critical but sympathetic and creative scrutiny by a sufficient number of specialists over a sufficient amount of time, may ultimately lead to a much better reconstruction that may then deserve to be supported by a considerable number of serious scholars. Ultimately, such an intersubjectively accepted model may be considered a paradigm in the light of which now still enigmatic or multinterpretable rock art may begin to be confidently interpreted.

Narrative Complex (number and description)	Discussion	Proposed origin	
		in time	in space
1. The Separation of Heaven and Earth	Is largely identical to 2, and presupposes 10. Not separately needed	– (see 2)	– (see 2)
2. The Re-connection of Heaven and Earth after Separation	Largely identical to 14, developing from 19; shamanic elements; upward gaze; agriculture, animal husbandry, kingship and perhaps early metallurgy; the celestial axis, which is a central theme in this Narrative Complex, may derive from 12, but mediated through more recent, shamanic elements (16) – which have enshrined astronomical knowledge for which the Upper Palaeolithic fire-bore, and the Neolithic chum or mill with animal traction, are central images; much emphasis on Demiurge (< 19), mainly as Rain and Lightning (<i>cf.</i> 4). This is the central Nigercongo mythical complex, encompassing the entire Southern half of Africa. Its Asian overtones are another reason to reconsider the extra-African antecedents of Nigercongo/Bantu.	Neolithic	Central and West Asia/ Extended Fertile Crescent
3. What is in Heaven?	Derives from 4, 13, 19, but in fact largely identical with 2; along with the protagonists of 19 it is the Cosmic Rainbow Snake who (as adversary) inhabits Heaven in 2 (and 3) – absorbing the Trickster's role; not separately needed	– (see 2)	– (see 2)
4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg)	Lightning as the central cosmogonic image, both of world making and of latter-day world renewal, the Lightning Bird and its World Egg are very prominent cosmemes in the sub-Saharan African mythical set. The World Egg is central to Laurasian mythology, and is likely to be a secondary transformation of 10 ('The Earth as primary'), which then – long after the Out of Africa migration – no longer features as an autonomous Complex but instead has been subjugated to the Lightning Bird, and is produced by it. So I take the Lightning Bird as the primary element in this Narrative Complex, and the World Egg as a subsequent internal development as a result of having incorporated 10. It is possible to construe many of the East, South Central, and Southern African attestations of this Narrative Complex as being under South Asian influence. (For instance, the bird mounts of South Asian gods are a subjugated Lightning Bird.) In that case the cosmogonic theme of Lightning / World Egg, which is truly central to the entire data set, would not be situated as part of the Out-of-Africa package (African Middle Palaeolithic), but in Middle or Upper Palaeolithic South or South East Asia. Yet the ubiquity and the power of this Narrative Complex persuade me to take the risk and to include this in the Out-of-Africa package.	Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic?	Sub-Saharan Africa?
5. The Mantis	Probably a transformation of 4, but with shamanic elements (16). Association with Khoisan speakers would superficially suggests great antiquity and part of the Out-of-Africa complex, but recent genetic findings favours West or Central Asian rather than Southern African origin for Khoisan speakers and hence for this Complex. Details seems to confirm this, like reference to shoe, Moon, and the fact that	Upper Palaeolithic	Central Asia

	in Ancient Egyptian shamanism (which is closely connected with the emergence of the state, under unmistakable West Asian influences) the shaman's familiars are spider (<i>cf.</i> 15, and 2), mantis, and midge (Helck 1984). The Trickster theme comes back in 17, and is typical of hunting and gathering as a mode of production – although it was subsequently incorporated in 2 as an aspect of the Demiurge (<i>cf.</i> 19)		
6. The Ogre	Rather akin in form and function to 11, but simpler. In combination with 19 produces the widespread Python vs. Apollo mytheme. Essentially a narrative to explain the rescue of Being out of Non-being. Occurrence in Australia and New Guinea of the Ogre theme suggests it to be part of Out-of-Africa package, which is astonishing in view of its sophisticated discursive message. I would rather view this Narrative Complex as a secondary transformation of 11, and therefore give it the same situation in space and time	Upper Palaeolithic or Mesolithic	(Central/South East/East) Asia
7. From the Mouth	Masculinising reinterpretation of 19, late; <i>cf.</i> Ancient Egyptian forms of male substitution of female reproduction: Atum's masturbation producing the first pair of creatures (Tefnut and Shu), the tears of Re' producing humankind, Athena's birth from her father's head	Neolithic or Bronze Age	Extended Fertile Crescent
8. The Stones	Not specific to any particular mode of production, which suggests great antiquity. Originally probably part of 10, but reinterpreted in the light of 19 (stones represent Demiurge) and 2 (stones from Heaven = meteorites = iron; in the latter case Neolithic or later); hence not separately needed	– (see 2)	– (see 2)
9. The Moon	Connotations of Cosmic Egg (4); of women's cults <i>cf.</i> 10, 19 and 15; of human sacrifice; of kingship and royal cult (also star cult) including human sacrifice, regicide and <i>suttee</i> ; incompletely integrated in 2. The penetration of several major other complexes suggests great antiquity of this complex. Conus shell lunar ornaments distributed in East and Central Africa and New Guinea. Despite the lunar dominance in the data set I hesitate to propose a Pre-Out-of-Africa origin, and would rather propose South or South East Asia.	Mesolithic, more probably Neolithic	South or South East Asia
10. The Earth as primary	Probably associated with puberty rites/ circumcision, for which I have built a case (<i>cf.</i> van Binsbergen, in preparation) for for their belonging to the original 'Out of Africa' package. In recent millennia this Narrative Complex was largely incorporated in 2, but it is much older – the distinction between Upper World and Underworld seems more primary, preceding the upward gaze of 2; origin of animals, much later (Neolithic) limited to cattle; in recent millennia, purification after murder has become part of this complex but comparative evidence suggests that such purification is shamanic 16	Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic, revised (cattle) in Neolithic	Sub-Saharan Africa
11. The Primal Waters and the Flood	Separation of the waters; Flood in punishment of murder (no Earth-related purification), really discontinuous with 10; incompletely accommodated to 2 (the Demiurge, Rain/Lightning, here becomes an agent of destruction; distribution of the Flood motif in Africa widespread but mainly along the coast – suggestive of maritime diffusion from South Asia and/or Oceania); comparative evidence suggests (Central /South East/East) Asia Upper Palaeolithic or Mesolithic as place of origin – <i>cf.</i> the global dramatic rise of sea level at the onset of the Holocene	Upper Palaeolithic or Mesolithic	(Central/South East/East) Asia
12. From under the Tree	Not specific to any particular mode of production, which suggests great antiquity. Intercontinental distribution of tree burial (New Guinea, South and South East Asia) compatible with belonging to Out-of-Africa package. On the other hand associated with the Tower motif, which has a restrictive distribution in Africa suggestive of West Asian origin; so does the shamanic connotation of West African bard, singled out for tree burial	Upper Palaeolithic / Mesolithic	West or Central Asia

13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake	Not specific to any particular mode of production, which suggests great antiquity. There is a link with 10 and 11, and along with the protagonists of 19 it is the Cosmic Rainbow Snake who (as adversary) inhabits Heaven in 2 (and 3) – absorbing the Trickster's role. Distribution in Australia suggests the Complex to have been part of the Out-of-Africa package.	Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic	Sub-Saharan Africa
14. Fundamental Duality	Here the asymmetry between senior cosmogonic virgin and her son/lover has moved towards symmetrical balance, due to male ascendance in modes of production (metallurgy/petty commodity production, hunting, raiding/war) dominated by them. The emphasis on bisexual attributes of gods also belongs in this Complex. Much of the symbolic elaboration of 2 is in terms of this complex. Late (Baumann 1955).	Neolithic to Iron Age	Extended Fertile Crescent
15. The Spider and feminine arts	The Spider features in three ways: as Trickster (<i>cf.</i> 5, 13, 17, 20); as Connection between Heaven and Earth and hence, by substitution, as Supreme Being (Nyambi, Anat, Neith, Anahit, Athena <i>etc.</i>); and finally as the patron of weaving. The martial connotations of these virgin goddesses may be explained by (or may have secondarily inspired the institution of) female warriors, but is more likely a consequence of 14. There is a link with shamanism (see under 5). The concentration in a core area stretching from West Africa to the Indus suggests this to be a relatively late Complex.	Mesolithic or Neolithic	Extended Fertile Crescent
16. Shamanism, bones	Although shamanic themes abound in the data set, and have particularly shaped 2 (ascent and descent along the celestial axis is shamanic), shamanism is not at home in Africa, and I refer to my other work (especially on Leopard-skin symbolism world-wide) for the complex linguistic, iconographic and archaeological argument to the effect that shamanism emerged in Central Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic	Late Palaeolithic	Central Asia
17. Spottedness and the Leopard	In the sub-Saharan African mythical material of the historical period, the Leopard appears in two fundamentally different forms: (1) as the Exalted Insider (often associated with the sinister sides of kingship, but essentially the Trickster, and equally ancient as the latter); (2) as the Sacred Outsider, who as a sign of sacrality and of victory over evil dons a Leopard skin. (2) is strongly shamanic, and marks the five principal forms under which shamanism has made inroads into Africa in recent millennia: bard, saints, Nilotic Earth priests, kings, and ecstatic healers. However, (1), which I see as the core of this Complex, is very ancient, going back to a fascination for spottedness and for leopard as 'spotted animal' which encompassed the entire Old and New World, and – with the colour triad red/white/black – was probably part of the Out-of-Africa package. As the ultimate Trickster, the leopard has combined the qualities of predator with that of distributor of food, in the sense that, long before the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans, early man may have competed with other scavengers for portions of the predator's kill. However, all the, all the ingredients of the Leopard/spottedness complex are in fact implied in the combination of Narrative Complexes 10-4-13, which together I take as the original Out-of-Africa mythical package. Much as I am partial to the Leopard and spottedness theme, which has dominated my long-range research for the past few years and has yielded many of the insights (for whatever they are worth) of the present analysis, I now believe that we do not need the Leopard as a separate Narrative Complex.	– (Pre-Out-of-Africa Lower Palaeolithic)	– (Sub-Saharan Africa)
18. Honey and Honey-beer	References to honey are rare in the African cosmogonic data set, and difficult to classify. They form a loose end. Occasional collecting of wild honey is considered a constant from the Lower Palaeolithic, while sophisticated techniques and equipment are depicted from the Mesolithic. There is a link with the kingship, in Egypt, Madagascar (with South East Asian connotations), and South Central Africa. The	–	–

	Bee represents both Heaven, and descends along the celestial axis – and the Underworld (where she may live, in addition to trees). The symbolic elaboration is therefore largely 2, but in fact this Complex is not separately needed		
19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and her Son/Lover	How does one reconcile the idea of radical origin with the observational facts of procreation? Virgin birth may be considered a cosmogony based on rational causal analysis and sense of time – such as one would expect in a society with established social inequality, charters justifying privilege, and basic practical biological knowledge applied and sustained in agriculture and animal husbandry (the cosmogonic virgin appears as celestial cow). The idea of virgin birth is often secondarily elaborated with the notion of the child becoming his virgin mother's lover. In addition to its dominance in the sub-Saharan African mythical data set, this Complex constitutes the dominant theme of religion in the Ancient Near East including Ancient Egypt, and the implied theme in much Graeco-Roman and Northern European mythology	Neolithic	Extended Fertile Crescent
20. Contradictory Messengers Bring Death	The most popular theme in the data set. Links with 10, and with the Trickster elements in 5 and 17, yet so effectively incorporated into 2 (the connection between Heaven and Earth after their separation) that no special Complex seems required.	–	–

Table 5.2. Postulated/reasoned relations between the Narrative Complexes, with proposed dating (extremely provisional) and proposed original location of emergence (likewise extremely provisional).

The careful consideration of all Narrative Complexes, and their possible situation in time and place, has enabled us to answer most of the four questions with which we set out:

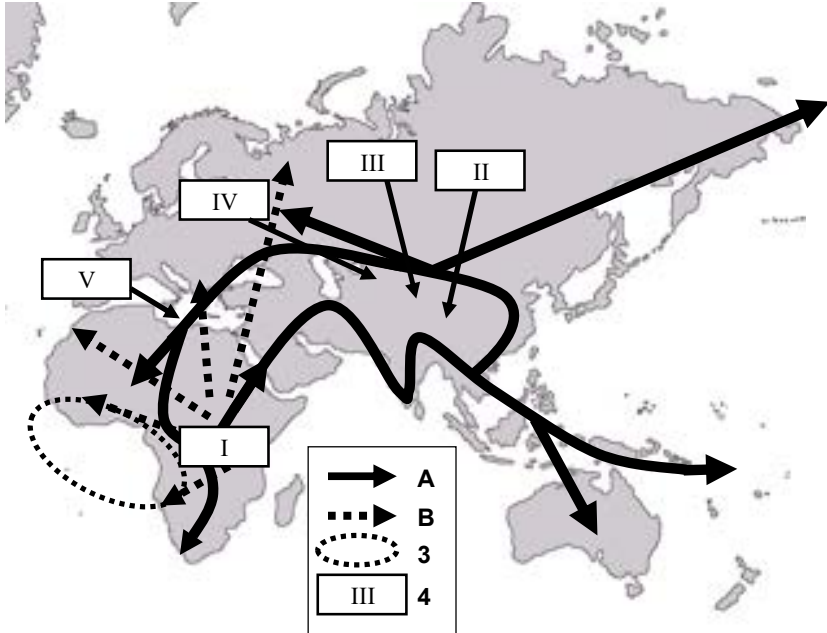
We found reasons to assume that the Out-of-Africa (as postulated under the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis) package did contain mythical material, and we identified the latter as Narrative Complexes 4 (The Lightning Bird, and the World Egg), 10 (The Earth as primary), and 13 (The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake) (in which Narrative Complex 17 – speckledness and the Leopard – was incorporated).

- a. As for the intra-Africa percolation of Pre-Out-of-Africa material after the Out-of-Africa Exodus, we suggested that the direct northward expansion of this Pre-Out-of-Africa material into North Africa, West Asia, and Mediterranean and Atlantic Europe and Central to East Asia have formed a substratum (still conspicuous in Neolithic archaeology, and in the ritual and folklore of the historical times) of sacred forests, cult of the land, puberty initiation and masquerades in these regions.
- b. As far as the effect of the Back-to-Africa return migration is concerned (for which population genetics has produced massive evidence in recent years),¹⁹⁰ we identified ample mythological traces of this return migration, through the presence, in African mythological material for the historical period, of Narrative Complexes that were developed in Asia, long after the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and on the basis of a transformation, on Asian soil, of the initial Pre-Out-of-Africa mythical mate-

¹⁹⁰ Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; Hammer *et al.*, 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002.

rial; moreover there is the evidence of recent, Neolithic and post-Neolithic Narrative Complexes belonging to an Extended Fertile Crescent which effectively straddles Africa and West Asia.

c. What remains is question d, which I will consider in Section 5.5 below.



A and B see Fig. 5.1

3. Frobenius's 'pristine' Africa

D. Out-of-Africa mythological package and subsequent developments

I: Out-of-Africa mythical package, 140,000 BP: Narrative Complexes 4, 10, 13

II: W or C Asia, Upper Palaeolithic/ Mesolithic: Narrative Complexes 5, 12, 16

III: C, S or SE Asia, Upper Palaeolithic/ Mesolithic: Narrative Complexes 11, 6

IV: S or SE Asia, Mesolithic/ Neolithic: Narrative Complex 9

V: Neolithic Extended Fertile Crescent: Narrative Complexes 2, 7, 14, 15, 19

in order to highlight the basic west-East-West movement, secondary spread and feedback effects have largely been ignored
missing numbers were discarded, see main text [heel goed checken want nummers en letters zijn veranderd]

Fig. 5.6. Summary of results: Preliminary situation in space and time of major Old World mythical complexes, in relation to the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80-60 ka BP) and the Back-Into-Africa return migration (from c. 15 ka BP)

5.5. Conclusions: Interpreting the emerging overall pattern in long-range comparative terms

5.5.1. African mythology is world mythology par excellence

According to the view widely held by scholars even today, the mythical material from sub-

Saharan Africa exists in isolation from the, much studied, mythical parallels across Eurasia and into the Americas.¹⁹¹ It is high time to discard this misconception (as comparativists like Frobenius and Baumann said we should, already in the first half of the last century). An examination of the Narrative Complexes constructed for the African material shows very considerable parallelism with Ancient Greek, Ancient Egyptian, and Biblical mythical themes. As has been stressed by exponents of Afrocentricity, there is much parallelism between the sub-Saharan African mythical material, and that of Ancient Egypt. Although Afrocentricity has often boiled down to an ill-founded, sentimental Egyptocentricity, it would be myopic to try and explain away the African/Egyptian parallels one-sidedly as paramount cultural influence emanating from historic Ancient Egypt upon the African continent, or of sub-Saharan Africa upon Ancient Egypt – the latter monocausal explanation would leave the unmistakable Egyptian parallels with West, Central, and South Asia totally unaccounted for (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2011a, 2011b and references cited there). It is much more attractive to explain these parallels on the basis of the idea that both Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa participated in an ongoing process of myth formation, diffusion and transformation, going back in time all the way to the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80-60 ka BP) and (inside Africa) even further, and stretching all over the Old World (even spilling over into the New World) – and also involving, among others, Ancient Greece and the Biblical world.

Meanwhile we must realise that the detour across South and East Asia, taking about 50 ka, years, has probably not been the only way for Pre-Out-of-Africa themes to travel from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa, Egypt, and Europe. Unmistakably a trickle of Palaeo-African traits (genetic, cultural and mythical – shortly below, and in ch. 6, we shall try to identify some of them) did not wait for the Asian detour but diffused directly (albeit slowly) north, to the shores of the Mediterranean and onward. The palaeoanthropological record for the Levant is contradictory and suggests Anatomically Modern Humans to have been present there 100 ka BP, in most of Europe their entry can be dated at only at 40 ka BP. In a form not yet affected by 50 ka of transmission, innovation and transformation on Asian soil, the original Pre-Out-of-Africa package also still continued to percolate through Africa northward also after the Out-of-Africa Exodus. Therefore we must be prepared to explain such manifestations of the Pre-Out-of-Africa Narrative Complexes (4, 10, and 13) as we can find in the Eastern Mediterranean region and in West Asia from the Neolithic onwards, as

- a. transformed items of the Pre-Out-of-Africa package, that have travelled all the way through Asia
- b. transformed items of the Pre-Out-of-Africa package that have directly travelled north through Africa
- c. the result of interactions between (a) and (b).

What would have been the composition of such a postulated original Pre-Out-of-Africa package travelling north without the detour via Asia? There is as very marked continuity between sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean, and Atlantic Europe, in terms of *sacred forests, the cult of the Earth, puberty and community initiation, masquerades, purification of murderers by Earth priests, etc.*, and I propose that these parallels are largely due to (b). The

¹⁹¹ The same utter isolation from other continents was claimed (as recently as 1997 by the prominent geneticist Cavalli-Sforza) for African languages, cultures and genes, and also on these points recent research has exploded older, ultimately hegemonic and Eurocentric, preconceptions.

extent to which (a) may also have brought about such parallels may be ascertained by tracing the distribution of these institutions to Central, South and East Asia. The latter is beyond my present scope and competence, but I venture some wild guesses:

- As a result of (b), North, Central and even East Asia have a greater share of Pre-Out-of-Africa themes than West, South and South East Asia
- related themes may tend to be concentrated among 'tribal' populations outside the realm of the principal civilisations and the states associated with these civilisations
- although shamanism is a relatively recent innovation from Central Asian (I propose a date of c. 20 ka BP), and emphatically situated along the mainstream of world mythological development, still it appears to have managed to retain and transmit certain Pre-Out of Africa themes (e.g. sacred corpses, the cult of the Earth, and masquerades, often disguised as the cult of commoner or royal ancestors) that are possibly (b)-related; this retention may have been one of the keys to shamanism's worldwide success, both in its typical form, and in its later transformations into kingship, statehood, science and organised religion.

Incidentally, such postulated continuity between sub-Saharan African and Europe due to (b), also render again less plausible Witzel's theory of a fundamental distinction between Laurasia and Gondwana mythologies – unless we decide (against all evidence) to classify European mythology as largely Gondwana.

5.5.2. Witzel's Out-of-Africa proposal *grosso modo* confirmed: Overall match between the genetic, linguistic and mythical trajectory of Anatomically Modern Humans

While we may differ in detail, this study owes a great deal to Witzel's (2001) seminal insight into the overall match between the genetic, the linguistic and the mythical trajectory of Anatomically Modern Humans. Africa has been recognised (although not unanimously; cf. Hammer *et al.* 1998) as the continent with the highest level of genetic diversity, as befits

- a. the cradle of humanity (c. 4,000,000 years BP), and
- b. the cradle of Anatomically Modern Humans (c. 200,000 years BP);

Return migration Back-into-Africa from Eurasia/Oceania has further contributed to Africa's genetic heterogeneity. That continent's linguistic and cultural diversity is far more limited than its genetic diversity, due to a number of converging factors in the most recent millennia (the spread of Nigercongo language family over almost the entire southern half of the continent; and the converging influences of Islam, Christianity, colonialism and globalisation). Witzel's (2001) claim of the existence of mythical parallels between

- a. sub-Saharan Africa, Australia and New Guinea (a South collectivum he designates as 'Gondwana') that seem to have no counterparts in
- b. Eurasia/America ('Laurasia')

suggests that world mythology was already incipient in Africa prior to the Out-of-Africa migration, and that some of its early themes may have continued to percolate in the continent perhaps even right through to Modern times. Eurasian Back-into-Africa migration will have brought into Africa Eurasian mythical themes developed in the course of over c. 100 ka in Eurasia. The heterogeneity of over a dozen Narrative Complexes, some more elaborate

than others, can be plausibly associated with this overall history of genetic and cultural diversity in Africa.

Thus we are able to provisionally propose a pattern for the history of Old-World mythology extending over 200 ka – reconstructing humankind's oldest traceable discourse.

Of course, this is nothing but a first proposal, inviting theoretical and methodological criticism; alternative readings of the available material; the addition of much additional material both from Africa and from other continents; a careful assessment of whatever has been used, in this analysis, from such ancillary disciplines as genetics, linguistics, archaeology, and anthropology; and in general much more reflection and debate. Working at the absolute outer limits of knowable or reconstructible intellectual history, we cannot expect first trials to be convincing hits. But by formulating and circulating our first trials, we may mobilise the skills, knowledge and intuition of colleagues working in the same and adjacent fields – without which an exercise like the present one will never proceed beyond the realm of science fiction. In this book's final chapter we shall see that, even with the concerted help of many recognised specialists, and lavish funding, the pitfall of science fiction may still turn out to be unavoidable.

5.5.3. Humankind's oldest discourse philosophically sound

What does all this have in store for our appreciation of myth? Far from revolving on mystifying stories that, as essentially lies, conceal the nature and complexity of reality and the causal processes that govern it, the mythical traditions of Anatomically Modern Humankind, as traced in the present argument, appear to show a persistent and focussed grappling with the fundamentals of Being, at an amazingly high level of philosophical sophistication. I leave it to the reader to determine to what extent this impression may be due to the simple fact that, in mid-career, I have personally shifted from empirical social science to intercultural philosophy.

The myths involved are not recreational stories to be told by the fireside after a good day's hunting – they are the fundamental ideas that not so much *reflected and commented upon*, but that downright *constituted in the first place*, Anatomically Modern Humankind. One attractive theory of the constitution of early society (Cassirer 1946, 1953-1957, Donald 1991) is that the recounting of myths created both language and society. The mythical tradition explored here (and it encompasses the whole of humankind as we know it, and the seeds of all great religious and ideological systems as we know them), far from being mere inconsequential fantasies or pastimes, *may well have been Anatomically Modern Humankind's main instrument for competitive survival*. The grappling with cosmogony (as in some of the NarComs which I have attributed to Pandora's Box) implies a vision of reality in which all Being is essentially cosmogonic, all human life a challenge to participate in the cosmogony of Being, and all initiation, all ritual, all intimacy, all making, nothing but a reviving of the fundamentally cosmogonic nature of Being.¹⁹² Eliade was right in seeing myth as revival of

¹⁹² Now that I reread this after the better part of two decades, I could still not agree more. Meanwhile I realise that this passage has been a prelude to my even more radical and metaphysical explorations in my book *Sangoma Science* (2021), where the dynamism imputed here to all Being (as essential cosmogonic), is further raised to the power 2 by my alarming and potentially schizophrenic claim that the essence of reality consists in its constant oscillation between Being and Non-Being. But whatever the fate of the ideas developed in *Sangoma Science*, I will continue to maintain that, in the last analysis, the earliest mythology of Anatomically Modern

primordial times, but he did not fully realise the extent to which such reviving was not simply a revoking an *original state* of Being, but an *original and perpetual Cosmogony* as the fundamental state of Being.¹⁹³ This finds its emblematic expression in Fire, and especially in Lightning, as the reviving of the cosmogonic moment par excellence. With such a philosophy of being, a biological sub-species (like Anatomically Modern Humans) appears to be sufficiently equipped to conquer the world – for better or worse.

If the mythical Narrative Complexes summed up, and situated in space and time, in Table 5.4, summarise the main types, of developments and of relationship between humankind's myths, then they constitute the oldest discursive repertoire humans had at their disposal. This is the beginning and earliest development, not only of myth, but also of religion, science, and philosophy. It would be worth our while to spell out the underlying basic ideas of the Narrative Complexes in terms of today's metaphysics, see what philosophical sophistication these myths were already implying, and compare the Narrative Complexes systematically with Egyptian, Chinese, Biblical, Graeco-Roman, Indian, *etc.* mythologies, and philosophies from these cultures. Such a comparison would make us aware of an amazing continuity in the intellectual history of Anatomically Modern Men across more than hundred millennia and across all continents – a finding that cannot fail to be relevant for today's globalised, but conflict-ridden world, where the fragmentation of proclaimed identities obscures such massive continuities and communalities, not only of the body but also of the mind and of worldview, as unite all of us as Anatomically Modern Humans. Above I suggested what assets helped humankind through their difficult beginnings. For an even more difficult and ominous future, we shall need a conscious awareness of the underlying unity of humankind (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f., 2020f), and concerted action in recognition of such awareness.

5.5.4. From modes of production to worldview, but also the other way around

Relating specific Narrative Complexes to specific modes of production is one of the central features of my dating methodologies; however, while a particular mode of production suggests a particular discourse (e.g. food production > knowledge of biological causality > Virgin Birth as cosmogonic trope) it is also conceivable for the relationship to work in the opposite direction, in the sense that a particular cosmogonic Narrative Complex may make a particular innovative mode of production thinkable, in the first place, in partial preparation for its subsequent practical realisation.

Our extremely tentative dating of individual mythical Narrative Complexes is largely predicated on the idea that certain images are much more to be expected in the context of a particular mode of production; *e.g.* the idea of virgin birth as cosmogony presupposes a strong rational sense of beginning and linear time progress, and a detailed awareness of the causal link between conception, pregnancy and birth – insights which, if not necessarily absent *outside* the Neolithic complex of agriculture and animal husbandry, are at least indispensable for the Neolithic complex to be engendered and sustained – since the Neolithic complex

Humans is also their earliest philosophy.

¹⁹³ Would it go to far to remind the reader, at this point, of the main modern alternative to the Big-Bang Hypothesis (a Modern version of the Cosmic Egg mytheme...), the dominant paradigm in natural-science cosmology today. The once leading British astronomer Fred Hoyle (1948) and his associates such as C and K. Wickramasinghe, claimed the we need no Big Bang if we assume that matter comes into being, constantly and everywhere.

revolves on humans's conscious management of the fertility and propagation of crops and animals. However,

- myth need not always follow the organisation of material production (however much a Marxist materialist point of view would suggest that it does) –
- on the contrary, myths may ramify off in directions totally unconcerned with material production,
- or, alternatively, myths may provide the conceptual and imaginary clues which then are subsequently explored and applied in the emergence of new modes of production, e.g. a myth of speckledness and hence a fascination with grains and raindrops might help the thinkability and hence the emergence of agriculture, instead of the other way around: the existence of agriculture in the first place engendering myths about grains, raindrops, and speckledness in general.

All the same, even though the fundamental logical operation which ever since Aristotle (1844 / 4th c. BCE) has been the hallmark of specialist thought (the Excluded Third, in other words: 'Where P there not not-P'), and even despite the attested imprecisions and handicaps of prehistoric and Ancient humans when thinking about difference (as demonstrated by the attestation of range semantics, cyclical element transformation, triadic thought), it is not as if abstract thought only appears relatively late in the mythological history which the present chapter seeks to overview. One is struck by the feats of logical reasoning implied in most of the Narrative Complexes. Of course, the Narrative Complexes were compiled by the present writer, and any suggestion of their level of rationality may be an artefact of my own, present-day scholarly representation. Yet (contrary to the impression Witzel 2001 gives of what he distinguishes as the Gondwana mythical complex, which includes sub-Saharan Africa) actual examples of prelogical, self-contradictory nonsense appear to be quite rare.¹⁹⁴

5.5.5. The spasmodic process of extensive continuity punctuated by specific moments of great conceptual change, presumably coinciding with the rise of new modes of production

We are left with our fourth and last initial question (d): suppose there is some truth in the world-wide sustained mainstream mythological development argued in this chapter, what factors caused the process to take the particular shape it took? I believe the modes-of-

¹⁹⁴¹⁹⁴ Instead, we should heed Lévi-Strauss's model of *La Pensée Sauvage* (1963) – once again, not the handicapped thought of 'Savages', but the undomesticated thought, such as all Anatomically Modern Humans (including scholars and scientists) engages in with great frequency as long as their expressions are not explicitly and publicly sanctioned by the requirements of Modernist, specialist formal logic. The following Pende myth meanwhile could serve as an example of sheer illogical treatment in myth:

'In the beginning everything was dark and there was nothing. It rained continuously on earth. When the Rain stopped, Mawese regulated the waters in rivers and created the first people and everything else. He also instructed the people in the art of agriculture and he created the snakes. Then Mawese married Muvadila and became the ancestor of all peoples. Finally he returned to the sky, whence he later issued a human couple with the first Fire' (Pende, South-Congo; van dere Sluijs n.d. [2004]).

This story has a typical inconsistent time sequence: humans are created at three different moments of time; the Creator marries a primal woman and becomes the ancestor of all people, whereas there are already people mentioned. Incidentally, the most striking parallel that comes to mind is not African/Gondwana, but the sequence of anthropogonies in Genesis 1f.!

production perspective, which was so helpful as a dating method, can offer us further insights into these factors. *To the extent to which the emerging picture may be taken seriously, it is suggestive, not of a constant flow of cosmogonic mythical innovation, but of a far more spasmodic process, where at a limited number of moments great conceptual changes occurred, resulting in the emergence of new Narrative Complexes; it is tempting to try and identify these moments, and relate them to crucial innovations in the sphere of modes of production, the (probably concomitant) emergence of new linguistic (macro-)families, etc. (cf. Tables 5.1 and 5.2)*

The process of Old World mythical development since the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans does not constitute a steady process with constant rate of growth and change. Rather, Fig. 5.6, above, suggests long periods of steady continuity to be punctuated by a few relatively short periods of rapid innovation and transformation of the available mythical material. Since the mythical material is at the religious, political and economic heart of historical socio-cultural formations, such periods of rapid innovation and transformation in the mythical domain must coincide with periods of major change in the demographic, productive, and socio-political domains. We would like to identify, in each case, the specific factors that triggered these changes. Table 2 indicates a number of such moments, and proposes specific triggers that may have caused the intensification of the mythopoeic process in these specific historical periods. Since innovation in the linguistic field seems to have marked some of these periods, major language (super-)families are tentatively indicated. The emergence and relative success of new language (super-)families is likely to be subject to the same factors in the demographic, productive and socio-political domains as would account for the intensification of innovation and transformation of the mythical corpus.

space / time context	Narrative Complexes	proposed trigger	tentative linguistic context
I. Out-of-Africa mythical package, 140,000 BP	4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg) 10. The Earth as primary 13. The cosmic/Rainbow Snake	a. The emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans as a biological mutation? b. Africa's soil carrying capacity, even for hunting and collecting, is the lowest in the world, mainly due to geological conditions that predate the appearance of humans by hundreds of millions of years c. The emergence of myth as constitutive of a new type of human community: self-reflective, coherent, communicating, engaging in hunting and collecting, and creating coherence, through the narrative and ritual management of symbols, leading to articulate language If (c) is plausible, then the earliest phase in the overall process is in itself myth-driven	Proto-Human
II. W or C Asia, Upper Palaeolithic/ Mesolithic	5. The mantis 12. From under the tree 16. Shamanism, bones	The emergence of shamanism, associated with detailed naked-eye astronomy which was an asset to hunters (orientation away from home, seasonality) even before it became an asset to agriculturalists. More important probably was that the vertical worldview of shamanism, with the shaman's privileged (belief of) travelling along the celestial axis to Underworld and upperworld, created a politico-religious social hierarchy on which more effective forms of socio-political organisation could be based.	Proto-Khoisan and Proto-Dene-Sinocaucasian

III. C, S or SE Asia, Upper Palaeolithic/ Mesolithic	11. The primal waters and the Flood ¹⁹⁵ 6. The Ogre	a. The rise of the sea level at the beginning of the Holocene; b. there are indications that Central and South Central Asia was a major source of population out-migration in the period indicated, but beyond microliths and improved boats I have no suggestion to offer as to what innovation in the mode of production could have caused a population surplus	Proto-Dene-Sinocaucasian and Proto-Nostratic
IV. S or SE Asia, Mesolithic/ Neolithic	9. The Moon	Kingship, star worship, human sacrifice as major contexts for socio-political organisation and surplus extraction	? (Proto-Bantu?)
V. Neolithic Extended Fertile Crescent	2. The connection between Heaven and Earth after separation 7. From the mouth 14. Fundamental duality 15. The Spider and feminine arts 19. The cosmogonic virgin and her son/lover	Neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; Neolithic arts and crafts such as pottery, spinning, weaving; male ascendance; complex society, the emergence of writing, the state, organised religion, and science; incipient metallurgy	Nostratic, especially Western Nostratic (<i>i.e.</i> Proto-Afroasiatic and Proto-Indo-European, and probably including Nigercongo – with Bantu – and Nilosaharan as branches of (Mega-)Nostratic, <i>cf.</i> Kaiser & Shevoro-shkin 1988.

Table 5.3. Proposed contexts of mythological innovation and transformation (CITIs) from the Middle Palaeolithic onward

5.6. Postscript: Can the above be dismissed as ‘merely Afrocentrist ideology?’

Some readers, and some colleagues among the 2005 Kyoto audience when this chapter’s argument was first presented, have believed to detect a strong ideological element in my approach. Is not my insistence on the African origin of world mythology an attempt to re-state, with the deceptive trappings of scientific methodology, the potentially ideological Afrocentrist claim of ‘Africa as the mother of all culture’? Such a claim seems so much a reflection of the marginalisation and exploitation of Black people in recent world history that one *might* be justified to take it less seriously as an objective, detached factual statement.¹⁹⁶ My interlocutors’ question is all the more worthy of consideration because, in recent years, I

¹⁹⁵ I postulate that these themes are younger, by perhaps five millennia, than shamanism; but this hypothesis is based of a number of assumptions concerning periodisation that might not survive closer analysis.

¹⁹⁶ I deliberately write ‘might’, for Afrocentricity’s unmistakable and understandable identitary pathos as a reflection of wrongs inflicted upon Black people in the course of the last few millennia of world history, does not in the least preclude that the Afrocentrist claims may also be considered a *coherent, potentially plausible, and what is more, falsifiable set of scientific hypotheses*. I have treated it as such (van Binsbergen 2005d, when I saw reason to defend Afrocentricity against the cavalier dismissiveness with which one the today’s great African thinkers and scholars, Valentin Mudimbe (1997), of all people, treated the movement and its leading ideas. Just as, years *after* the *Black-Athena* discussion proper had been launched (timely and justifiably) by Martin Gardiner Bernal, I did not buy (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011) his mere fashionable conversion to a superficial form of Afrocentricity.

have repeatedly advocated Afrocentrism as containing – despite its, *admittedly*, often defective scholarship and ideological orientation – some kernel of objective scientific truth open to methodological empirical investigation.

The answer to my interlocutors' well-taken question comes in a number of steps, and it will be negative.

1. The first step is that we admit that state-of-the-art genetic research, aided by long-range approaches in the linguistic, archaeological, ethnographic, and mythological domain, now allows us to reconstruct the earliest global history of humankind in unprecedented detail – and that the evidence happens to point, overwhelmingly, to the pivotal place that the African continent has played in those early periods. In this respect there is no ideology involved in my argument in chs 5 and 6, except in two respects, neither of which disqualify our position:
 - i. it was the geopolitical ideology of a past era (an era characterised by European imperialism, and the attending racism and Eurocentrism) that never allowed us to seriously consider such an honourable place for Africa before – but now we have left that hegemonic ideology behind;
 - ii. we agree (and this is surely ideology, but permissible among scholars) that state-of-the-art scientific methods constitute at least one possible intersubjective road to truth (if perhaps not the only one).
2. The second step is the realisation that, under no conditions, are we allowed to project today's ideological and identity distinctions and positions onto Lower to Middle Palaeolithic origins in the African continent. (Incidentally, let us not forget that the name 'Africa' has a capricious and erratic history; whereas the oldest attestations of Africa / Ifriqa/ Ifriqiyya applied (by a curious East-West parallelist identified by Karst, 1931; cf. van Binsbergen 2021) to regions both in (a) West and Central Asia and (b) the North African littoral, it is only through a process of extreme aggregation that the name Africa came to be applied to the Old World's entire major southwestern landmass – a development originating only in Late Graeco-Roman Antiquity, and mainly consolidated in Early Modern Europe.) If Anatomically Modern Humans originated in the African landmass c. 200 ka BP, and from there spread out to other continents from c. 80-60 ka BP (the Middle Palaeolithic) on, that makes *all now living humans* into 'Africans', but only in such a nominal sense as to make the designation 'African' meaningless. The small trickle of Anatomically Modern Humans who left Africa in the Middle Palaeolithic, *were not yet Africans in our modern sense; not any more than that those they left behind in the African continent, were Africans*. The cultural orientation of both groups of humans in the Middle Palaeolithic was originally shared with all other Anatomically Modern Humans, and in that sense could not be meaningfully designated as 'African'. And beyond their general belonging to Anatomically Modern Human stock we know nothing for certain of their specific outside physical characteristics, including those external physical features (skin pigmentation, hair texture, nasal architecture) that may or may not have made them look like *modern* Africans. Probably, most of these particular sub-species phenotypical characteristics were a product of local ecological adaptations and emerged *long after* the Out-of-Africa Exodus. On the other hand, climate changes in the world during the last mere 100 ka BP were not as massive as to deprive the African landmass of its essentially tropical nature, and the adaptive advantages favouring high skin pigmentation among present-day South populations in Africa, South and South East

East Asia, and Oceania (although less conspicuously so in the New World) may also have been at work 100 ka BP – so that the Pre-Exodus Anatomically Modern Humans in the African landmass were probably highly pigmented. By contrast, the mobilising identity appeal of Afrocentrism refers to the perception and the redress of relatively recent wrongs, experienced by Black people over the last few maximum the last few millennia and especially the last few centuries); these retrace their claimed African background to ancestors living on African soils in recent centuries, before forced intercontinental migration in the course of the slave trade, followed by voluntary intercontinental migration in the late 20th century CE. *The frame of reference Afrocentrism is entirely Modern, on a time scale that encompasses less than 1% of Anatomically Modern Humans' life span of 200 ka.* It would be nonsensical to appropriate the views expounded in the present chapter as a corroboration of Strong¹⁹⁷ Afrocentrism's claims relating to modern global history; it would be equally nonsensical to denounce my argument on the grounds that it smacks of Afrocentrism – even though it does, deliberately.

1. Point (2) presses all the more since, as a third step, we have to recognise that the model advocated in the present chapter implies, if anything, *a radical deconstruction of any notion of African essentialism.* The recognition of a considerable return migration Back-into-Africa from c. 15 ka BP onwards, means that genetically, linguistically, culturally and mythologically, there is *the empirical fact* of very marked continuity between modern Africans, modern Asians and modern Europeans. This makes any celebration of an African identity as much a source of pride and self-construction as any other regional and (sub-)continental identity, but no more than that, and always against the background of the overarching fundamental unity of Anatomically Modern Humankind as a whole.

¹⁹⁷ #5.8. 'STRONG' AND 'MODERATE' AS TERMS FOR VARIETIES IN POSITIONING IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS. In the History of Ideas, we tend to differentiate between schools of thought that substantially differ in degree, but not in essence, by the adjectives 'strong' or 'moderate'. Hence Strong Constructivism, Moderate Eurocentrism, Strong Idealism, etc. I consider myself a Moderate Afrocentrist, in the sense that I do identify with the African continent, its people, cultural history, and attribute to those an important place in their own right in global cultural history; and in this orientation I do distinguish myself from Strong Afrocentrists, who tend to claim that *everything* of value in cultural history has *recent* (i.e. post-Palaeolithic) roots in Africa.

Chapter 6. Further steps towards an Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, starting from the African continent (2006)¹⁹⁸

6.1. Introduction

At least three leading ideas have been manifest in my work since the 1990s: the important place to be accorded to Africa in the context of global cultural history; the fundamental unity of humankind, which brings us to take a relative view of the specific contributions from whichever of the continents including Africa; and the possibility of retrieving substantial glimpses of humankind's thought systems even from times well before their textual docu-

¹⁹⁸ An earlier version of this paper was read at the International Conference on Comparative Mythology, organized by Peking University (Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts & Buddhist Literature) and the Mythology Project, Asia Center, Harvard University (Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies), May 10-14, 2006, at Peking University, Beijing, China (convenors Professors Duan Qing 段晴 and Michael Witzel; I regret that the promised publication of the proceedings under the editorship of the convenors never materialised). I am indebted to the following persons and institutions: Michael Witzel, to whose pioneering work on long-range comparative myth analysis, and to whose continued support, my approach has owed a great deal; to him and Duan Qing for making my participation in the present conference possible; participants in earlier Harvard Round tables, who have suffered my earlier arguments and greatly inspired me towards the present one; participants in the present conference, whose contributions, formal discussions and informal conversations have both encouraged me, and inspired me to improve my argument; the African Studies Centre, Leiden, and especially my colleagues in the Theme Group on Agency in Africa, for loyally supporting, for many years already, my explorations outside their favourite paths of knowledge production, where they concentrate on present-day Africa and use participant observation as their principal method; my wife, Patricia, as sparring partner in the protracted intellectual struggle on which the present argument is based. Since this conference was held in China, and my contribution is the analysis of world mythology on the basis of a corpus of African cosmogonic myths, I chose as a background illustration a famous relief depicting the primal pair of Chinese cosmogonic myth, Nü Wa/Kwa 女媧 and Fu Xi 伏羲 with their intertwined snakelike tails, and with overhead the emblems of phoenix and frog that refer to (some of the popular etymologies of) their names as written beside them.

mentation from the Early Bronze Age onward. The present chapter is one of a series of explorations in which I attempt to combine two seminal ideas:¹⁹⁹

1. the 'Out-of-Africa' scenario with
2. Witzel's idea (2001) of myth constituting an independent source on humankind's remotest past.

I seek to identify (in addition to other cultural, linguistic and religious elements: Anatomically Modern Human's near-universals) some putative 'Out of Africa' original *mythological* package; moreover, I attempt to trace this package's subsequent transformations in the process of global spread. Emphasis is on the development of an explicit methodology, without which the entire exercise would be pointless. Meanwhile, the fact that I have termed the putative original mythical package 'Pandora's Box', is a reminder (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2003b, reprinted in this book as ch. 3) of the fact that our scholarly approach to myth cannot and should not escape from our own *mythopoiesis* (myth-making).

My first paper in this series was presented at the Pre-Symposium / 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table on 'Ethnogenesis in South and Central Asia', organised by RIHN, NIHU / Harvard University, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 6-8 June, 2005 (reprinted here as ch. 5). The abstract²⁰⁰ to that paper defines the context for the present chapter:

The present argument reflects an attempt to write a coherent world history of mythology along strict methodological lines of empirical enquiry. Point of departure is the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis. The argument seeks to identify the mythological content, if any, of the Out-of-Africa package (80 ka BP). For this purpose a corpus of c. 200 mythemes is constructed from sub-Saharan Africa cosmogonic myths as attested in historical times. The corpus is then subsumed, with inevitable and violent simplification,²⁰¹ under 20 Narrative Complexes or NarComs (see Table 1), whose number is further reduced because some turn out to be implied in others.

1. The Separation of Heaven and Earth	11. The Primal Waters and the Flood
2. The Re-connection between Heaven and Earth after Separation	12. From under the Tree
3. What is in Heaven?	13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake
4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg)	14. Fundamental Duality

¹⁹⁹ During the 2006 Beijing conference, various colleagues, especially from China and Japan, expressed the wish to know more of the background which led me to formulated my Aggregative Diachronic Approach To World Mythology, starting from the African continent. In the present book, the Introduction, the final chapter 21, and the autobiographic ch. 7, largely answer that question.

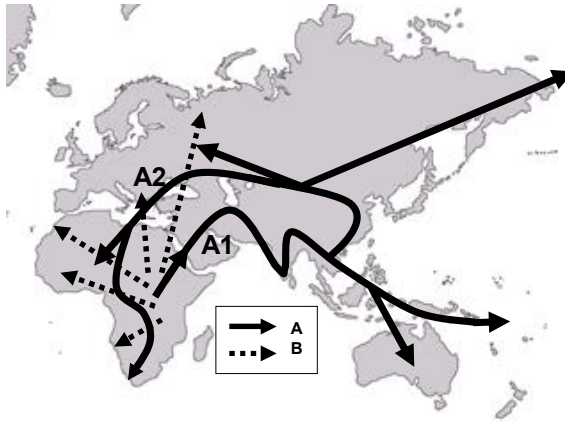
²⁰⁰ Edited for the present purpose.

²⁰¹ #5.9. THE DILEMMA OF SOPHISTICATED TYPOLOGY VERSUS SOPHISTICATED HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION. In their inspiring contribution to the 2006 Beijing conference on Comparative Mythology, Boris Oguibénine and Nataliya Yanchevskaya posit that comparative mythologists have to choose between sophisticated typology, or sophisticated comparative historical reconstruction. Clearly, my choice is for the latter, but at extreme costs of simplification as far as the specific mythical complexes, and the individual mythemes, are concerned. A further aggregative element is the claim that these various NarComs are not just specific to sub-Saharan Africa in remote or historical times, but may also be found back in much (though probably not all) mythology outside Africa. Meanwhile my model's purpose is *merely heuristic*, and not exhaustive: we cannot expect the stunning riches of world mythology to be *exhaustively* described by reference to what is, after all, both in subject matter (cosmogony) and provenance (sub-Saharan Africa) a rather limited corpus, whose composition, moreover, leaves much to be desired on the methodological and bibliographic side.

5. The Mantis	15. The Spider and feminine arts
6. Rescue from the Ogre	16. Shamanism, bones
7. From the Mouth	17. Spottedness and the Leopard
8. The Stones	18. Honey and Honey-beer
9. The Moon	19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and her Son/ Lover
10. The Earth as primary	20. Contradictory Messengers Bring Death

Table 6.1. The 20 Narrative Complexes as found in a corpus of African cosmogonic myths recorded in historic times.

The basic orientation of my approach has been: *each NarCom has a history, and I am determined to identify that history, if at all possible.* The Narrative Complexes are subjected to elaborate (if still defective) methodologies of absolute and relative dating, based on considerations from the fields of astronomy, genetics, archaeology, modes-of-production analysis, ethnographic distributional analysis, and hermeneutics; these are also argued to offer clues as to the location of origin of each Narrative Complex. It turns out that, as an abstract model with mainly heuristic claims, all Narrative Complexes may be situated, in space and time, along a sustained global mainstream process of mythological development. This starts out in East Africa with a Pre-Out-of-Africa package, subsequently follows the recursive path (first eastward along the Indian Ocean coast, then westward) (Fig. 6.1) of Anatomically Modern Humans across the Old World, finally to be fed back, secondarily, into Africa.

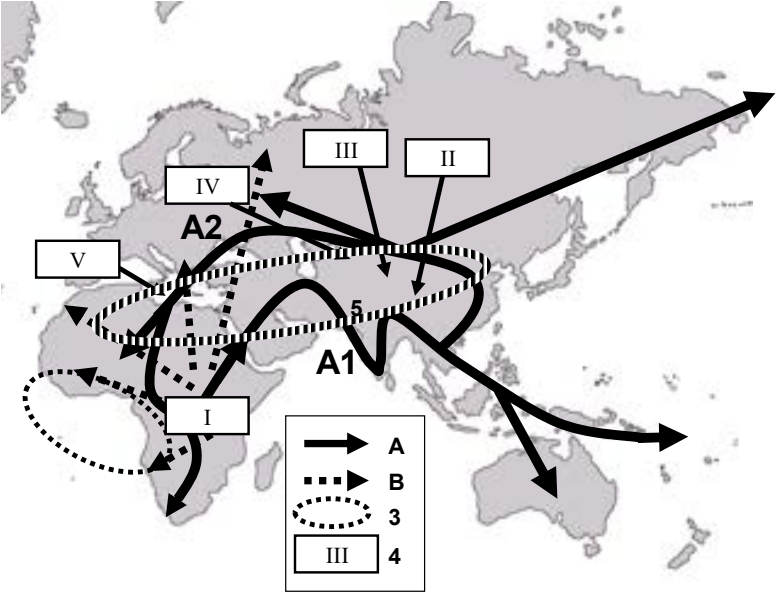


A. Main-stream path of spread and transformation of the core cultural package of Anatomically Modern Humans ('Pandora's Box'), taken to coincide with the primary spread of Anatomically Modern Humans (the hairpin movement 'A1' from Africa to SE Asia); after the hairpin bend follows A2 i.e. the 'Back into Africa' (from c. 15 ka (= kiloyears) onwards) is manifest²⁰². A is secondarily complemented by: B. Diffuse percolation of Pre-Out-of-Africa cultural contents within the African continent and to Anatomically Modern Humans who had arrived in West Asia and Europe as a result of A.

Fig. 6.1. The model I used in the first tentative formulation of the present theory (repetition of Fig. 5.1, above)

²⁰² Cf. Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Hammer *et al.* 1998; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004.

In the process, the successive Narrative Complexes emerge, spread, transform, be innovated, and interact, in argued relation with innovations in the fields of modes of production, socio-political organisation, and languages. The dynamics of this process were far from steady; on the contrary, situated along path A I identify a handful of Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI), which are the main cradles of new Narrative Complexes arising in the period between the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Since the path is conceived as essentially one-dimensional, the location of these CITIs (numbered I to V in Fig. 6.2) along path A is taken to indicate relative, even absolute, dating of the origin of these NarComs. However, diffusion along path B is constant and pointless to attempt to periodise; it is taken to result in an implicit, widespread substrate in Western Old World mythology and culture.



A1, A2, and B as in Fig. 6.1: the hairpin curve of mythological spread and innovation, coinciding with path A. 3 marks the African Atlantic littoral region which was once (cf. Frobenius 1993/1933) identified as relatively untouched by the kind of cultural influences (especially the spread of shamanism) that I have come to associate with the 'Back-into-Africa' movement (A2), from c. 15 ka BP. I have added the large ellipse (5) with hatched outline, to mark the Extended Fertile Crescent

Fig. 6.2. Summary of 2005 results, showing the CITIs (I to V) on a one-dimensional geographic path also taken to be a time axis (repetition of Fig. 5.6, above) .

Reasoning backwards from those NarComs whose emergence we can specifically argue to have taken place *after* the Out of Africa Exodus, along path A, we end up with a small original Pre-Out-of-Africa mythical package. This turns out to revolve on the NarComs of 'the Earth' (10), the eminently cosmogonic 'Lightning Bird' (4) (also with Rain connotations), and the 'Rainbow [Snake]' (13) as the original, *Solar Adversary of Rain*. All the other Narrative Complexes in the recent African data set are continuous with Asian material and are argued to have originated on Asian soil, or

at least (in the case of the most recent Narrative Complex) in the Neolithic Extended Fertile Crescent ranging from East Asia to North-eastern Africa including the (once fertile) Sahara. From the Upper Palaeolithic onward, the mainstream East-West movement interacted with a direct northbound diffusion (path B) of Pre-Out-of-Africa material (again the NarComs 10, 4 and 13: Earth-Lightning-Rainbow) into North Africa, Europe and Asia, provided Anatomically Modern Humans had already arrived there; this has resulted in a substratum (in myth, ritual and folklore) that complements the otherwise prevailing Asian antecedents. Thus, sub-Saharan African mythology finally sheds its habitual isolation from world mythology, and turns out to be, in its own right, world mythology *par excellence*. Extensive continuities between African, West and South Asian, and European mythologies are revealed and explained. While predicated on Witzel's (2001) seminal long-range approach to world mythology, his rigid Laurasian/Gondwana dichotomy is replaced by a systematically argued combination of continuity, transformation, interaction, and feedback.²⁰³

With the generosity characteristic of the Harvard Round Tables, my 2005 argument was very well received, but of course, its excessive scope and ambition, as well as its reliance on auxiliary disciplines way out of my competence made it inevitable that within a year substantial additions and alterations needed to be advanced – which is the principal aim of the present chapter.

My argument in this chapter will dwell on the following topics:

1. (section 6.2) I will discuss some of the theoretical issues raised by my model: universals of culture, the dynamics of NarComs, and background assumptions
2. (section 6.3) I will adduce, from the field of 'iconographic archaeology' (the interpretation of rock art and other ancient images), possible attestations of some of the NarComs claimed in 2005
3. (section 6.4) I will situate my original model more firmly within state-of-the-art genetics, which is after all our main inspiration for the 'Out of Africa' Hypothesis
4. (section 6.5) At this point we may consider the Neanderthal connection. Neanderthals occupied West Asia and Europe throughout the period ranging from before the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans in Africa, to the extinction of Neanderthals 30 ka BP. Inevitably therefore, Neanderthals interacted, one way or another, with the systematic effects from my model, and we may begin to identify these interactions.
5. (section 6.6) Still in the genetic context, I will follow the example of Villems 2005 and propose, rather more specifically than before, links between specific genetic types arising in the course of the global spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, on the one hand, and the rise and spread of specific NarComs, on the other.
6. (section 6.7) This involves a re-examination of the global distributions of selected NarComs, accords us new, genetics-based tools of periodisation, and brings us to revise the original model of five Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation – rethinking their situation in space and time, proposing specific links between CITIs and genetically estab-

²⁰³ This chapter largely reflects the state of my research around 2006. My subsequent research made me aware of several other NarComs that may be postulated to have belonged to Pandora's Box. Cf. van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen in press (f), (g).

lished branches (in terms of MtDNA Types) of Anatomically Modern Humans, and rethinking, for all such CITIs, possible ecological and economic trigger mechanisms as well as their association with the largest linguistic groupings (macrophyla). Meanwhile I cannot emphasise enough (a point also made by Steve Farmer) that the distributions brought by today's molecular biology, while affording us to look deeply and widely in space and time, yet do so at the expense of huge error functions, running into tens of thousands of years, so that identifications in space and time on this genetic basis remain immensely dicey.

7. (section 6.8) On the basis of the above I will formulate some substantial revisions of the model as formulated in 2005 (chapter 5 above), but without affecting its main thrust
8. My 2005 model (which I have designated 'an Aggregative Diachronic Approach To World Mythology, starting from the African continent', situated NarComs neatly along path A (taken as one-dimensional) of the spread of Anatomically Modern Humans. However, already two major situations were indicated where this systematics was breached by feed-back mechanisms:
 - a. the 'Back-into-Africa' movement (which made the end products of transmission, transformation and innovation along path A interact with (locally transformed) Pre-Out-of-Africa elements inside Africa); and
 - b. the gradual diffusion (along path B) of such Pre-Out-of-Africa elements from Anatomically Modern Humans who, after the detour via South East Asia, had arrived in West Asia and Europe.

Such feedbacks upset the neat systematics of the distribution of mythologies that would have resulted on the basis of my model alone. However, since by definition culture is learned through a communicative interaction process and not genetically inherited, and therefore can move, geographically, even more freely than human genes, we must also consider the probability of far more erratic displacements of mythological materials, way outside the place and time where the systematics of the model would make us expect them, and thus serving as *contaminations* of the theoretical distribution of the mythological data. Yet all we have, as our empirical data to begin with, is the end product of such contaminations having worked, presumably, on our theoretical distribution. Therefore we must heed the advice given by Steve Farmer during public discussion at the 2005 Kyoto conference, and give special attention to the *problem of contamination*. From its inception, the field of comparative mythology has been obsessed with the global distribution of Flood myth, since these seem to resonate with Biblical (*Genesis* 8-11) as well as Qur'anic (Sura 11, 71) materials; here the problem of contamination is especially tricky, because Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as well as Buddhism, have been particularly responsible for the spread of mythological themes way outside those themes's original historic context. I touch upon these problems when, in section 6.6, I trace the global distribution and attempt to reconstruct the world history of NarCom11, 'the Primal Waters and the Flood'. However, I found that the topic was too extensive to be accommodated in the present chapter, and instead I have confronted it in my several publications (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) on the Sunda Hypothesis, which according to Stephen Oppenheimer (1998) to constitute the context for the most influential mythological contamination in history: he claims, wrongly (as I tried to demonstrate by a quantitative argument), that the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East including the Noahic Flood myth, originated in Early Holocene South East Asia and had been brought to West Asia by people fleeing the flooding of the former Sunda subcontinent as a result of the melting of the polar caps.

Narrative Complex (nuclear mytheme) (no.) reconstructed to have been in Pandora's Box	possible use of this mytheme in Middle and Upper Palaeolithic proto-divination as suggested by divinatory patterns in historical times	element in transformational cycle
The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg)	lightning as omen fowl as divinatory animals	aether; fire
The stones (as earth; under CITI VI revised as the stones as connection between heaven and earth)	psephomancy (divination by pebbles)	earth; aether; metal (e.g. sidereal iron)
The Moon	moon as omen proto-astrology	
The Earth as primary (10 was subsequently revised towards cattle, in the Neolithic)	earth omens proto-geomancy	earth
From under the Tree (subsequently diversified into 12a 'The world and humanity from the tree', and 12c 'the leg-child')	cleromancy with wooden tablets etc.	wood
The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake	snake as divinatory animal, snake omens; confusion with earth possible because of homonymy	aether; earth
The Spider (subsequent transformed into 'the feminine arts' in proto-Neolithic times)	spider as omen and divinatory animal	

Source: van Binsbergen 2013.

Table 6.2. The divinatory significance of the reconstructed mythological contents of Pandora's Box, Africa, 80 ka BP

9. It would be opportune to take a closer look at the effect identified above under 4b: the gradual diffusion (along path B) of such Pre-Out-of-Africa elements from Anatomically Modern Humans who, via the detour via South East Asia, had arrived in West Asia and Europe. If the 2005 paper's spectacular and ingenious identification of the mythological contents of 'Pandora's Box' (*i.e.* the NarComs Earth, Lightning, and Rainbow) can be sustained, then the attestation of such NarComs in West Asia and Europe in the Neolithic and later need not be due to these mythological elements have completed the entire hairpin movement from Africa to South East Asia and back again – they may also have diffused directly north from sub-Saharan Africa, along path B. In the 2005 version (chapter 5 above) I have already briefly indicated how the three NarComs then identified to be in Pandora's Box (the Earth, the Lightning Bird and its Egg, the Rainbow Snake) may have diffused directly north; this would account for traces (typically rather isolated and underdeveloped, disconnected from the more elaborate dominant mythologies) of these NarComs in, for instance, the Ancient Egyptian mythologies of the abysmal

Snake Apep (cf. Greek Python, Mesopotamian Tiamat, Syrian Yam, Hebrew Leviathan, Hittite Illuyanka), the Earth-centred Osiris mythology, the Lightning (Zeus, Tarḫun, Pihassassa) and Rainbow (Iris, Bifrost) elements in Greek, Hittite and Germanic mythology, the World Egg in Egyptian and isolated Greek myths (cf. Helena and the Dioscuri), the cult of the Earth (shrines, oaths, incubation, sanctuary, ritual cleansing of murderers) throughout Northern Africa and the Mediterranean with inroads into West Asia. Now that I see reason to add three more NarComs to the original contents of Pandora's Box (NarCom₉: the Moon, NarCom₁₂: From under the Tree, and NarCom₁₃ The Spider (and feminine arts) many more themes from Egyptian, West Asian and European mythologies come to mind (Selene, the luminaries as the two eyes of Ḥorus, Neith/ Athena/ Anahita, Germanic Yggdrasil etc.) as possibly due, in part, to direct north diffusion of Pre-Out of Africa mythical contents from sub-Saharan Africa. However, this again would obviously constitute a paper or chapter in its own right, and (although much of this happens to be written already) it must regrettably remain outside our present scope.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, from an Africanist point of view, we now discern three accumulative reasons for the (I insist) massive continuities between sub-Saharan African, and other Old World mythologies:

1. the continued percolation, inside Africa, of the Out-of Africa package of a handful of NarComs taken to other continents and transformed there,
2. the Back-into-Africa movement, bringing Asian mythological innovations (new NarComs) back into Africa
3. the amorphous northbound diffusion via path B from Africa into West Asia and Europe, outside the path of genetic ramification of Anatomically Modern Humans (path A), and with a time lag of several dozens of ka needed to allow Anatomically Modern Humans to arrive in West Asia and Europe in the first place

Divination tends to be a cultural domain where the construction of unquestioned authority for the oracle's pronouncements is of paramount importance, and such authority is often derived from the suggestion of unfathomable antiquity of the invisible agents involved, and of the procedures through which these are approached so as to partake of their omniscience. It is therefore no surprise that much of the reconstructed mythological contents of Pandora's Box is found to constitute the backbone of many time-honoured forms of divination, as Table 6.2 indicated. Incidentally, Table 6.2 also indicates that element cosmology, for which I argued (on the basis of comparative evidence) a near-global spread and Upper Palaeolithic origin in my book *Before the Presocratics* (2012), may have even greater antiquity and in some respects revert back to Pandora's Box.

10. (section 6.9) I thus go against the grain of much comparative mythology, which has generally had difficulty relating to the (mainly oral, often poorly recorded, and not readily accessible) sub-Saharan African mythologies, by and large assuming that the African mythologies are discontinuous with those of the rest of the Old World, and represent par-

²⁰⁴ Meanwhile van Binsbergen 2007b (included in the present volume as chapter 10) presents essential data towards such an analysis, in the form of an 'Extensive Table Of Old World Mythological Continuities, classified on the basis of 20 Narrative Complexes (NarComs) 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'.

ticularly ancient and primitive forms of mythology (Witzel 2001, despite all its qualities, is a major example, which will be severely and repeatedly criticised throughout the present book). However, I will once more stress the amazing continuity between African, Asian and European mythologies. This brings out the dilemma of Africa in recent millennia: *relatively ancient genes, but (due to the Back-into-Africa migration from 15 ka BP onward) largely 'recent' mythologies.*

11. (section 6.10) In line with the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis now generally accepted by specialists in human genetics and palaeoanthropology, my model accords a central place to the African continent, as the cradle of Pandora's Box including its mythological contents. At the 2006 Beijing conference some discussants from East Asia felt that such an approach slighted the original, independent mythological achievements of their own continent – a reflection of the myopically chauvinistic tendencies which adhere to most national archaeologies but which are particularly manifest in the cases of China, and of the state of Israel (where such chauvinism is brought out in recent Sea Peoples studies, on the basis of the amazing, conflictive identification of Ancient Sea Peoples with today's Palestinians). Some critics from the North Atlantic region, on the other hand, may reject my approach in this chapter because, to them, it smacks of Afrocentrist ideology. I have considered these objections at the end of the previous chapter 5, and shown them to be – unnecessary.
12. (section 6.11) Finally, I will spell out in detail what the wider implications of my model are for comparative mythology.

6.2. Some of the theoretical issues raised by my model: Universals of culture, the dynamics of NarComs, and background assumptions

6.2.1. Why (near-)universals in human culture?

#6.1. WHY (NEAR-)UNIVERSALS IN HUMAN CULTURE? We have ample evidence of an extensive corpus of (near-) universals attested for humankind in historical times (Brown 1991, 2000; Wiredu 1990, 1996; Gellner 1990), including universals in the linguistic field (Greenberg 1963; Décsy 1988; Hawkins 1988; Aitchison 1989) and in the mythological field (Fontenrose 1980).

These universals have been explained by reference to, *e.g.*

1. The presumably universally uniform, innate structure of the (Anatomically Modern Human) mind, producing multiple parallel but independent cultural inventions
e.g., if Flood myths would be truly universal – but they are merely near-universal – , then we could have: 'Flood myths result from dreaming about having a full bladder, as all humans do' (Roheim 1952)²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ I have yet to see the following point to be argued in scholarly print, but given the cosmogonic connotations of the Mother of the Waters which I have postulated to dominate a phase in Upper Palaeolithic and (*cf.* ch. 16 below) Early Neolithic mythology, one would expect another basis for Flood myths to be suggested in the (semi-

2. The presumably converging effects of non-human reality, governed by presumably immutable natural laws
 - e.g.* 'Flood myths result from the universal experience that – under Pre-Modern technology – no human life can be sustained under water for more than a few hours'; or: 'palaeontology tells us that marine life preceded terrestrial life by at least half a billion years; perhaps Flood myths as some unexplained reminiscence of this biological fact'
3. The increasing convergence of human experience under proto-globalisation and globalisation
 - e.g.* 'Flood myths have one unique origin in some historical catastrophe or some historical imagination, specific in time and space, and from there they have spread to other communities through population movements and through Premodern means of information and communication, including sailing ships, caravan trade, itinerant shamans and story-tellers, conquering armies, *etc.*'

However, the 'Out-of-Africa' model offers a fourth partial explanation:

4. Anatomically Modern Humans manifest (near-)universals because of common origin, not only as regards genetics (and on this point most specialists agree), but also as regards cultural universals.²⁰⁶

The 'Out-of-Africa' model then becomes a rather convincing basis for a developmental / historical / genetic model of world mythology:

- myths are carried by human communities which, as gene pools, are more or less traceable genetically
- therefore, if all Anatomically Modern Humans (*i.e.* the whole of present-day humankind) ultimately derive from a fairly limited gene pool that was situated in the African continent over 80 millennia (kiloyears, ka) ago,
- then we may presume that these ancestors of Anatomically Modern Humans held in common not just a set of genes but also a set of cultural including linguistic, social-organisational and mythological traits,
- which were taken 'Out-of-Africa' along with these genes,
- and like these genes were substantially transformed and innovated after leaving Africa, in the process of the global history of mythology.

6.2.2. The dynamics of NarComs

For each NarCom a putative origin is proposed in space and time – in each case prompted by a combination of considerations:

)universal bodily experience of a pregnant woman's 'breaking the water', *i.e.* the rupture of the amniotic membrane at the onset of parturition.

²⁰⁶ It is prudent to confine ourselves to the claim of *near*-universals; for after all, even with a shared common origin, the traits present in that origin will only survive integrally and without exception to the present if there is *total retention*, *i.e.* if no traits die out in-between; and since we understand too little of the mechanisms of cultural, including mythological, retention over many thousands of years (although the fact of such retention is undeniable, on the one hand the underlying assumption, on the other hand one of the principal findings, of the present project), any claim of total retention would amount to *hybris* – even more so than the present argument in itself already does.

- the NarCom's empirical distribution in space and time, not only in texts (which only afford a time depth of 5 ka (kiloyears, millennia) maximum, but also iconographically in archaeological data, which go back much further
- any relevant outside material constraints open to scientific scrutiny, *e.g.* in astronomy, glaciology, modes of production analysis, and especially genetics;
- hermeneutics of a NarCom's contents, which may bring out implications that may contain time- and space specific clues.

Below we will see that often the association between a NarCom and a genetic type offers us an additional means of situating that NarCom in time and place.

A few remarks are in order in regard of modes of production. My proposed aggregative diachronic approach to world mythology amounts to the reconstruction of the sequence of emergence and transformation of NarComs in time and space (in reflection of Anatomically Modern Humans' increasingly complex and diversified modes of articulating reality through myth), along the paths which Anatomically Modern Humans (according to the reconstructions by genetics and archaeology) appear to have taken since their emergence in Eastern and/or Southern Africa 200 ka BP. Central myths (*cf.* our NarComs) constitute the ideological/ cosmological knowledge component of any mode of production. Therefore specific modes of production, and specific changes therein, are *among* the factors that power the demographic and mythological processes attending Anatomically Modern Humans before and after their exodus 'Out-of-Africa'. Myths may occasionally be expressed in iconographic materials and thus leave archaeological traces in their own right; however, archaeology allows us to trace the history of modes of production with much more detail and confidence than the history of NarComs. Many myths imply a specific mode of production (*e.g.* growing crops, shooting arrows, weaving), and this can be fixed to a point in time before which they can hardly be supposed to have originated.

Partly informed by the dynamics of modes of production, the world history of the successive and cumulative innovation and transformation of myth is not a constant process, but is spasmodic, concentrated in a limited number of Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI), which I seek identify in time and place (see below).

Triangulation may give further clues as to the relative age of specific NarComs. My emerging aggregative model of global spread and transformation of world mythology is, in the first place, predicated on the geneticists' finding that Anatomically Modern Humans initially migrated east from Africa along the Indian Ocean coast to South East Asia, Australia and New Guinea (Path A₁). Only subsequently, in a new migratory wave, were Asia and the other continents populated by Anatomically Modern Humans (Path A₂).²⁰⁷ Subsequently, from c. 15 ka BP onwards, a westbound and southbound

²⁰⁷ In the 2006 version I conflated A₁ and A₂ into A, as in the summary above. More important is that *cultural inertia* may not just be assumed to be an automatic given, on the contrary, it is inherently problematic. Most cultural phenomena are transient and, through free variation and cultural drift, will no longer be readily recognisable after a few centuries, let alone millennia. The constancy of lithic techniques over tens of thousands of years, as securely attested by palaeoanthropology, is exceptional and amazing, and requires explanation. So is the apparent inertia (presumably making for the universals of present-day human cultures) of the postulated contents of Pandora's Box, not only in the mythological field, but also in regard of social organisation, kinship,

return migration from Asia ‘Back-into-Africa’ has been attested genetically; I take this to be the final phase of path A2. In this way, clues as to the situation of specific NarComs in time and space, may be derived from triangulation of the Australian and New Guinean material with data from elsewhere in the world.

6.2.3. Background assumptions

- In the background, my approach is based on a number of assumptions that are highly contentious and whose critical testing, as well as the invitation to critical testing and subsequent improvement by others, are among the aims of my project. These assumptions include:
- Myth may be defined as ‘telling collectively managed stories about fundamental reality’, in other words the fundamental human act of subjective world-making
- Although Anatomically Modern Humans have, admittedly, an infinite capability for imaginative invention, hence – on the surface – an potentially infinite repertoire of myths, still that invention is constrained by a limited number of basic thought operations (*e.g.* distinction, juxtaposition, identity *etc.*) – which are constrained, at least in part, by the structure of the human mind and the structure of the non-human environment
- Each NarCom encodes and facilitates one or more of these basic thought operations, in principle related to the mode of production with which that NarCom occurs.
- Although myth can be told in music, dance, spatial layouts *etc.*, its typical (more recent?) form is language-based
- It is only partially true that myth expresses culture in language; rather, it is myth that constitutes language and culture in the first place (*cf.* Cassirer 1946, 1953-1957; Donald 1991) – it is, again, the central human act of subjective world-making

Therefore, myth may have been Anatomically Modern Humans’ principal claim to adaptive advantage.

6.3. Possible corroboration from ‘iconographic archaeology’ (the interpretation of rock art and other prehistoric images) for selected NarComs claimed in 2005

6.3.1. Not just Anatomically Modern Humans?

Anatomically Modern Humans are considered to have been the first type of humans possessing articulate language, representation, symbolism, art. We may have to substantially

marriage, notions of causation, etc. In the course of this book I shall repeatedly come back to this question. I do not propose to solve it, but will propose (in the footsteps of Durkheim, 2012; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2018) that religion is the principal factor bringing about such inertia, and thus making society possible.

qualify this assumption.. Some authors (e.g. Bednarik *n.d.* / 1990) claim evidence for human representations already in the Lower Palaeolithic, 3 Ma BP, and Fig. 6.3 indicates that such claims are not without ground. Be this as it may, we now consider whether the NarComs which we have reconstructed from an examination of a sub-Saharan corpus of cosmogonic myths collected in historic times, may also be found back in iconographic material that is essentially prehistoric.

	
<p>a Engraved forest elephant bone fragment from Bilzingsleben, Germany, c. 350 ka BP (Bednarik <i>n.d.</i>)</p>	<p>bi, b2. Stringer & Gamble 1993: 189 fig. 92: Middle Palaeolithic piece of bone with zigzag line, from Bacho Kiro in Bulgaria, Europe: a potential expression of NarCom4 (The Lightning Bird) (even though in a Neanderthaloid context, and despite Stringer & Gamble's denying it any meaning)</p>
	
<p>c. Middle Palaeolithic sculpture, Central Europe; NarCom17 (Speckledness and the Leopard)</p>	<p>d. The jasperite manuport from Makapansgat Cave, S Africa, 2.5 to 3 Ma BP – claimed to be the oldest known palaeoart object in the world (Bednarik <i>n.d.</i>)</p>

Fig. 6.3. Iconographic evidence suggestive of symbolic activity before Anatomically Modern Humans

Initially, our only indication of such NarComs as I discern, was in a corpus of African cosmogonic myths attested in historical times. From there to Pre-Out-of-Africa times (80⁺ ka BP) is an enormous step. Documentary evidence only has a time depth of 5 ka. Do we have any other data to bridge the remaining gap?

6.3.2. Iconographic evidence for NarComs?

Specialists in non-western art studies (e.g. those present at the Leiden 2005 conference on Creation Myths and the Visual Arts) have complained that so little of the African cosmogonic mythical material seems to be reflected in African visual arts. I think they are mis-

taken: they fail to recognise mythical content that is in fact there, because they lack an heuristic device to open up such cosmogonic mythical clues as the African visual arts material contains. A re-examination of the extensive corpus of African visual art in the light of my NarComs would reveal that many items of African visual art could be interpreted as attestations of NarComs, or a combination.²⁰⁸ On the following pages I will elaborate a number of concrete examples of this claim:

- The Separation and subsequent Re-connection of Heaven and Earth (one of the most common African cosmogonic themes, and one typically associated with the Back-into-Africa return migration from c. 15 ka BP), exemplified in prehistoric rock art from Southern Africa
- the Lightning Bird, part of the original Pre-Out-of-Africa package, and to my mind a candidate as possible referent of the geometric pattern displayed by the Blombos block, South Africa, 70 ka BP.²⁰⁹

Besides, I will show a few possible further examples, without much comment.

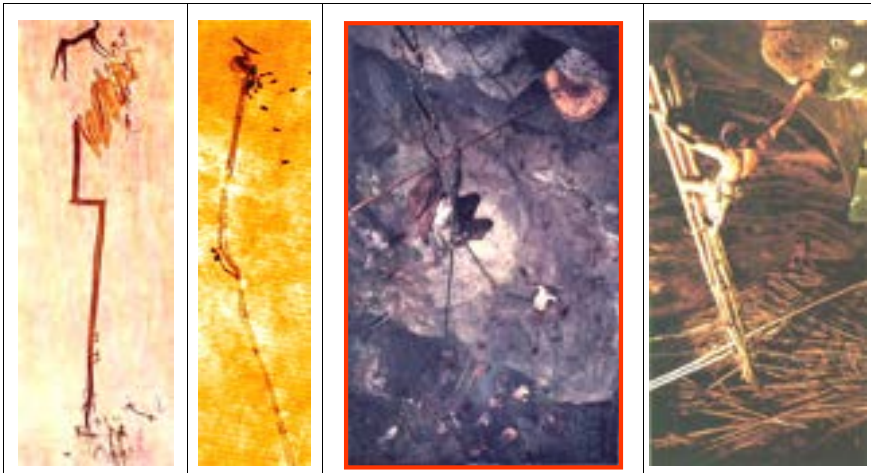
Of course I realise that the interpretation of iconographic material across the mists of time and cultural difference is far from self-evident. Here we have to study and further develop hermeneutical methods leading to interpretational intersubjectivity between specialists and schools; however, the present scope cannot accommodate adequate discussion on this point. Incidentally, the meta-African distribution of the NarComs suggests also meta-African distributions of these Visual Arts applications of cosmogonic mythical themes; *e.g.*, the Re-connection between Heaven and Earth (Ladder, Staircase, Cosmic Tree, Sun Beam, Moon Beam, Birds, Rain, Rainbow, *etc.*) is a recurrent theme in European art history, as it is, *e.g.*, in Ancient Egyptian and Indian art. This stands to reason because this theme belongs to the Extended Fertile Crescent of the Neolithic, ranging from the fertile Sahara to the Indus, ultimately with extension into China. The eastbound diffusion of this NarCom implies a cultural diffusion whose human agents have remained below the resolution threshold of our data on MtDNA Types (in other words, for which there is no genetic support as yet), and such western influences upon China from the Neolithic onward are contested anyway – as amply discussed in van Binsbergen 2012a. However, there are myriad other genetic markers. Yet we had better face the truth and admit that not all steps in the history of world mythology can be traced genetically; especially not the closer we come to the present, with its reality of (post-Neolithic) genetic globalisation.

6.3.3. African rock art as attestation of NarComs: NarCom2: Separation of Heaven and Earth, and their subsequent Re-connection, and of NarCom3 'What is in Heaven'

Our first example for this NarCom is that of a rock painting from Marondera (Marandellas), Zimbabwe, showing a vertical line dominating the entire figure.

²⁰⁸ The archaeologist James Harrod has for decades been engaged in a similar exercise, lately (Harrod 2020) on the basis of Witzel's synthesis of prehistoric mythologies.

²⁰⁹ I have meanwhile elaborated this point into a booklet on the general topic of crosshatching motifs in prehistory: *Shimmerings of the Rainbow Serpent* (van Binsbergen 2011, hitherto only circulated on the Internet).



From left to right:

- a. Rock painting from Marondera (Marandellas), Zimbabwe as evidence of NarCom2 ‘The connection of Heaven and Earth’
- b. Rock painting, Cueva de la Araña, Mesolithic Spain, style, microliths and continuous African distribution and styles of rock art suggest historical connection with (1)
- c. Honey hunting in present-day Nepal (*National Geographic* Nov. 1988)
- d. Relevant for the mythical themes of the Tower / Ladder into Heaven appearing in connection with Flood stories, is the Thai practice of collecting swallow’s nests in caves along the Andaman Sea; the collectors use extremely long ladders of bamboo (up to 100 m), and their other implement is a metal trident. There is a parallel with honey hunting but there rope or rope ladders are used. (source: Armijo, R., *et al.*, 1993)

Fig. 6.4. Rock painting from Marondera (Marandellas), Zimbabwe as evidence of NarCom2 ‘The connection of Heaven and Earth’; with parallels from Mesolithic Spain and contemporary Nepal.

Image 6.4.a has been explained (Lommel 1976: 149) as a rain ceremony, where a virgin princess is buried alive as sacrifice at the foot of a tree (the vertical line however looks very little like a tree – but it is certainly suggestive of some kind of connection between Heaven and Earth), people ascending, and a large female goddess, with smaller human figures, up in the sky, as well as a heavily zigzagged being which is probably the Rainbow Serpent – its position at the top of the vertical suggests that it is obstructing Rain. Lommel’s explanation finds much support in recorded local myths and practices prevailing up to the middle of the 20th c. CE. However, considering the age of this painting, estimated (Garlake 1995) at a few thousand years at least, this reading may be totally inappropriate in its potential anachronism: it may be the iconological equivalent of a popular etymology.

The same figure appears (black and white, and schematised) in Garlake 1995: 131, Fig. 157, with discussion p. 130 *f.*), where the interpretation is exclusively in terms of trance of the reclining bottom figure – Ladder and Snake are relegated, by the interpreter, to mere representations of the trance state. Much as such an emphasis on altered states of consciousness is popular in current Southern African rock art studies (especially as a result of the work of

Lewis-Williams), any one-factor explanation must be distrusted as one-sided, especially if local practices and myths (which after all have been a great inspiration to Lewis-Williams) suggest additional perspectives, as above.

6.3.4. A string figure in historical times, the Blombos block, and the Janmart plaque, as possible expressions of NarCom4: The Lightning Bird




		
<p>a. Red ochre block discovered in 2002 in Blombos Cave, South Africa, among [what was claimed to be] the oldest attested human art, c. 70 ka BP; considering the red-ochre colour and the intricate zigzag pattern, this may well be a representation of NarCom4, the Lightning Bird – one of only three NarComs I have argued (van Binsbergen 2006a) to have been part of the original Out-of-Africa package (source: d’Errico <i>et al.</i> 2003, cf. Henshilwood <i>et al.</i> 2001a, 2001b; also http://cogweb.ucla.edu/ep/Art/BlombosOchre.jpg).</p>	<p>b. The identical pattern displayed in one of several sacred string figures (termed ‘Jacob’s Ladder’ in the comparative literature) managed and transmitted in the Nkoya female puberty rites, Kaoma district, Zambia, 1978.²¹⁰ The women managing this knowledge did not explain or name the figures to me, so the interpretation in terms of the Lightning Bird is just my own.</p>	<p>c. The same string figure produced by an Aboriginal girl in present-day Australia (if the Lightning Bird NarCom4 was in Pandora’s Box, as I claim, it would have been transmitted to Australia along Route A1).</p>

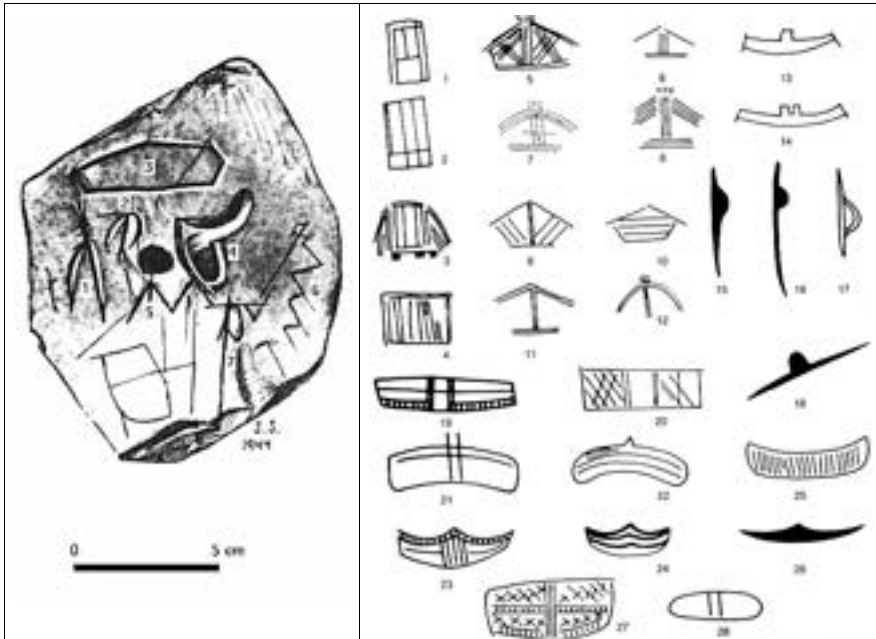
Fig. 6.5. The Blombos block, and string figures in Africa and Australia, as evidence of NarCom4: ‘The Lightning Bird’.

Even if the trance interpretation were in principle correct in the sense that it tallies with the participants’s own conscious and explicit interpretation (of which we cannot be sure, considering the age of these paintings and their illiterate cultural context), the images of trance would still follow a particular cosmology, *e.g.* one in terms of ascent to Heaven (NarCom2) or descent into the Underworld, and one stipulating the existence of anthropomorphic and snakelike beings in Heaven (NarCom3).

Although the specific interpretation in terms of a particular NarCom remains conjectural, finds like this make it plausible that initiation rites served as a context to preserve the mythical contents of the Out-of-Africa package, in other words, as a rare mechanism of cul-

²¹⁰ #6.3. DISCLOSING WOMEN’S SECRET INITIATORY KNOWLEDGE? These rites are strictly controlled by senior women. The figures are secret, and only by making extensive payments (the standard way in South Central Africa to negotiate the boundaries surrounding privileged knowledge – the same model applies to knowledge in the fields of healing and divination) could I, as a male, gain access to this and other information on the rites in 1978 – never mind that I was locally very well connected with the initiation specialists through affinal ties, and about to be adopted as a royal. No further obligation of secrecy was imposed on me in connection to the female initiatory knowledge shared with me, on the contrary, my status as someone who was to finally write a book on Nkoya culture (surrounding peoples were envied for already having such a book, or several) was generally known and appreciated in the community. It is therefore that I publish this pattern here without qualms.

tural retention and inertia across dozens of millennia.



Left: A Middle Palaeolithic schist stone plaque found in Angola (Janmart 1946: 56); the tectiform signs are reminiscent of the repertoire of Franco-Cantabrian Upper Palaeolithic art (Leroi-Gourhan, right, cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1958, 1968a, 1968b); the zigzag lines may indicate the Lightning Bird (although Janmart offers different, anthropomorphic interpretations)

Fig.6.6. A Middle Palaeolithic schist stone plaque found in Angola, as evidence of NarCom₃ 'The Lightning Bird'; and compared with Leroi-Gourhan on the European Palaeolithic



c: representation of a swan as a white aquatic bird often associated with the cosmogonic Mother of the Waters

a-b: This plaque from Mal'ta, Siberia, c. 18 ka BP, looks like an apt illustration of the equivalence of

- snakes (above, aside and below: of sky, sea, and Underworld) and
- the Primal Waters (above, aside and below: of sky, sea, and Underworld)

Both the location and the period match my reconstructions as to the presumable period when the 'Primal Waters/Land' cosmology was dominant. Incidentally, the Mal'ta material holds another iconographic corroboration of my reconstructions: it is here that the swan as representation of the Primal Waters is particularly in evidence among the mobile art

Fig. 6.7. Upper Palaeolithic mobile art from Mal'ta (Lake Baikal, Siberia, Russian Federation), suggestive of NarComs 10 (The Earth), and 11 (The Primal Waters, and the Flood)

6.3.5. Further corroboration from Australia?

- If the mythological contents of Pandora's Box were transferred to Australia along Route A₁, and
- if the above interpretation of the 'Jacob's Ladder' motif in terms of the Lightning Bird is correct

then we would expect traces (in more or less transformed form) of the same connotations to be found in Australia. This appears to be the case, as Fig. 6.8 indicates

- not only because of the continuity in string figures
- but also because of the symbolism attached to the 'Jacob's Ladder' pattern in the Australian context in historical times.

From an Australian perspective (Venbrux *n.d.*; cf. Chaloupka 1993) the Jacob's Ladder pattern would have an obvious interpretation, in the conventionalised *yam* pattern – evoking the creepers of the yam plant (genus *Dioscorea*). This is claimed to have been an art motif in Australia since the Middle Palaeolithic (60,000 BP), i.e. from the first arrival of Anatomically Modern Humans there.

This offers interesting possibilities in terms of the wider cosmogonic mythical repertoire (Cosmic Tree/ World Axis/ perch of the cosmogonic Lightning Bird), and the unfolding and transformation of that repertoire in the course of the transition from (Pre-Out-of-Africa) Africa to Australia. Particularly significant is (in Venbrux's words)

'that the clan using this [conventionalised yam] image has for its major "dreaming" (*irumwa*, ['totem'] a bird, notably the jungle fowl. Digging up the yam causes rain and lightning, according to the ritual leader of this clan [who was Venbrux's initiation mentor – WvB]'.



Left: Australian Aboriginal bark painting: Fish; yam; echidnas ('spiny anteaters', egg-laying mammals). Natural earth pigments on eucalyptus bark. Artist unknown; source: <http://www.bcgalleries.com.au/gf35.htm> | Right: *Dioscorea villosa*, photographed in New Zealand; source: http://www.sbs.auckland.ac.nz/info/schools/nzplants/food_climb_dioscorea.htm

Fig. 6.8. *Dioscorea* vegetal symbolism from Australia as obliquely referring the NarCom4 'The Lightning Bird'

In Africa, the lightning Bird is often fowl-like. So there are several indications that the lightning Bird association also adheres to the motif in its latter-day Australian usage.

6.3.6. Further iconographic suggestions of ancient NarComs

Even though, inevitably, we lack documentary evidence for the presence of our NarComs for nearly the entire span of Anatomically Modern Humans' history, either inside or outside Africa, there is a wealth of archaeological and iconographic material, e.g. in rock art, that could be read as possible attestations. I will only give a few examples

		
<p>Shamanism (Nr-Mr tablet, Ancient Egypt oth Dynasty; 5 ka BP); Nar-Com16 ('Shamanism, bones')</p>	<p>Tassili, Sahara, 7 ka BP: NarCom17 ('Speckledness, the Leopard') or NarCom2 (Luwe, personification of the celestial pole, cf. von Sicard 1968 and van Binsbergen 2004ab, d, e , and this book ch. 18, on Leopard-skin symbolism)</p>	<p>Shrine for Heitsi-Eibib (mantis-shaped culture hero), Namibia, undated: NarCom8 ('The Stones'), and 5 ('The Mantis').</p>

Fig. 6.9. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.

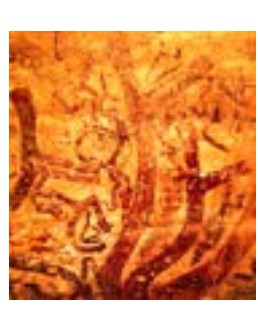


		
<p>NarCom5 ('The Mantis'), undated rock art, Chad</p>	<p>NarCom17 ('Speckledness and The leopard'), Apollo 11 Cave, Namibia, 25 ka BP</p>	<p>NarCom2 ('The Re-connection between Heaven and Earth'): Mwendanjangula, personification of the celestial pole, a manifestation of Luwe cf. von Sicard 1968-1969), Angola, Early Modern.</p>

Fig. 6.10. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.


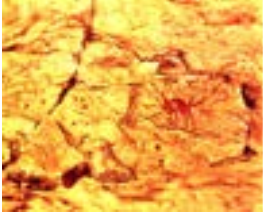


			
<p>NarCom15 ('The Spider and the feminine arts'), Tassili, Archaic period, 7 ka BP, from: http://creativity.bgsu.edu/africanArt/part1/xtassili/T2.html</p>	<p>NarCom15 ('The Spider and the feminine arts'), Iberian peninsula, Mesolithic (15 ka BP) (Bandi & Maringer 1952: 139)</p>	<p>NarCom17 ('Speckledness and the Leopard'; and 16 ('Shamanism, the bones'), Tassili, c. 6 ka BP; source: Breuil <i>et al.</i> 1954</p>	<p>NarCom15: the Spider (and feminine arts) Australian rock art, conventionally considered a 'Sun symbol', more likely a spider's web (but ancient Spider goddesses are often solar), undated, probably several ka old (Stubbs 1978)</p>

Fig. 6.11. Further iconographic evidence of NarComs.

These selected images from a variety of provenances and suggestive of a variety of NarComs do not, of course, prove the reality of my NarComs, but at least remind us that we have additional, archaeological sources for NarComs, once our theory tells us what to look for.

6.4. Situating my original model (as set out in chapter 5 above) more firmly within genetics

6.4.1. Reconstruction of the rise and spread of Anatomically Modern Humans: Evolution, expansion and migration of human MtDNA Types across the world on the following seven maps (based on Forster 2004)

In order to situate my original model more firmly within state-of-the-art genetics, let us have an extensive look at Peter Forster's 2004 model of the Out-of-Africa spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, derived from the analysis of mitochondrial (mt-)DNA – which, as is well known, is only inherited in the direct female line. The convincing role of mtDNA in modern research is *e.g.* brought out by Achillia *et al.* 2007, confirming the Near Eastern origin of the Etruscans.

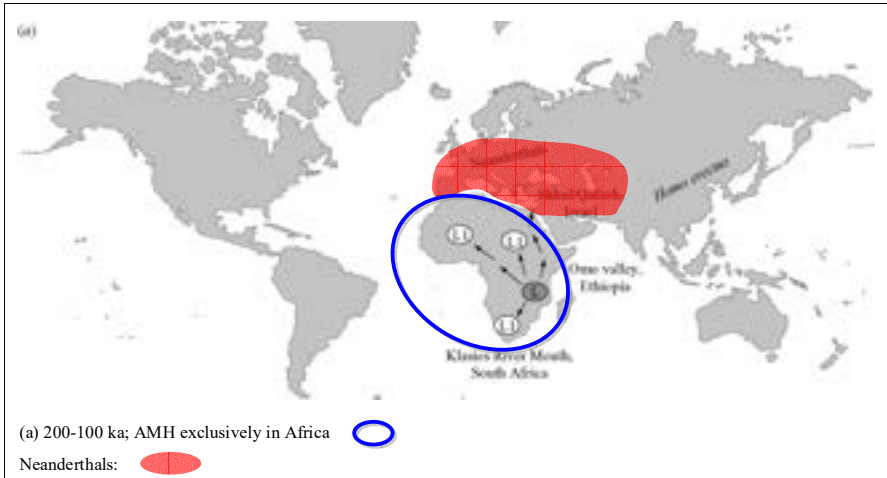


Fig. 6.12. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (a) 200-100 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

My maps of the distribution and historical development of MtDNA Types derive from Forster 2004. I have added the dynamics of the Neanderthal area²¹¹ and its postulated influence on the expansion of Anatomically Modern Humans; the distinction between Routes A1 and A2 (with a time lag of c. 15 ka); singling out the Back-to-Africa – including circumlittoral – migration process; and highlighting the global significance of type B (slides below, encircled).

The first map depicts the period (c. 200-100 ka BP) when Anatomically Modern Humans were exclusively confined to the African continent. It is during this period that ‘Pandora’s Box’ was established: the cultural (including mythological) package that was more or less shared by Anatomically Modern Humans in Africa in the Pre-out-of-Africa period, and that subsequently spread, and transformed, and innovated, world-wide.

²¹¹ The Neanderthal distribution derives from: Klein 2003; Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: 61 (their Fig. 2.1.2 reproduced here), after Giacobini and Mallegni 1989 and Vandermeersch 1989.

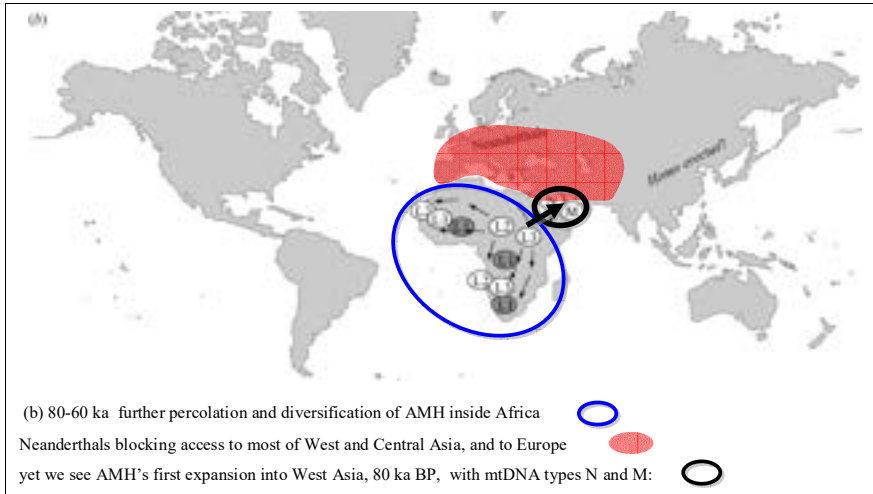


Fig.6.13. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (b) 80-60 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

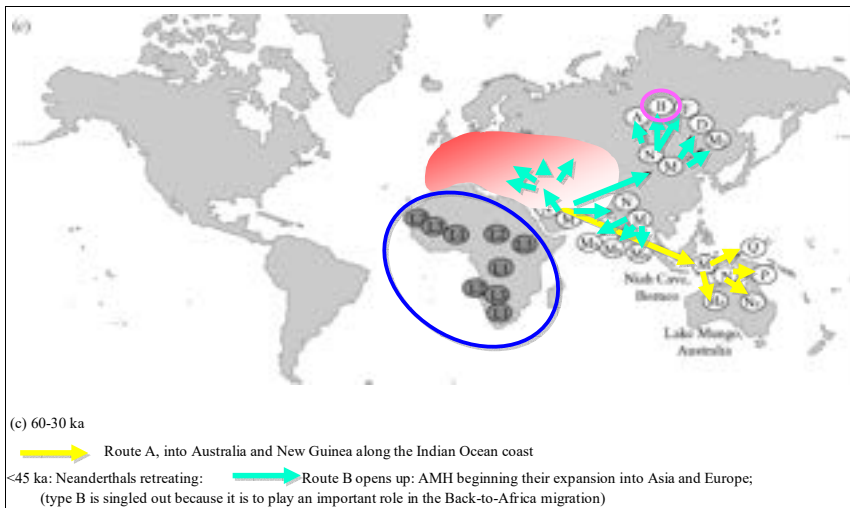


Fig.6.14. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (c) 60-30 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004).

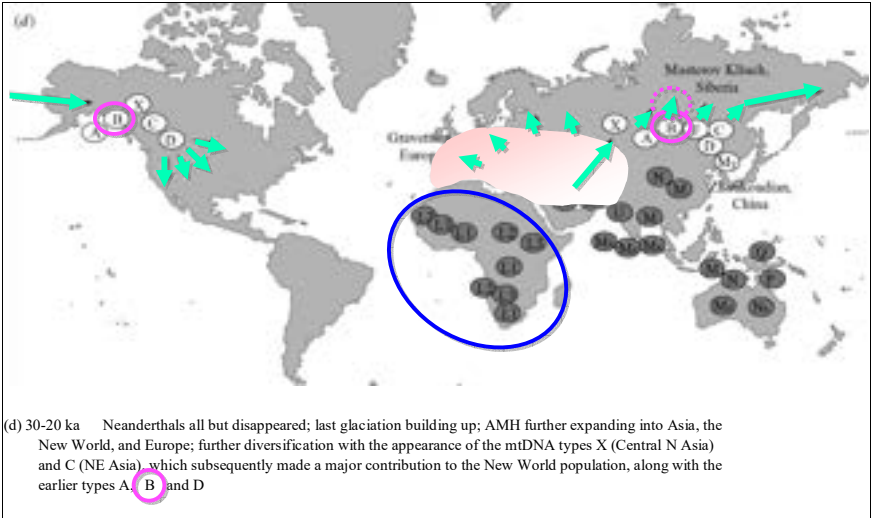


Fig. 6.15. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (d) 30-20 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

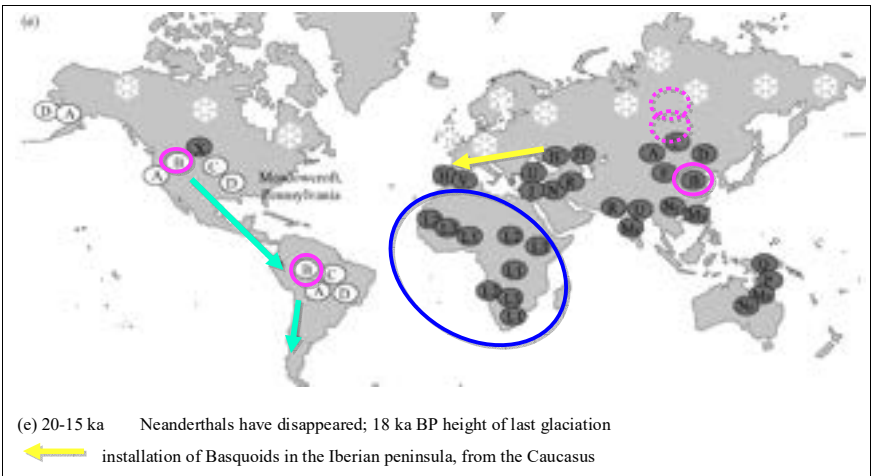


Fig. 6.16. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (e) 20-15 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

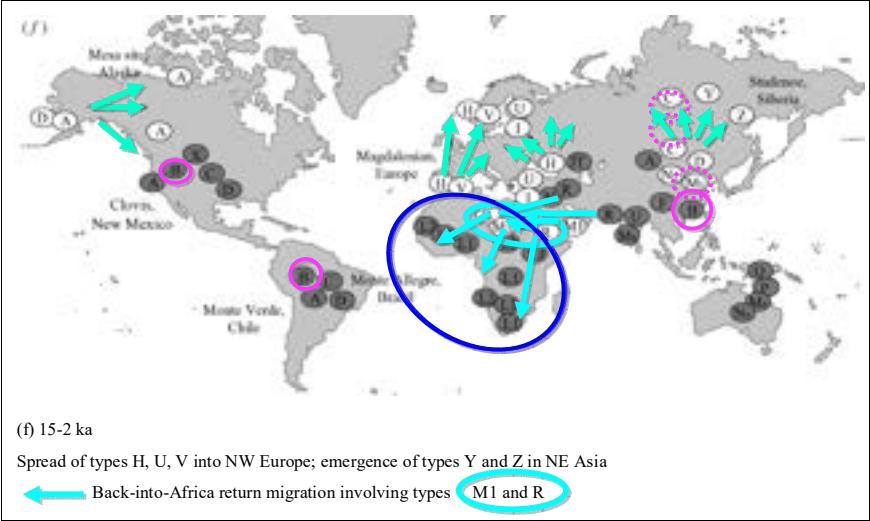


Fig. 6.17. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (f) 15-2 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

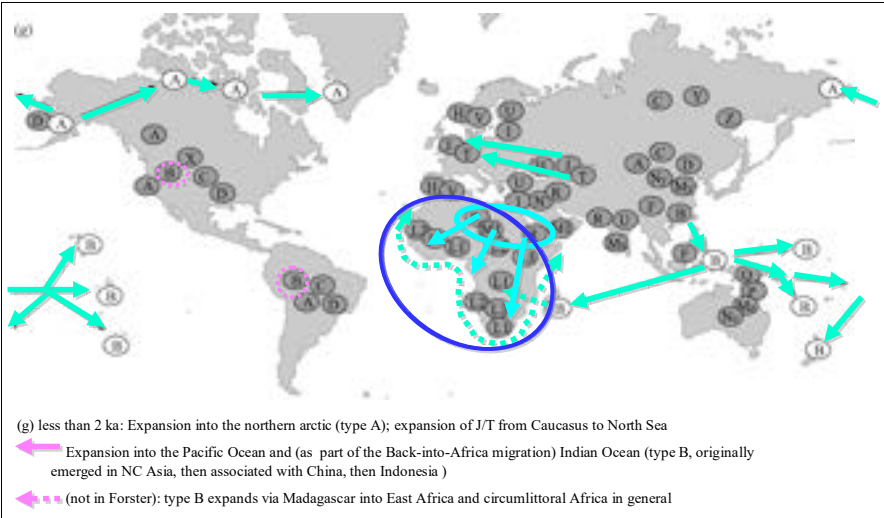


Fig. 6.18. Spread and genetic diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans (g) < 2 ka BP (largely after Forster 2004)

Even though the 'Back into Africa' migration seems to be one of the constituent factors of Af-

rica's four language families today (Afroasiatic, Nilosaharan, Nigercongo and Khoisan; I take it that all these four macrophyla are reflexes of *Borean and ultimately an origin outside the African continent), admittedly the relative contribution of Asian and Palaeo-African (Pre-Back-into-Africa) elements towards the present-day linguistic pattern remains an open question. The diagrams underplay the geographic scope and the relative impact of this 'Back into Africa' migration (*e.g.*, there is no indication of its effect in the Southern half of the African continent, where Nigercongo speakers are now dominant, and where (as tiny minorities) all Khoisan speakers are found. Yet do note the relative stability, from a genetic perspective, of the South-western quadrant of the African continent – a likely basis for Frobenius's 'pristine Africa' (see below), despite massive linguistic, cultural and mythological change.

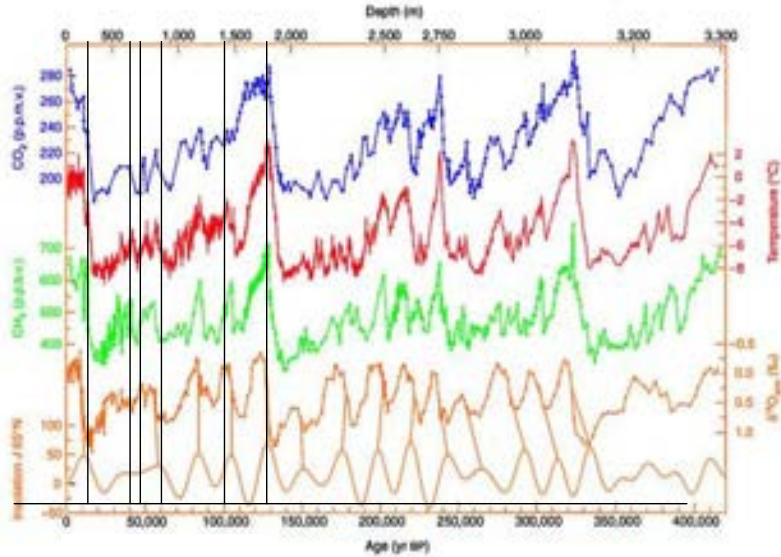
6.4.2. Some remaining questions

- Why did Route A₁ become more or less abortive²¹² after reaching Australia and New Guinea?
- Why was there a considerable delay (15 ka) before Route A₂ successfully made inroads into Asia?
- Why was Route A₂ so successful and so richly elaborated, both demographically and mythologically? For it is along this route that Anatomically Modern Humans succeeded in conquering the entire world
- Why did the mythological elaboration along Route A₂ take the form it did?

6.4.3. 'Windows of opportunity'?

Current wisdom seeks the answer to this kind of questions by reference to 'windows of opportunity' at least partly dictated by such geophysical factors as fluctuations in sea-levels and climatic conditions, while stressing the intensive and transformative intra-Africa percolation of Anatomically Modern Humans during the first 100 ka after their emergence. Such 'windows of opportunity' are intuitively relevant for Route A₁. For on their first sally Out-of-Africa, Anatomically Modern Humans apparently confined their journey to a littoral tropical climate more or less familiar from East Africa. Presumably, Anatomically Modern Humans crossed significant sea straits only when the opportunity arose – notably, when glaciation heights at the poles produced low sea levels. Fig. 6.19 suggests as likely points in time for crossing the Bab al Mandhab and subsequently the sea separating Indonesia from New Guinea / Australia, the dates of c. 46, c. 52 and c. 68 ka BP. Forster (2004: 262) prefers the most recent windows; but this compresses the time scale unduly, and I intuitively prefer the least recent windows. However, Route A₂ is largely or entirely overland, across a considerable variety of (palaeo-)climatic zones. Therefore less mechanical, less natural factors need to be invoked to explain both the demographic and the mythological processes that characterise Route A₂.

²¹² Did it really become abortive? Or was it (as Oppenheimer suggests on the basis of painstaking genetic analysis augmented by recent insights from regional archaeologists) continue eastward, into the Pacific and even beyond (into the New World), in Upper Palaeolithic times? Is this perhaps the reason why we find some very archaic traits reminiscent of Pandora's Box, in South American isolated cultures?



420,000 years of ice core data from Vostok, Antarctica research station. Current period is at left. From bottom to top:

- Solar variation at 65°N due to Milankovitch cycles (connected to $\delta^{18}O$).
- $\delta^{18}O$ isotope of oxygen gas.
- Levels of methane (CH_4).
- Relative temperature (converted from δ^2H isotope in ice).
- Levels of carbon dioxide (CO_2).

Source: <http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/images/Vostok.jpg> / and: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/7/77/Vostok_420ky_4curves_insolation.jpg

Fig. 6.19. Recent geophysics research (Vostok ice core analysis on the Antarctic, going to the depth indicated) has yielded fairly consensual and reliable information on the global rise and fall of glaciation over the last few look

6.5. The Neanderthal connection

#6.2. THE NEANDERTHAL CONNECTION. In this connection, we may point to a cultural and demographic 'window of opportunity' that is recently being rescued from the realm of science fiction, and ushered into the realm of empirical science: *the Neanderthal connection*. In my above, largely Forster-derived, maps of the historical development of MtDNA Types in association with mythological NarComs, I have already taken this factor into account. For, c. 15 ka, around the time when Anatomically Modern Humans set out on Route A2 from East, South East, and Central Asia, Anatomically Modern Humans and Neanderthals lived side by side in the Levant. Despite geneticists' claims that they constitute two independent branches of *Homo sapiens* (cf. Scholz *et al.* 2000; Caramelli *et al.* 2003; Currat & Excoffier 2004) palaeoanthropologists point to intermediate forms. In recent decades (e.g. d'Errico *et al.* 1998; d'Errico *et al.* 2003) there has been increasing appreciation of the cultural

achievements of Neanderthals, ranging from burial to flute music, from flower symbolism to bear-cult ritual, from sculptural representation to stellar maps (van Binsbergen 2018: 299-283; van Binsbergen with Lacroix 2000), from clothing to articulate speech. In that connection, the question of possible cultural exchange between Anatomically Modern Humans and Neanderthals has been reconsidered.

In Europe and West Asia the Neanderthals's disappearance goes hand in hand with the expansion – into a cooling temperate climate – of Anatomically Modern Humans from subtropical environments – not exactly a climatic window of opportunity.

There is no consensus among specialists about what made Neanderthals disappear: genocide on the part of Anatomically Modern Humans, and inability to adapt to new environmental conditions, are among the scenarios proposed.

Mathematically, an only marginally lower reproduction rate as compared to Anatomically Modern Humans occupying the same ecological niches would already have been sufficient to lead to extinction if kept up through dozens of kiloyears.

Taphonomics is the branch of archaeology studying the systematic effects of the non-human environment on archaeologically significant remains (Binford 1981; Chase & Nowell 1998); it has severely criticised the above claims of Neanderthaloid cultural achievements, yet fails to entirely sweep away the emerging image of Neanderthals living up to their brain size (which was, on the average, larger than that of Anatomically Modern Humans!)

Regardless of the question of genetic interaction between Anatomically Modern Humans and Neanderthals, and regardless of popular and literary appropriation of the notion by New Age fantasists and by the novelist Jean Auel, yet it is almost inevitable that cultural exchange took place between these groups in the very long time span of these living side by side in West Asia.

Inevitably, modern researchers are Anatomically Modern Humans, and their chauvinism as such has persuaded some to think that any cultural exchange between Neanderthals and Anatomically Modern Humans, whatever its scope, could only have been a mere one-way process, with the apparently culturally deprived Neanderthals as sole beneficiaries. However, our attempt to construct a diachronic approach to world mythology seems to be better served by exploring the following points:

For over 100 ka, from c. 200 ka BP, Anatomically Modern Humans existed in the African continent without spreading into Asia, Europe, and further afield. During much the same time, Neanderthals in the narrower sense occupied West Asia and Europe, in such a way that Anatomically Modern Humans would have had to pass through Neanderthaloid territory if these Anatomically Modern Humans were to expand into West Asia, Europe, and further. During the relatively short period of their conviviality, Neanderthals and Anatomically Modern Humans lived side by side in Palestine, and intermediate phenotypical forms have been claimed to exist between the two human types. The earliest sally of Anatomically Modern Humans out of Africa took the southernmost route (Route A₁), into the Arabian peninsula, probably across the Bab al Mandhad at the southern end of the Red Sea (at the time only about 5 km of open sea),²¹³ thus merely skirting or even effectively avoiding

²¹³ At the Bab al Mandad ('Gate of Lamentation', Arabic) there was only 5 kms of open sea to cross, with a likely view of the shore waiting on the other side; somewhat later, having reached the by then insular Indonesia region, it was 70 km of open sea beyond Timor, crossing into New Guinea and Australia. The point is immaterial in our present con-

Neanderthal territory. All this leads to the following suggestion:

- Anatomically Modern Humans' expansion into Asia and Europe and further afield seems to have been effectively blocked by Neanderthaloids
- The gradual disappearance of Neanderthaloids, whatever its causes, opened a window of opportunity which was one of the factors facilitating Anatomically Modern Humans taking Route A2

Perhaps more was involved than an opening geographic frontier: perhaps, after the qualified dead-end of Route A1, the fact that Anatomically Modern Humans embarked on the eminently successful Route A2 was partly due to cultural, including mythological, contributions from Neanderthaloids living due north and northeast of Africa.

Even though our view of the Neanderthaloid cultural package is still dim and contested, triangulation within the framework of my model may suggest some possible specific contributions of Neanderthaloids to Anatomically Modern Humans in the mythological field; I think NarCom6 with shamanistic overtones is a possible candidate; so is NarCom6 ('escape from the Ogre').

Above, Fig. 6.3, we have also seen Neanderthaloid expressions that could be interpreted in terms of NarCom4 (Lightning Bird) and 17 (Speckledness and the Leopard), although these NarComs are likely to have a long history among Anatomically Modern Humans inside Africa *prior to* Anatomically Modern Humans and Neanderthaloids living side by side in the Levant. So it looks as if not all NarComs were Anatomically Modern Human inventions – as if part of the contents of Pandora's Box may have derived from non-Anatomically Modern Humans, – from Neanderthaloids! Of course, Neanderthaloids in a wider sense were not confined to Europe and West Asia but have also been attested in Africa, *e.g.* Broken Hill/Kabwe, Zambia, in the Lower Middle Palaeolithic.

The relationship between Anatomically Modern Humans, and Neanderthals, even though still unclear in details, from a comparative mythological point of view gives rise to further considerations. The region of their most recent and prolonged interaction is West Asia, ca. 40-20 ka BP. Now in regard of much more recent periods, this region strikes us as one of the principal areas of cultural transformation and innovation throughout the cultural history of Anatomically Modern Humans. In my reconstructions of the long-range history of individual mythemes especially NarComs, in the present book and throughout my voluminous recent work, I am often compelled to identify West Asia as the most likely region of origin of the particular mytheme in question, including the ideas underlying the Fire cult, but also male genital mutilation, megaliths, the skull complex of which headhunting is an important aspect, and others. Turning to the prominence of Pelasgians and the Pelasgian cultural package in my recent work, it is also in West Asia that these find their origin, with a striking impact on the Ancient Mediterranean (veneration of aniconic divine images, divination from the rustling of tree leaves, lack of recognition for the Hellenic celestial gods foremost Zeus, apiculture, veneration of the Primal Waters and of the Mother Goddess, etc.). Linguistically, this is the area suggested as cradle of such important phyla within the Eurasiatic macrophylum as Indo-European and Berber. West Asia (and not sub-Saharan Africa; Karst 1931; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) is also the region where we find the first attestations of Proto-Bantu. Major technologies such as agriculture and metallurgy have acquired

text, but these feats of Anatomically Modern Humans setting out for other continents than Africa, confirm their unmistakable capability of navigation (a point repeatedly made by Bednarik; also *cf.* van Binsbergen 2020).

visibility here at a very early stage and may even have originated here. *Is it too far-fetched to invoke the prolonged influence of Neanderthaloid culture in its dying phase as a decisive factor in this amazing exceptional position of West Asia?*

6.6. Links between specific genetic types arising in the course of the global spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, on the one hand, and the rise and spread of specific NarComs, on the other.



Fig. 6.20. Genetic associations of the Earth Diver motif (black-lined ellipse) according to Villems (2005)

One of the regulars of our Harvard Round Table was the Baltic geneticist Richard Villems. He discovered the association between the mythological motif of the Earth Diver, and particular genetic traits (Villems 2005). I believe that this approach can be extended to the NarComs I have discerned in the African cosmogonic material. Not pretending more than rudimentary competence in genetics, I will simply take Forster's mapping of the history of MtDNA Types, and suggest how this can be used as a possible clue to the history of specific NarComs. I will have to limit my demonstration to only a few NarComs, which already involves a considerable amount of work finding, world-wide, specific mythemes belonging to each NarCom, and tracing their global distribution.

The provisional results are encouraging, and the analysis may ultimately be extended to include all my NarComs. *The main merit of this genetic association of NarComs is that now our tentative situation of NarComs in space and time (hitherto based on a heterogeneous complex of considerations, from astronomy to modes-of-production analysis and hermeneutics), can now be matched with the (admittedly provisional and subject to huge error functions, yet far better substantiated) periodisation of Anatomically Modern Humans' genetic ramification in space and time, as estab-*

lished by geneticists. If the unfolding of world mythology is concomitant with the spread and diversification of Anatomically Modern Human genes, then we have, in principle, an instrument to situate specific myths (at least, NarComs) in space and time. Of course, Witzel has already done an important part of this task in his 2012 magnum opus – albeit that he distinguishes other mythemes than the aggregated ones that lie at the basis of my chs 5 and 6.

6.6.1. NarCom11 (the Primal Waters and the Flood), and MtDNA Type B (out of type N); type B emerged in northern Central Asia, c. 35 ka BP: Model A.

Our first attempt at association between a NarCom and a genetic type will be in connection with NarCom11: The Primal Waters and the Flood. In the 2005 Kyoto paper (chapter 5, above) I have discussed African Flood myths, stressing that, although relatively rare, they are far more numerous than is often assumed.²¹⁴ Since then, my data on Flood myths in Africa have considerably expanded since I had the benefit of Isaak (2005). I will first indicate the (tentative) global distribution (Fig. 6.21), then, in the next Figure, use Forster's (2004) data on Mitochondrial DNA Types to try and associate the NarCom distribution with a particular genetic type. Here I do not yet distinguish between

1. the most simple version involving the emerging of the world from Primal Waters in some cosmogonic connection, and/or the subsequent annihilation of that first cosmogonic order by its destructive reversal: the world's sinking back again into the Primal Waters,²¹⁵ and

²¹⁴ #6.4. PARALLELLISM BETWEEN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, AND THE NEW WORLD. I have repeated argued (most extensively in my 2012 book *Before the Presocratics*) the amazing parallelism between sub-Saharan Africa and the New World (especially North America), in such respects as female puberty rites, gaming and divination, basketry, fishing techniques, etc. My cluster analysis of linguistic macrophyla to be considered reflexes of *Borean (see Table 8.1, below) also brings out the relative closeness of the macrophyla (a) Austric, (b) the African languages (Afroasiatic, Khoisan, Nilosaharan and Nigercongo) and (c) Amerind – so another parallelism between sub-Saharan Africa, and the New World. However, despite mythical convergence (e.g. 'Wounded Knee' is a seminal concept in both – van Binsbergen 2012a:263 f., 2020c: 94; and so is the Pole into Heaven, and perhaps also the Lightning Bird), the two regions differ substantially in that Flood myths abound in the New World but are remarkably rare in sub-Saharan Africa (although not absent, as Frazer 1918 wrongly claimed). This contradiction promises a growth point of future insight, but I am still at a loss to pinpoint its meaning. Was it controversy over (future) Proto-Africans's rejection of Flood myths and of the attending cosmology of the Separation of Water and Land, that brought Proto-Africans to quit the common temporary homeland they shared with Proto-Americans somewhere in Central to East Asia ca. 15 ka BP? Of had that branching off, as brought out by statistical analysis, already taken place when Proto-Americans began to develop Flood myths (and perhaps transmit them to other Anatomically Modern Humans across the globe)? Can we perceive an implied division between

- 'Water People' (cherishing the Cosmology of the Separation of Land and Water, and later – since the Heavens are the Waters Above – the Separation of Heaven and Earth, and
- Fire or Sun people, where the veneration of Fire or the Sun may take the place of the veneration of the Waters?

The distinction is as yet not very conclusive, because it is not only Flood myths that abound in North America, but also sun cults. I have explored some of these pertinent themes in my (highly critical) monograph on Sun cults prompted by the centenary of the work of the arch-diffusionist Grafton Elliot Smith, but believe that further promising vistas are opening up here.

²¹⁵ I take it that this is the original meaning of the simple Flood myths: evocation of the abolition of the cosmogonic order by return to the Primal Waters. Based on the actors' conceptual thinking through of the meaning of reality and order in the context of a world image based on the Primal Waters producing land as the first reality, there is absolutely no need for any historical hydrographic catastrophe to trigger such a myth. Therefore,

2. the more elaborate version known from the Bible, SE Asia and Oceania, and typically composed of the sequence (a) human transgression (b) divine wrath (c) divine selection of a survivor, who is informed (d) the Flood (e) survival and reconsideration of the connection between Heaven and Earth (Ladder, Tower, Rainbow).

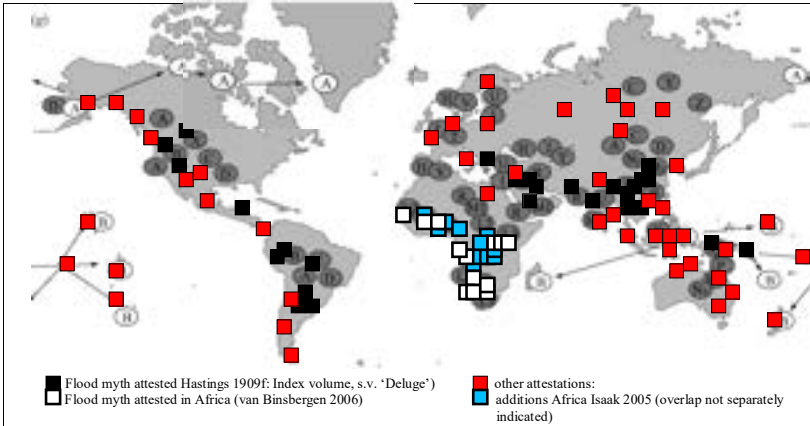


Fig. 6.21. Distribution data on NarComu (Primal Waters and the Flood)

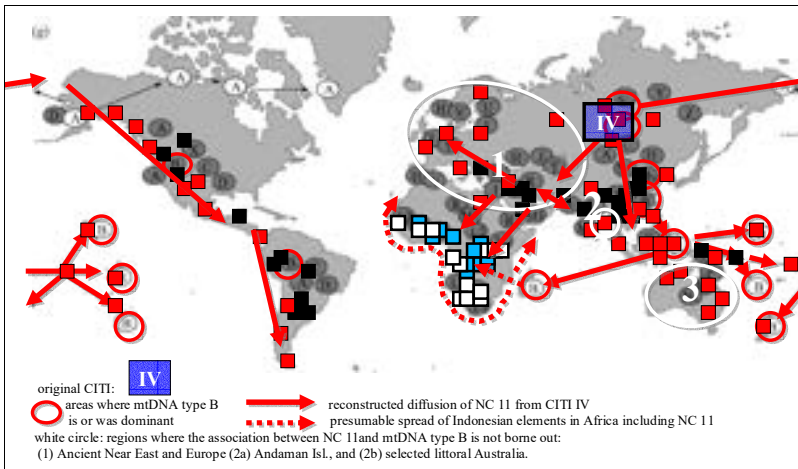


Fig. 6.22. Historical interpretation of the previous Figure

From Fig. 6.22, it is manifest that for most of the world distribution of NarComu, the latter is

northern Central Asia (see below), regardless of its hydrography (sea, lakes, rivers, deserts) is as good as any other place for such a NarCom to emerge. Of course, the elaborate Flood myth defined in the text, will have a different origin in time and place (CITI), and a different subsequent history.

closely associated with the distribution of Mitochondrial DNA Type B. This association holds for Central, East and South East Asia, throughout Oceania, and throughout the Americas. The association is amazingly consistent. This leads us to postulate that NarComu, indeed, emerged in the same time and place where Forster (2004) situates the emergence of mtDNA Type B: northern Central Asia, which will henceforth feature as our CITI IV. However, this is far from the whole story, for in significant other regions where NarComu has been attested, mtDNA Type B is inconspicuous or absent. In Fig. 6.22, the regions surrounded by a shaded white circle are those where hypothetical association Flood myth / MtDNA Type B is not borne out: (1) Europe and Ancient Near East, (2) Andaman Isl., and (3) selected littoral Australia. These exceptions may be explained

1. By secondary diffusion (from northern Central Asia to the Ancient Near East – Nuaḥ often given Central or East Asian connotations *cf.* Nü Wa 女娲 –, there greatly elaborated, then to Europe; to the Indo-Iranian domain either before or after the Ancient Near East; shamanism as vehicle of spread;
2. the Sunda Hypothesis;²¹⁶
3. (least convincing, and in fact incompatible with the theory so far) on the basis of the near-global distribution, we may suggest that the Flood myth was already part of Pandora's Box.

*So, as we come nearer to the present, the diffusion pattern of myths may more and more separate from that of detectable genetic markers.*²¹⁷ Above (section 6.1 point 8) we have identified this as the problem of contamination, already stating that it is particularly manifest in the context of Flood myths – to which have devoted separate studies, some included in the present book as chs 15 and 16.

6.6.2. Attempted reconstruction of the genetic association and global history of selected other NarComs

The case of NarComu is relatively exceptional, in that (due to the central position of the Flood myth in Judaeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, which have formed the cradle for North Atlantic scholarship; but also due to the near-ubiquity of Flood myths globally) there is a very considerable scholarly literature on this topic. Moreover, my work on progress on eth-

²¹⁶ #6.5. SECONDARY DIFFUSION AS CONTAMINATION. Such secondary diffusion is identical to the mechanism of contamination *cf.* van Binsbergen 2007c, 2019a and 2020c; and van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008, a where the Sunda westbound migration from Indonesia in early Holocene times is critically discussed as – in Oppenheimer's (1998) erroneous claim – the greatest single event of contamination in the world history of mythology; I exaggerate there with my counter-claim to the effect that the distribution of NarComu in South and West Asia, Africa, and Europe is the *only* major Sunda effect in the field of comparative mythology, *pace* Oppenheimer's (1998) far more extensive claims that the whole of West Asian mythology, including Genesis 1-11, is Sunda based. That Sunda, on the contrary, is in fact a formidable force to reckon with in comparative mythology, became clear over a decade later, when I wrote my 2020 book on Sunda; there comparative mythology furnishes the main empirical examples *in favour* of Oppenheimer's theory, which since has been augmented by Dick Read and Tauchmann.

²¹⁷ This was the point I had reached in my research in the Spring of 2006, when this paper was delivered at the Beijing conference. Meanwhile, I have done further work on the global distributions of NarComs, and I have considered Oppenheimer's (1998) 'Sunda' thesis in great detail in two later books. I am now considering rewriting this passage in the light of a modified Sunda thesis, but the argument is far too extensive and complex to be summarised here, and moreover would no longer faithfully reflect my contribution to the Beijing conference; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c.

nicity in Mediterranean proto-history has recently made me study the Biblical Flood myth, and the Nuaḥ-related chapters of Genesis, in great detail and from a long-range comparative perspective.

If such a relatively well-documented case already manifested tantalising complexities and analytical difficulties, we cannot expect the reconstruction of the global history of other NarComs, in association with genetic markers, to be any more easy. Yet I will now attempt three more such reconstructions, realising full well that – would we have more data – the relatively straightforward pattern of these reconstructions would soon fall apart. If anything, the following reconstructions are even more problematic and provisional than that of NarCom1, above. However, making the attempt is a precondition for any future critical discussion and improvement. So here goes.

6.6.3. The association of NarCom2 (The Re-connection of Heaven and Earth) with MtDNA Types R and M1 in the context of the Extended Fertile Crescent and the ‘Back-into-Africa’ movement

Note that this NarCom overlaps with that of the Spider (see below), who as a mythical figure may be credited with creating the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth (= NarCom2), but without the shamanic, subsequently royal, connotation yet. Again, I shall first present the tentative distribution (Fig. 6.23), followed by a tentative historical reconstruction in terms of the association of NarCom2 with a particular mtDNA Type.

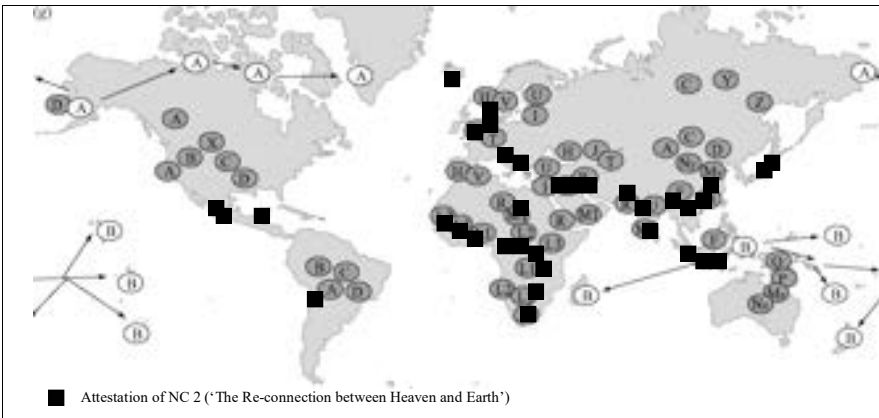


Fig. 6.23. Distribution of NarCom2: The Re-connection between Heaven and Earth.

The distribution clearly brings out the association between NarCom2 and MtDNA Types R and M1 in the context of the Extended Fertile Crescent and the ‘Back-into-Africa’ movement. This makes us situate the emergence of NarCom2 in the Proto-Neolithic context of West Asia: CITI VI. This explains the occurrence of NarCom2 not only in Neolithic and Bronze Age West Asia but also in sub-Saharan African cultures from the Neolithic onwards. However, again we are confronted with the problem that in several regions NarCom2 is attested without immediate association with Neolithic West Asia. For Europe, this cannot be a

problem because it is accepted that most of its cultures and languages ultimately derive from West Asia or have undergone very profound influence from there. For South and East Asia a similar argument may be used, with world religions (especially Buddhism and Islam) and proto-globalisation (Hellenism! the Gandhara style as its South Asian aftermath) conveying the mythical contents of NarCom2 to those regions, in ways that are historically attested. The claim of a West Asian influence on China and (via Korea) Japan since Neolithic and Bronze Age times remains a moot point, for which there is however sufficient support in scholarship to allow us to pass over this point here. Our greatest puzzle is the attestation of NarCom2 in Meso and South America, and, frankly, I cannot resist the temptation²¹⁸ to appeal here to transcontinental influences, either from East Asia across the Pacific, or from West Africa across the Atlantic.

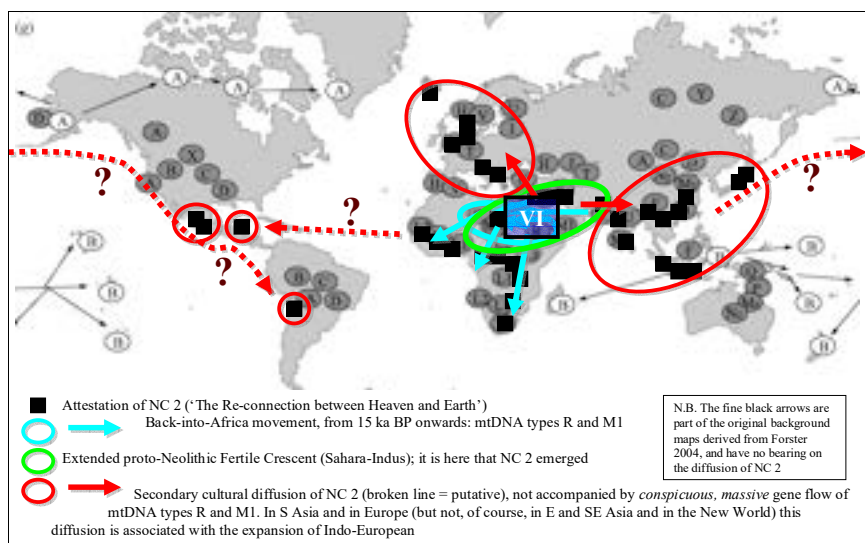


Fig. 6.24. Historical reconstruction of NarCom2 highlighting MtDNA Types R and M1

6.6.4. The association of NarCom15 ('The Spider [and Feminine Arts]') with MtDNA Type L (L1, L2, L3): Pandora's Box, subsequently transformed in the (Proto-)Neolithic context of the Extended Fertile Crescent

In an earlier version of my argument I simply conflated all mythical attestations involving spiders, regardless of their association with the feminine arts of not. I also ignored the use of Spider imagery in magic, omens and taboos. On reconsideration, and with a few additional attestations, a more complete and detailed picture emerges. I now propose to distinguish between the following manifestations of the Spider motif.²¹⁹ Our discussion in this chapter

²¹⁸ Like the pioneer anthropologist Tylor (1879, 1896), or the prominent archaeologist Heine-Geldern – not to mention recent Afrocentrists like van Sertima; but see Ortiz de Montellano 2000 and Amselle 2001 for a devastating mainstream anthropological critique of such transcontinentalism.

²¹⁹ Attestations of the Spider mythological motif as shown in the Figures in this section include the following.

is provisional; we shall come back to the Spider Narcom in ch. 12, below.

1. NarCom_{15a}: Spider as significant god usually Supreme Being or Creator, often with solar connotations
2. NarCom_{15c}: Spider motif associated with goddesses that do not have (any longer?) the status of Supreme Being or Creator, and that are emphasised to be associated with the feminine arts of spinning and weaving, and warfare (!)
3. the Spider prominent in the domain of magic, omens and taboos, but (no longer?) without articulate mythical elaboration

Once more Native Americans appear to have retained very ancient traits, of Pandora's Box and Route A1, across c. 80 ka.

We note however the disturbing absence of NarCom_{15a} attestations for most of Eurasia. Is this compatible with the idea that NarCom_{15a} was in Pandora's Box? It would be compatible, if we may assume that, distributed among the literate post-Neolithic civilisations of Eurasia and probably originating there, NarCom_{15b} (which both narrows down, and elaborates, the Spider theme in the direction of *the feminine arts of spinning and weaving*) has supplanted NarCom_{15a}, from c. 6 ka BP onwards. Such replacement is also suggested by 15c, where 15a has been relegated to the obscure, peripheral domain of magic, far from a society's central religious representations. If this line or argument is correct, more attestations of NarCom_{15a} should be expected from peripheral Eurasian cultures – folklorists can help us out here.

The post-Neolithic transformation of NarCom_{15a} towards feminine arts (NarCom_{15c}) reflects widespread masculinisation associated with the package of writing, the state, organised religion and science; solar Supreme goddesses are replaced by male ones (or rather, transmogrified into, *e.g.* Neith > Re'), their once all-powerful female originals being relegated to the weaving

Banks Isl., Melanesia: death was introduced by the Spider Creator spirit, Marawa (Cotterell 1989: 151). Enki (the Water god) pursues his daughters incestuously, and his wife Nimhursage retrieves Enki's semen from the body of Uttu the Spider goddess of weaving, 'whom the god had used and left' (Cotterell 1989: 86); so it looks as if Uttu is not only the Sun but also the goddess of weaving. This is an ancient thought, which we encounter from Japan to sub-Saharan Africa: the Sun is a weaver, hence female. Probably this is also why fly, midge *etc.* are sacred in the Ancient Near East including Egypt: they reflect the Sun / Rainbow, and thus the Supreme Deity. In Gilbert Isl., Micronesia, Oceania, Nareau is the Spider Lord, Creator deity (Cotterell 1989: 133); he made Na Atibun, from his spine grew the sacred Tree where all mankind came from; the people scattered falling from this tree (this is the widespread theme of the Confusion of Nations, usually associated with the Tower motif – but the tree motif is comparable; luminaries, sky *etc.* were made from Na Atibu's body parts (Cotterell 1989: 224; another common theme, *cf.* Babylonia, Masai); there was Nareau the Older (the Spider spirit) and also Nareau the Younger (Cotterell 1989: 242). Moving from Oceania to sub-Saharan Africa, Leza (Zambia) departs to Heaven on a Spider's web (Cotterell 1989: 89). But back to Oceania we have: Marawa: Melanesian Spider spirit (Cotterell 1989: 219). And in Melanesian Nauru (west of Gilbert Islands): the primal Spider Areop-enap, which creates Heaven and Earth from shell with the assistance of insects (Willis 1994: 294). Ogun (war god Yoruba) climbs down from Heaven on a Spider's web before creation (Cotterell 1989: 143). The spider of Cingle de la Mola Remigia, Gasulla cañon, Castellon, Spain: Levant Mesolithic art (Bandi & Maringer 1952: 139; *cf.* Fig. 3 above). Melanesian Spider spirit 151; Spider woman 134, 240 (Cotterell 1989: index). Also Hastings *et al.* 1908-1921: Index volume. *Spider woman among the Navajo*; here the spider is not the Sun god but facilitates, for two heroic sons, their access to the Sun god; (Cotterell 1989: 134); Spider woman Naste Etsan (a palindrome! suggestive of a literate origin? of the West African / Manjacos Nasin Batsi, 'Sky King?' – there are other indications of Native American – West African continuities across the Atlantic, *cf.* van Binsbergen 2021c: 182f) was the benevolent god of the Navajo (Cotterell 1989: 240). The Spider Inkтоми appears as culture hero and Trickster in parts of the N. American prairie (Willis 1994: 227). The Spider is an ancient Australian icon (Cotterell 1989: 58; Stubbs 1978). Below, in Part III, such lists of attestations are to be presented in a detailed table of their own; that this routine is not followed here shows the comparatively older nature of the present chapter.

room under male domination. Fig. 26 offers the historical reconstruction. *We notice how Native Americans have retained very ancient traits, of Pandora's Box and Route A, across 80 ka*

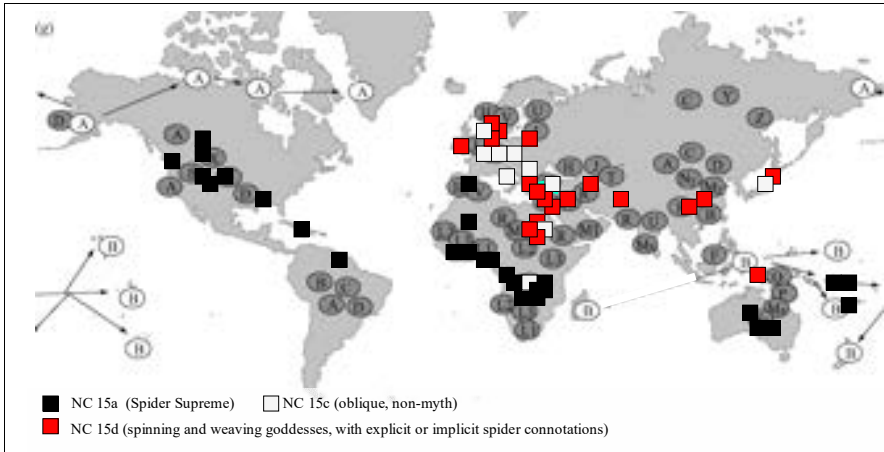


Fig. 6.25. Distribution of variants of NarCom5 (The Spider – and feminine arts)

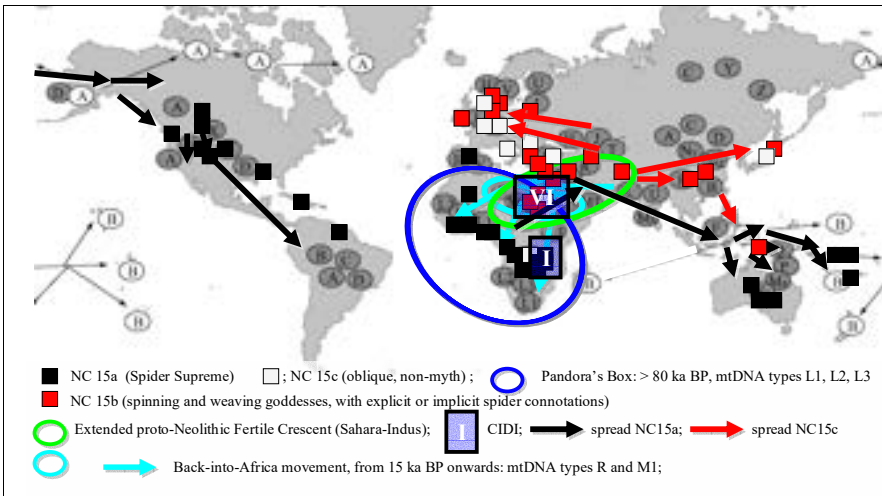


Fig. 6.26. Historical reconstruction of NarCom5, highlighting MtDNA Types L1, L2, L3, as well as those dominating the Neolithic context of the Extended Fertile Crescent.

6.6.5. Rescue from the Ogre (NarCom6)

We shall now turn to the Ogre NarCom-6, and again a fuller discussion will be offered in a separate chapter II, below. In the first stage of this project (2005),²²⁰ when I worked through the data on cosmogonic myths attested in sub-Saharan Africa in historical times, I was impressed by what seemed a NarCom in its own right: 'the rescue from the Ogre'. In its essential form, in ogre narratives:

- a protagonist
- is swallowed
- by a much larger enemy (typically designated 'ogre') ,
- and subsequently the protagonist is rescued from inside that enemy.

Often the protagonist effects the rescue, not only of himself, but also of others similarly imprisoned. He is often a young hero, accompanied by his mother whose lover he may turn out to be. The protagonist may not originally be imprisoned himself but he may accept that condition so as to liberate others – remotely, the Christian theology of Redemption by Christ is a case in point. Sometimes no rescue is effected.

I believed to be able trace the historical development of this motif. The following discussion will show that today I am no longer so confident.

Already at an early stage did I realise that the story could be considered a sophisticated metaphor of all cosmogony, if cosmogony is conceived as the liberation of Being from the state of non-Being (cf. Endymion's eternal sleep in a cave; cf. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.57 f.). An initial 'chaos' invoked in many cosmogonies all over the world (Greek Chaos; Nordic Ginnungagap, etc.). The initial chaos often appears as 'the Primal Waters', is then hardly distinguishable from the Ogre in a concrete, personified sense. By the same token, the annihilation of Being (in deluge, or some other cosmic disaster) seems equivalent to being swallowed by the Ogre.

The organic body within which imprisonment is to be situated, may be replaced by

- a cave (like the one where 天照 Amaterasu the hidden Sun goddess was hiding – Japan; or the one where Proteus hid Helena, sending a substitute to Troy...;²²¹ or the cave from which the Zuni Pueblo culture hero Kanahuhu ushered his people to the surface of the earth),
- a house (like, among the Navajo, the liberation of the game animals from the house of Crow, the black god)
- a prison (like Minos's labyrinth, from which Daedalus and Icarus rescue themselves),
- the Underworld,
- a grave.

The equation of the Ogre with the Primal Waters brings us back to another fundamental cosmogonic mytheme, that of the Separation of Land and Water. If the emergence of Land is the fundamental act of creation, then, of course, the Ogre is equivalent to the Primal Waters, from which protagonists (like Thor and Hymir in Nordic European myth; or Maui in Maori myth, New Zealand, and elsewhere in

²²⁰ Many of the current themes and distributions are also extensively discussed in my book on Sunda, 2020c.

²²¹ Stesichorus fragment 16 (Gaisford 1823); Herodotus, *Historiae*, II, 112 f.; Euripides, *Helena*.

Polynesia)²²² rescues the land by fishing it up. What Thor and Hymir actually bring up is not so much land, but the World Snake – but that is not so very different, once we remember that in many myths, with wide global distribution, the world is made from the fragmented body of the initial Water Monster (which is really a personification of the Primal Waters): Tiamat (Babylonia), Leviathan (Ancient Israel), Ymir (Nordic Europe), Vrtra (South Asia), Pan Ku 盤古 (Southern China) – or the South Asian Maruts (‘cloud riders’), considered the fragments of an embryo that was initially supposed to remain long enough in his mother’s womb (a hundred years) so as to become greater than Indra (Cotterell 1989: 219). Moreover, there is, at least in Indo-European, the etymological near-identity between ‘world’ and ‘snake’, to be discussed elsewhere in this book.

The cosmogonic connotations of the Primal Waters may doubly combine with the L theme, in that a box-like vessel is imagined in which (like from an artificial, secondary Cosmic Egg), the Flood hero rescues himself and others from the Ogre of annihilation: the Ark, the Pumpkin (in the Southern Chinese version of Nü Wa 女媧 and Fu Xi 伏羲 as Flood heroes). Primal Waters, Giants and Flood mythemes further proliferate in a Talmudic story, where, during the Flood, the giant Og ride on the Ark and is fed by Noah. Og was ultimately slain by Moses (Aunt Naomi / Landa 1919).

In addition to these cosmogonic/cosmoclastic conditions, other important associations come to mind in connection with the ‘rescue from the Ogre’ motif. Any normal birth from a maternal body is a delivery similar to ‘being rescued from the Ogre’ – as infantile and pathological adult fantasies often indicate; thwarted or delayed birth is then another application of the ‘rescue from the Ogre’ theme. Myths from Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and from Oceania sketch the initial state of constant copulation between Heaven and Earth, – the moment of creation consists in the two lovers being prised apart or the male partner emasculated, which (in the Greek and Oceanian versions) finally also allows the second generation of deities, sired by Heaven, to leave their imprisonment in Earth’s womb.²²³ Miraculous births, e.g. the ‘leg child variant’²²⁴ (Dionysus) or Athena’s, inevitably combine initial imprisonment in a body with subsequent rescue – very similar to the Ogre scheme, especially in that Zeus in both cases first swallows the mother – in imitation of his own father, Cronus, who used to swallow his offspring until Zeus escaped that fate by his mother’s ruse (cf. Egyptian Nut daily swallowing her child, the Sun).

The Underworld as the dwelling of the deceased is similar to the Ogre’s belly, and very rarely does a protagonist effect a rescue from this place – the motif of Orpheus’s, Odysseus’s Inanna’s, and Jesus’s descent into hell, of the first couple Izanami and Izanagi according to Japanese mythology (the cosmogonic goddess Izanami dies as a result of burns sustained when giving birth to Fire, and crosses the river that forms the boundary of the Underworld – resenting that her sibling and spouse Izanagi sees her in that condition), etc.

In the above cases of Zeus and Nut there is only virtual or symbolic eating, and the emphasis is on confinement and liberation; however, the latter notions may give way to a cannibalistic motif stressing true anthropophagy

The imprisonment may be merely spatial, no longer corporal, so that it becomes imprisonment in a room (e.g. Isis’s and Amaterasu’s weaving chamber, cf. Penelope’s; Bluebeard’s room...)

²²² E.g.: The Polynesian myth of Tangaroa and Turi-a-faumea, who fished the sea monster Rogo-tumu-here up and hacked it to pieces, after it had swallowed Tangaroa’s daughter-in-law [elsewhere named as Hina-a-rauriki].

²²³ I have discussed this theme of ‘Heaven and Earth locked in prolonged embrace until disrupted’ at length in my *Sunda* book (2020, with references), where also resulting the East-West parallels (between Oceania and the western Old World) receive adequate attention.

²²⁴ The subject of a separate chapter below, 13.

Close to the cosmogonic notion of the liberation of Being is that of the Cosmic Egg, in which all potentialities are contained, only to be released at Creation; and the Egg may be replaced by other sealed carriers of generation, such as a seed, a nut, *etc.*

The Cosmic Egg theme may shed its cosmogonic connotations, merely retaining the idea of contained potentialities – and then it becomes the magic box locked with unrevealed contents (Pandora’s – her box was initially a vase),²²⁵ or a coffer or coffin like the one Seth tricked his hated brother Osiris into, St Patrick who lures a snake (no doubt, the Rainbow Snake *i.e.* Adversary!) into a box and drowns it, or the wind god Aeolus’s bag full of winds

The cosmogonic aspects of the Ogre motif may merge with the idea that it is from inside the Earth, from the Underworld, that all Being originates, and then we have arrived at the cosmogonic motif ‘From the Earth’.

Clearly, the Ogre motif is very complex. It can be said to form a ‘poor men’s’ or bowdlerised version of several of the most fundamental myths of humankind. Normally we would prefer to classify these various implied myths under a number of clearly distinct NarComs, but here they turn out to intersect and proliferate in ways that bring out the limitations of all classification, especially in comparative mythology. Considering the complexity and their implication of so many different NarComs, it is probably not very useful to try and map out the distribution of the Ogre motif: we never now which aspect is stressed, and which underlying NarComs may be implied.

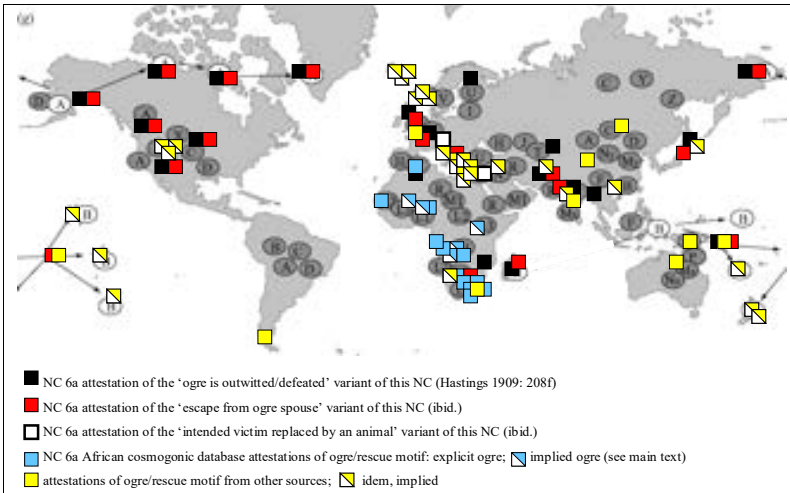


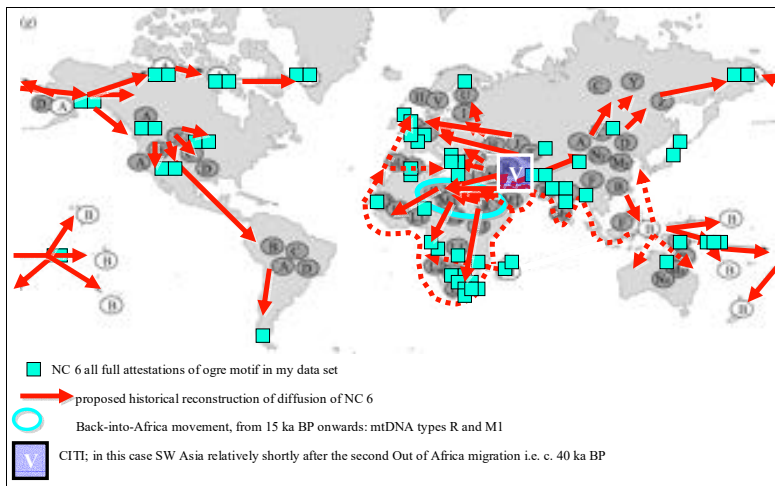
Fig. 6.27. Distribution of various types of NarCom6: Rescue from the Ogre.

The unsatisfactory results of an earlier attempt of mine to map out the distribution of the Ogre NarCom (Beijing 2006) are probably due, not so much to a deficient data base (although there is that problem, too), but to the multidimensionality and secondary nature of the Ogre NarCom.

²²⁵ Hesiod, *Opera et Dies*, 60-105. Pandora’s Box was originally reputed to contain all the evil that could befall humankind, but I have deliberately and ironically twisted the original meaning by applying the concept to the shared cultural including mythological heritage which Anatomically Modern Humans developed inside Africa 200-80 ka BP, and with which they subsequently set out to conquer the other continents.

Fig. 6.27 specifies what major sources were at my disposal for the analysis of the ‘Ogre’ NarCom6; a more completely referenced treatment may be found in ch. 11 below

After discarding those cases where the ‘Ogre’ motif is merely implied (see legend), and after lumping the remaining cases in one single category (once more, this kind of comparative mythology thrives by simplification, which is also its greatest defect), we are ready to try and reconstruct the historical pattern, if possible in association with a genetic type. The result is Fig. 6.28:



NarCom6 is clearly transmitted to NE Asia, Oceania, and N/S America in combination with MtDNA Types A and B (both!). These two types only emerge in Central Asia c. 40 ka BP, both from type N. The fact that both types A and B are capable of transmitting NarCom6 into NE Asia, Oceania, and N/S America suggests that in fact NarCom6 was already present in the common ancestor of types A and B, notably N. It is MtDNA Types N and M that carried the contents of Pandora’s Box out of Africa. Subsequently, types M and N were widely distributed in E and SE Asia, New Guinea and Australia.

Fig. 6.28. Historical reconstruction of NarCom6: Rescue from the Ogre.²²⁶

The Khoisan attestations are likely to have a Central Asian rather than pre Out of Africa background; but even so they may echo very ancient motifs carried out of Africa by humans carrying MtDNA Type N – so in principle they may still reflect pre Out of Africa motifs, *i.e.* the contents of Pandora’s Box. Therefore, NarCom6, however heterogeneous in its manifestations in historical times, must be considered to be extremely old (at least 40 ka), which is when we can trace it to Central Asia; we still have to ascertain whether NarCom6 emerged at that moment in Central Asia, or have an even earlier history, in West Asia or in Africa, as part of Pandora’s Box.²²⁷

²²⁶ Below follows a separate and more recent chapter on the Ogre mytheme in its own right. It proved to be impossible to entirely update the various chapters in terms of cross-connections between the chapters. I trust that this stimulating job may be left to the reader.

²²⁷ The details of the distribution of NarCom6 have a bearing on the Sunda model, which however I cannot discuss in our present scope of this chapter; *cf.* van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen 2020c, and ch.

To these contradictory implications in the sub-Saharan African attestations we must add the possible influence of the Back-into-Africa migration, of which the Khoisan cases offer clear examples; but so do the Masai. Moreover, nearly all other African attestations are in the Nigercongo realm, which I consider permeated with Back-into-Africa elements.

The Dogon attestation of NarCom6 is interesting. Willis has identified that particular (*grosso modo* northerly) section of the Nigercongo speakers who do not belong to the Bantu-speaking sub-family, as particularly rich in elaborate and sophisticated mythologies that, he says, rival those of West Asia and Ancient Europe. The Dogon constitute examples of the workings of NarCom6 in sub-Saharan Africa, and they remain so, even when we compensate for the scholarly critique that Griaule and Dieterlen's accounts of the Dogon have elicited (*cf.* van Beek 1992). I am inclined to see this section of non-Bantu Nigercongo speakers as largely a manifestation of 'Back-into-Africa' effects, and do not consider the Ogre element here as a genuine and reliable indication of pre Out of Africa mythology.

By the same token, the many attestations of NarCom6 from among Bantu speakers I would consider a Back into Africa effect rather than a revelation of pre Out of Africa mythology. All attestations, even those in the interior, are conveniently situated on the hypothetical routes of Sunda expansion.

An important consideration in my decision to deny NarCom6 inclusion in Pandora's Box is given in the above introduction to this NarCom. Clearly, the Ogre theme is complex, contradictory, multidimensional, and secondary rather than original. It is not a NarCom in its own right, but the simplified, bowdlerised, 'poor man's' echo of purer and more original NarComs. One could imagine that such was the form in which cosmogonic myths, featuring the Primal Waters or the Origin of Being from inside the Earth, were cast in a simplified form suitable for the consumption by non-initiates or neophytes.

Overlooking the evidence and the above chain of considerations, I propose to situate the origin of NarCom6 in West to Central Asia, c. 40 ka BP, in the context of MtDNA Type N, where it was a derivative from more fundamental NarComs, notably those of 'the Primal Waters' (= NarCom ...) and of 'the Earth' (= NarCom ...), both in Pandora's Box. With this great antiquity, and its close affinity with fundamental NarComs which themselves did originate from Pandora's Box, it stands to reason the NarCom6 followed the subsequent expansion of Anatomically Modern Humans. Thus this NarCom6 ramified all of Eurasia, where it can be found either as implied or in full form featuring a literal Ogre. Expansion into NE and SE Asia, the Americas, and finally Oceania was largely due to the spread of Anatomically Modern Humans specifically carrying MtDNA Types A and B (which developed out of type N). Spread into Northern and sub-Saharan Africa was partly (perhaps largely) due to the Back-into-Africa migration from Central and West Asia; but, throughout Africa, also with the added effect of the Sunda migration. The latter may also have helped, to some extent, to disseminate NarCom6 in North Africa, Western Europe (especially Nordic Europe), and the Eastern Mediterranean especially the Aegean.

6.6.6. Concluding on Narrative Complexes

Thus we have seen how for a few selected NarComs their situation in space and time becomes more transparent once we make the association with the differentiation of MtDNA genetic types, as recently established by molecular genetics. However, such association also brings out the limitation of our

ii, below.

model, and the – sometimes massive – influence of *contamination* as a non-systematic factor upsetting the neat systematics of the model. Against this background, let us now see what this genetic perspective does to our proposed pattern of Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation.

6.7. Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITIs)

Already in this model's earlier version it was clear that the unfolding of world mythology is *not* a gradual process evenly spaced out along the migration routes of Anatomically Modern Humans. On the contrary, the progression is spasmodic and punctuated at certain identifiable points: a limited number of Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI) can be discerned, in which specific new NarComs emerge, in a far from mechanical process. The overall pattern is represented in Table 6.2. This table tentatively situates CITIs in space and time, indicates for each particular CITI which specific NarComs apparently find their origin there, tentatively indicates the MtDNA Type apparently associated with that CITI, proposes the specific trigger mechanisms that may help to explain the rise of each CITI from its historic context, and tentatively indicates the linguistic groups identified with each CITI.

Some of these CITI may be associated with the emergence of new modes of production (*e.g.* CITI VI, with the emergence of Neolithic food production).

By and large, these CITIs coincide with the contexts in which significant new linguistic families have arisen (among others, Proto-Khoisan, Proto-[Dene-]Sinocaucasian, and Proto-(Mega-)Nostratic (Kaiser & Shevoroshkin 1988), and the further differentiation of the latter into, among others, Proto-Indo-European, Proto-Afroasiatic, Proto-Nigercongo, and Proto-Nilosaharan. (Of course, the latter three languages together with Khoisan sum up the language map of Africa in historical times.)

Earlier, I believed that my method allowed me to identify only three NarComs in Pandora's Box: NarCom10 the Earth, NarCom4 the Lightning Bird (and its Cosmic Egg), and the NarCom13 Rainbow. Further attempts to establish the specific global distribution of each NarCom, now lead me to identify three more NarComs as probably having belonged to the original mythological package with which Anatomically Modern Humans started out on the Out-of-Africa exodus: NarCom9. The Moon, NarCom12. From Under the Tree, and NarCom15 (the Spider) – although the latter was much redefined towards the feminine arts, in the Proto-Neolithic.

A dramatic further step, but which I am not ready yet to take, would be to try and model in detail how the various NarComs are not just innovations emerging and existing detachedly side by side, but how some of them may be argued to be systematic transformations of certain others, particularly of the NarComs that were already available in Pandora's Box. For some NarComs this would not be so difficult, for instance, if we see NarCom2 'The re-connection of Heaven and Earth (after separation)' become the most prominent NarCom in mythologies throughout the Old World from the Proto-Neolithic onwards, we might admit that prototypes of such a connection have been available, throughout, in some of the NarComs among the extended set we now discern in Pandora's Box: Lightning, the Tree, the Rainbow, and the Spider, are all pressed into service as cosmological imagery of the connection of Heaven and Earth, even though they were much older, and initially independent from NarCom2, and even if a developed notion of Heaven as a distinct realm in its own right, may be argued to be relatively late (I take it to be a fruit of NarCom6: shamanism (see table 6.2). By the same token, NarCom6 (Escape from the Ogre) – which is an image

of birth/coming-into-being, but also of rebirth *i.e.* escaping death and burial – could be seen as a transformation of NarCom10 (The Earth). And so could NarCom8 (The Stones),²²⁸ so much so that I did not even bother to reserve a separate place for NarCom8 in Table 2.

The most recent of these CITIs are the ones connected with Neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry. Here the NarCom of 'The Re-connection of Heaven and Earth' emerged (among others), whose richly elaborated ramifications (in such themes as creation, kingship, salvation, human conception and birth, the origin of death, *etc.*), often with shamanistic overtones borrowed from NarCom6, are found – *cf.* extensive tables in van Binsbergen *n.d.*, reproduced here as ch. 10 – all over the Ancient Near East including Ancient Egypt, the Indus valley, China, Ancient Europe, and (as a result of the 'Back-into-Africa' movement) much of Africa.

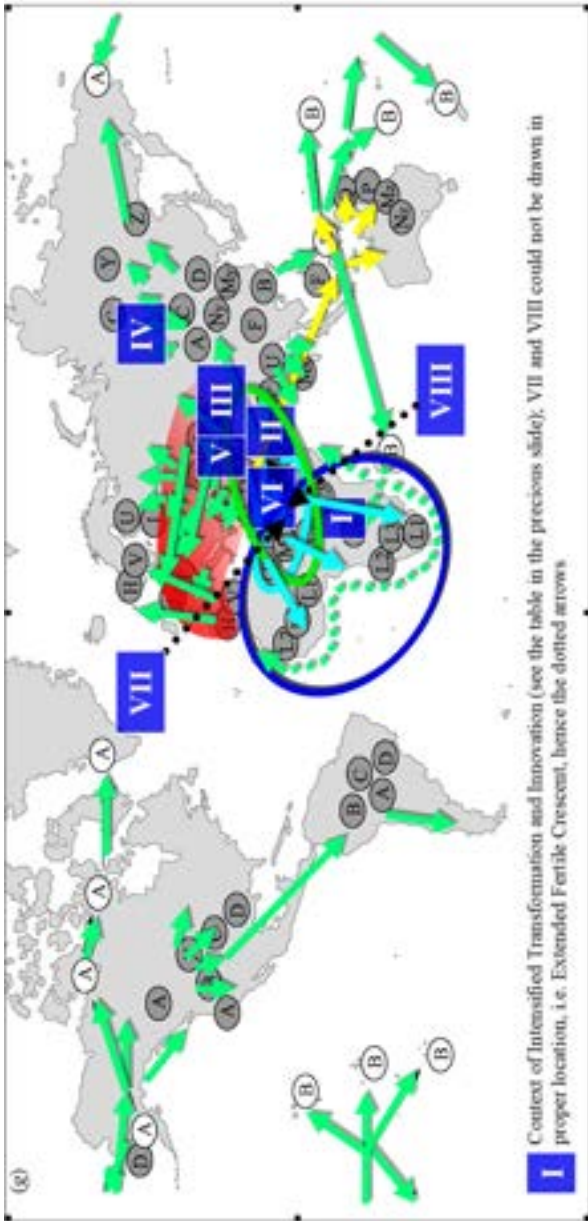
As a result, the African continent today combines (and I shall come back to this point below) a genetically highly diverse and relatively ancient Anatomically Modern Human population with, largely, a relatively recent mythology that is in striking continuity (pace Witzel 2001) with the rest of the Old World.



source: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/world/images/s13p4.jpg>, withthanks

Fig. 6.29. Depiction of the Japanese cosmogonic myth featuring Izanami and Izanagi.

²²⁸ NarCom8, The Stones, is treated only cursorily in the present book, but received much attention in my 2021 book *Sangoma Science*.



the symbols used are in line with preceding diagrams, and explained there

Fig. 6.30. Synthesis: Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation in the history of

mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans

CONTEXTS OF INTENSIFIED TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION (CITI)		Narrative Complex (no. and description)	MtDNA Type of AMH community launching this Narrative Complex	Proposed trigger (much further reflection needed)	tentative linguistic context
IN TIME	in space				
i. Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic 80,000 BP and earlier	Sub-Saharan Africa	'Pandora's Box': the original mythical package, perhaps containing: 4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg) 9. The Moon 10. The Earth as primary (to was subsequently revised towards cattle, in the Neolithic) 12. From under the Tree 13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake 15. The Spider (and the feminine arts, a subsequent revision in the Proto-Neolithic)	L (L1, L2, L3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans as a biological mutation? Africa's soil carrying capacity, even for hunting and collecting, is the lowest in the world, mainly due to geological conditions that pre-date the appearance of humans by hundreds of millions of years the emergence of myth as constitutive of a new type of human community: self-reflective, coherent, communicating, engaging in hunting and collecting, and creating coherence, through the narrative and ritual management of symbols, leading to articulate language if this last point is plausible, then the earliest phase in the overall process is in itself myth-driven	Proto-Human
ii. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 70,000 BP, Route A	West or South Asia	5. The Mantis	N and/or M	venturing along the indian ocean coast from africa to se asia is likely to have produced new challenges and to have given access to new opportunities, e.g. new and more sophisticated tools	Proto-Khoisan
iii. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 40,000 BP, Route B	W or C Asia	16. Shamanism, bones	N (H, A, B)	shamanism is associated with detailed naked-eye astronomy which was an asset to hunters (orientation away from home, seasonality) even before it became an asset to agriculturalists. more important probably was that the vertical worldview of shamanism, with the shaman's privileged (belief of) travelling along the celestial axis to Underworld and Upper World, created (the idea of) a politico-religious social hierarchy on which more effective forms of socio-political organisation could be based. one of the triggers may have been neanderthaloid influence in sw asia	proto[-Dene-]Sinocaucasian?
iv. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 35,000 BP, Route B	C N Asia	11. The Primal Waters and the Flood	B (out of N)	perhaps a historical inundation catastrophe? (temperatures had been slowly declining since ca. 150 ka bp therefore rise of sea level due to melting polar caps (as in early holocene, 10 ka bp) not applicable); perhaps here again neanderthal influence?	?
v. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 35,000 BP, Route B	West Asia?	6. Escape from the Ogre	weak association with B and A	Neanderthaloid influence?	?

vi. Proto-Neolithic c. 10,000 BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	2. The Connection between Heaven and Earth (after separation) 19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and her Son/lover	R and Mt	well-established neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; neolithic arts and crafts such as pottery, spinning, weaving; male ascendance; complex society, the emergence of writing, the state, organised religion, and science; incipient metallurgy	Proto-(Mega-)Nostratic
VII. Neolithic or Bronze Age c. 5,000 BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	7. From the Mouth	too recent and too limited in scope to be interpreted in terms of MtDNA Type	masculinisation and mythical 'hysterical displacement' of procreative functions, from groin to mouth and head – transcendentalism as triggered by writing, the state, organised priesthood, and science	(Proto-)Afroasiatic, Indo-European, Nigercongo (>Bantu), Nilosaharan
VIII. Neolithic to Iron Age c. 3,000 BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	14. Fundamental Duality	?	?	(AA and IE, cf. gender in language)

Table 6.3. Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITIs) in the history of world mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH): Their tentative situation in space and time, the Narrative Complexes emerging in each CITI, the Mitochondrial DNA Types associated with each CITI, possible trigger mechanisms for each CITI, and possible association between each CITI and major linguistic families.

6.8. Revision of the theory as compared to earlier versions



Fig. 6.31.a, b, c. Discarded (2005, left and centre, see ch. 5 above) and presently proposed model (right, see Fig. 6.30)

Further reflection on the contradictory empirical implications of my 2005 model, and additional (even though, admittedly, still cursory) perusal of the genetic and archaeological literature, now leads to extensive revision. Route A has now been differentiated into A₁ and A₂, c. 15 ka apart and fundamentally different: A₁ to Australia and New Guinea, then abortive; A₂ to C. Asia, the rest of Asia, and the rest of the world, and continued till today. The neat one-dimensional hairpin line has been replaced by a much more complex set of vectors, but ultimately, the original idea of eastbound movement out of Africa, followed by westbound movement back into Africa, has been retained for A₂. The hairpin curve is not so conspicuous anymore, the path is somewhat fuzzier and broader, and the turning point now

is supposed to lie in C Asia instead of SE Asia (as in the original version), but the basic outline of the model has survived, still implying massive Asian contributions to latter-day African mythologies.

Initially I restricted the Pre-Out-of-Africa mythological package to very few elements, between which a narrow logical connection could be argued, the Threesome (Trinity):

- The Earth,
- the Lightning Bird (and its Cosmic Egg²²⁹)/Rain,
- and the latter's adversary, the Cosmic / Rainbow Snake

Further scrutiny and adduction of intercontinental comparative material suggests that Pandora's Box may be considered as more extensive and more heterogeneous, also comprising:

- From under the Tree
- The Moon
- The Spider

Another correction is that the time scale of the Out-of-Africa migration, turns out to be substantially compressed (from 140 ka to 80 ka; this was already been corrected in the version of ch 5 included in the present book), as is the temporal distance between Route A and B (from 100 ka to a mere 15 ka)

'The Mantis', which I initially considered a very recent theme and situated at the moment of Khoisan immigration into Africa from West Asia (10 ka BP), is relegated to a position of high antiquity, as part of Route A2.

'The Primal Waters and the Flood' could be more precisely and convincingly situated in time and space (Central Northern Asia, 35 ka BP), revealing a much older, and more northerly origin.²³⁰

Also, the link between detailed genetic history of Anatomically Modern Humans, and the history of specific NarComs (= coherent groups of mythemes) has now become more clear and convincing – also in its limitations.

In the process, the contents of Pandora's Box, inside the African continent, has substantially increased. This implies a dramatic increase of the proposed impact of Pre-Out-of-Africa material upon world mythology.

By the same token, I was able to discard my initial impression that African mythologies in historical times are merely innovations and transformations, made in Asia, of the original contents of Pandora's Box – which risked to place Africa, once more, in a position of receptive dependence. In the version of my model as offered in the present chapter 6, already six out of twenty NarComs in latter-day African cosmogonic mythologies were in Pandora's Box, this suggests that at least their latter-day presence in sub-Saharan Africa is partly due to retention on African soil, and partly to the 'Back into Africa' migration from Asia.

These changes led to new formulations, in space and time, of specific CITIs in the history of

²²⁹ Meanwhile I have decided the the Cosmic Egg should constitute a NarCom in its own right; for a fuller analysis, see ch. 14, below.

²³⁰ However, the detailed quantitative analysis in ch. 16 will make us doubt the excessive antiquity of this NarCom, and persuade us to largely interpret it as associated with the Early Neolithic, c. 12 ka BP.

world mythology; and new associations between CITIs, genetic markers, language (macro-)families, and possible triggers in this process.

Another alteration in the model is that now it is less unilineal and mechanical. In the earlier version the whole of mythical history was forced into the straightjacket of one, hairpin-like movement, Route A. The new version may be somewhat closer to appearing truly historical, in that movement is more multi-directional, and multi-factored.

Of course, it has been the extremely ambitious conception of my project in scope (200 ka, global, not just isolated mythological themes but the whole of world mythology) which has necessitated substantial revisions so soon after the model's first formulation; the earlier versions were unmistakably premature, but the present, hopefully slightly more balanced version could only be formulated once the earlier ones had been made explicit, and had found considerable peer and institutional support.

6.9. The dilemma of Africa in recent millennia: relatively ancient genes, but (due to the Back-into-Africa migration from 15 ka BP onward) largely 'recent' mythologies

One of our most recent CITIs is the one preceding and facilitating Neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry. Here the Narrative Complex of 'The Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth' emerged (among others), whose richly elaborated ramifications (in such themes as creation, kingship, salvation, human conception and birth, the origin of death, *etc.*), often with shamanistic overtones, are found all over the Ancient Near East including Ancient Egypt, the Indus valley, China, Ancient Europe, and (as a result of the 'Back-into-Africa' movement, partly in the form of Pelasgian expansion along the South bwing of the 'Cross Model')) in much of Africa. Consequently, the African continent today combines a genetically highly diverse and relatively ancient Anatomically Modern Human population with, largely, a relatively recent mythology that is in striking continuity²³¹ with the rest of the Old World.

Genetically, the 'Back-into-Africa' return migration, as from c. 15 ka BP, was superimposed upon the populations that had remained in Africa and that had greatly diversified there, probably before, but certainly after the Out-of-Africa Exodus.

In the course of the 'Back-into-Africa' return migration, mythological (as well and more general cultural and linguistic) transformations and innovations from Asia were fed back into the African mythological *etc.* scene. These inroads, into Africa, are associated with all four African linguistic families without exception (including the Khoisan speakers, whose ancestors Cavalli-Sforza has tried to trace to Central or West Asia, 10 ka BP).

The last point suggests that in the mythological, cultural and linguistic fields, the effect, upon present-day Africa, of the 'Back-into-Africa' return migration were far more substantial

²³¹ Such continuity is my main point of difference vis-à-vis Witzel's pathbreaking initiative, which meanwhile has produced his 2012 *magnum opus*. Much of my present book is a sustained, often passionate, criticism of Witzel's Gondwana / Laurasian dichotomy, which denies South-North continuity in comparative mythology.

than in the genetic field. It is not impossible to identify relatively old clades, and perhaps Palaeo-Africans such as certain Pygmy populations; the latter were demonstrated (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994) to have been separate from their neighbours for (only) 25 ka. (Khoisan speakers, however, are not Palaeo-Africans, and partake of the *Borean heritage.) Linguistically and culturally, these older elements today only appear as mere fragments, and never as intact comprehensive complexes. Even 'Palaeo-African' Pygmies are linguistically and mythologically hardly distinguishable from their standard-size neighbours, whose mythologies and languages are dominated by Back-into-Africa effects.

Since the 'Back-into-Africa' migration came in from the North East and especially the South East, the half of the African continent adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean (*i.e.* West) is likely to have retained at least some 'Pre-Out-of-Africa', 'pristine' cultural (including linguistic and mythological) traits, even if only in fragmented form. Here Frobenius (1931, 1993) has identified systematic indications to that effect – converging with my own recent research into Leopard-skin symbolism (van Binsbergen 2004b, in press (h)).

However, we are now in a position to suggest a new and perhaps more positive appreciation, after all, of Witzel's (2001) distinction between Gondwana (Africa/Australia/New Guinea) and Laurasian (rest of the Old World, and the New World) mythologies:²³²

- Witzel's Gondwana complex largely corresponds with the NarComs emerging in Africa in the Middle Palaeolithic largely as part of Pandora's Box
- Whereas his Laurasian traits contain a selection of NarComs developed in the subsequent course (Routes A1 and A2) of the history of world mythology,
- therefore partly *outside* Africa, but (notably, as from the Proto-Neolithic onward) but partly also *inside* Africa, in communality and continuity with West Asia (and perhaps SE Europe, depending upon definition) within the Extended Fertile Crescent.

6.10. Conclusions: Implications of my model for comparative mythology

6.11.1. Suggested merits of the proposed theory

The resulting *aggregative diachronic approach to world mythology* might appear to be a mere house of cards – a myth, perhaps, in its own right.²³³ However, the present theory's claims to scholarly merit appear not exactly negligible. It does take into account much comparative state-of-the-art evidence from a variety of disciplines. I am not aware that it selec-

²³² After having been prodded by me at several successive meetings of the Harvard Round Table and the Annual Meetings of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Michael Witzel finally conceded that the distinction between Gondwana and Laurasian mythologies is only relative, and that in fact Gondwana is to be followed by Laurasian in time and typologically, not only in Eurasia and North America, but possibly also in Africa. However, the original distinction continues to dominate his *magnum opus* on comparative mythology (Witzel 2012), and has meanwhile been adopted by others.

²³³ In passing we note that the same can be said of all pre- and proto-historical reconstructions! Whoever finds this an intolerable condition may be reminded that the field of scholarship does not necessarily coincide with that of science; and that both fields are pluralistic, fragmented, and open to negotiation and paradigmatic change.

tively obscures contradicting evidence, but on this point I need the critical feedback from my peers.

It throws light onto hitherto unexplained continuities and affinities within and across continents, even if this goes against inveterate geopolitical stereotypes.

- Such as the assumption that the African continent has always been peripheral to, or even (Hegel) excluded from, global cultural history
- Or the conviction (*cf.* the xylophone debate from Jones 1964 to Oppenheimer 1998 and Dick-Read 2004; also van Binsbergen 2020c) that East and South East Asian cultures including mythologies could not have left substantial traces on present-day sub-Saharan Africa
- Contrary to a house of cards, it is internally coherent and will not collapse as soon as one constituent element is replaced or removed; the latter is demonstrated by the considerable changes that had to be made, and (in the present paper) could be made, in the model's details since it was first formulated in 2005.

And most importantly, the model suggests fascinating paths for further research, which will surely enhance our insight even if at the cost of rendering obsolete the present model that has prompted them.

Let me end with a list of specific points: real or imagined achievements of the present model, items for an agenda for further research, and points of admitted weakness and doubt.

1. First a disclaimer: as an Africanist, I have only a limited comparative grasp of world mythology, on the basis of often obsolete and incomplete data. This partly accounts for many omissions and for much one-sidedness, which the present paper no doubt displays and which regional specialists on other continents are invited to spot and redress
2. Yet it appears possible to design a coherent aggregative diachronic approach to world mythology
3. By linking genes (MtDNA Types) to Narrative Complexes we may even trace the early world history of specific myths in some detail, and pinpoint their place and time of origin
4. Such an approach is, moreover, in line with more or less state-of-the-art genetics, linguistics and archaeology / palaeoanthropology; yet here again, my amateurish appropriations need the critical input from experts in these respective fields
5. In the genetic field, a possible confusion must be avoided: if I (and others before me, *e.g.* Villems, and Witzel) link mythical themes to genes (MtDNA Types), we are not saying that mythical content is enshrined in genes instead of culture; all we say is that a specific human community, identifiable by specific genes, is postulated as the original owner and transmitter of that specific myth.
6. Yet we must look again at long-range mechanisms (perhaps including biological mechanisms) of cultural inertia and retention, in order to explain a chief finding of my approach: *the persistence of mythical themes across tens of ka*; neither our own cultural experience today, nor standard anthropological theory, has prepared us for this finding – the main other example that come to mind, from outside the mytho-

logical field, is the persistence of particular lithic industries (e.g. Mousterian, Acheulean) across tens of thousands of years

7. We must also keep in mind that not all aspects of the early history of world mythology may be traced by genetic markers of the owners and transmitters of myths (e.g. Oppenheimer postulated a diffusion of Flood myths, and in fact of the whole ensemble of 'core mythologies of the Ancient Near East', from the flooding subcontinent of South East Asia to West Asia – but beyond *thalassaemia alpha and beta*, which have a certain incidence in South East Asia but also in other regions including parts of West Asia, few convincing traces of the transmission postulated by Oppenheimer have been found
8. Our analysis is based on aggregated mythemes ('Narrative Complexes', NarCom) in a corpus of cosmogonic myths attested in sub-Saharan Africa in historical times; even regardless of the regrettable simplifications involved, this is not an exhaustive set of all NarComs in African mythology, let alone of all NarComs in world mythology. Additional NarComs may be discerned even in our African data set (e.g. the theme of the Trickster could be made into a NarCom in its own right), and there is much room for further research. In fact, when soon after drafting the present chapter I turned to the quantitative analysis of Flood myths world-wide (an investigation very selectively reflected in chs 15 and 16 below; the final report now awaits publication as van Binsbergen in press (f)), I was prompted to add as many as 20 new NarComs to the twenty listed in the present context.
9. The entire approach nicely brings out a point that in the conflict-torn, globalising world today may prove to have unique and indispensable survival value: *the cultural unity and shared cultural history of us, Anatomically Modern Humans* (cf. van Binsbergen 2015: 8f, 2020f)
10. This topical relevance may be the approach's saving grace, but of course may also be construed to be a disqualifying ideological slant.
11. Perhaps some NarComs are older than Anatomically Modern Humans, as is suggested by some of our Lower and Middle Palaeolithic visual material above (Fig. 6.3), as well as the intriguing Neanderthal connection.
12. Much light is cast on parallels and continuities which more local or regional, and more presentist approaches to comparative mythology are unable to explain, e.g.
 - a. The close parallels between sub-Saharan African, and North American, mythology, especially in regard of themes that I have identified as part of 'Pandora's Box' (see point 15 below)
 - b. The amazingly wide, yet far from global, distribution of Flood myths, whose place and time of origin I believe, above, I could rather precisely identify (North Central Asia, 35 ka BP), and the paths and mechanism of whose subsequent spread I thought I could spell out in a way that accounts very well for the distribution – however capricious – of this mythical complex in historical times – but note the shift, prompted by ch. 16 below, from Upper Palaeolithic to Early Neolithic emphasis in regard of such Flood myths

- c. The near-ubiquitous themes of ‘the Adversary’ and of ‘the Threesome (the Christian Trinity! with parallels in Ancient Egyptian, and Hindu mythology)’, which appear to go back to Pandora’s Box and to revolve on basic arithmetical and logical operations in regard of sameness and difference
- d. The extensive continuities between the mythologies of the Ancient Near East, Ancient Egypt, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, the Indo-Iranian region, Ancient Northern Europe, and (as uninvited guest in most world mythology) sub-Saharan Africa – communalities that are adequately explained by
 - o The accumulative effects of world mythology development between the Out-of-Africa Exodus and the Neolithic in West Asia
 - o The *Back-into-Africa* migration
 - o The seething of cultural (including mythological) innovation across a vast region (the ‘Extended Fertile Crescent’), ranging from China to the fertile Sahara, in the Proto-Neolithic
 - o The subsequent diffusion of these innovations, concomitant with the spread of Afroasiatic, Indo-European, Nigercongo, Nilosaharan, and Khoisan.

These points have a number of wider methodological and theoretical implication, which I shall now spell out in conclusion:

1. *Towards transcontinental long-range intellectual history.* The emerging long-range perspective with its obvious explanatory power adds an indispensable extra dimension to merely local/regional and presentist or a-historical approaches.
 - a. Against the background of the long-range vistas in space and time that are now opening up thanks to comparative mythology, we will no longer be so thrilled by approaches (hitherto very common, *e.g.*, in Africanist mythological studies and in religious anthropology) seeking to explain a particular myth by reference to merely local, merely present-day social and religious organisation alone, or explaining it as a mere disguised narrative on recent local history
 - b. For the formal comparison of myths, Lévi-Straussian structuralism continues to offer essential tools. Also, instead of denouncing his ‘empty’ rationalism, we are aware of the logical operations implied in, *e.g.*, the mythological contents of Pandora’s Box. However, the present approach offers a coherent and elaborate historical model that may help liberate structuralism from its timelessness, and that allows the content implications of specific, enduring Nar-Coms to set limits to (as Lévi-Strauss has it) the free play of some timeless human ratio – that allows us to look for Pre- and Proto-language forms of myth, and offers us first glimpses of the evolution which the thinking capabilities of Anatomically Modern Humans is likely to have gone through
 - c. By the same token, this approach adds a grounded and detailed, long-range historical corrective to the tendency, among historians of religion, to a-

historically jump from concrete religious (including mythical) phenomena to timeless (near-) universals.

- d. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis (1987) posits a model of Aegean dependence (also mythologically) from Ancient Egypt, within the limited time frame of the Late Bronze Age, and the geographic framework of the Eastern Mediterranean. Secondly, it has sought to converge with existing Afrocentrist approaches (e.g. C.A. Diop, Garvey, Asante, W.E.B. Du Bois, Winters, Obenga), which tend to substitute 'sub-Saharan Africa' for Ancient Egypt, and 'Europe' for 'Ancient Greece, and which hence claim decisive cultural dependence of European (by extension North Atlantic, and global) culture from post-Neolithic Africa. Laudable (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011) as a pioneering critique of Eurocentrist scholarship, yet Bernal's model must be faulted as myopic in space and time, as Egyptocentric, and as unidirectional and monocausal. Rather than being directly and entirely dependent from one another in the mythological field, Greece, Egypt, and sub-Saharan Africa all participated in, and benefited from, the extensive communalities evoked above under Conclusion point 12d; these communalities informed the entire Extended Fertile Crescent (Sahara to Indus), and had been building up over a dozen of ka, against the background of the entire cultural (including mythological) history of Anatomically Modern Humans. More specifically, what Bernal overlooked was the considerable extent to which these effects made themselves felt, in the Mediterranean Bronze Age, as channeled via West Asia (and the Egyptian Delta) rather than via sub-Saharan Africa / via Egypt's postulated dependence upon the latter
2. *Further pitfalls.* Dealing with a domain of human culture where the boundless flight of the imagination manifests itself perhaps more than anywhere else, our greatest mistake would be to expect a world history of mythology to be straightforward and simple. On a number of counts we have noted major contradictions that upset transparent modelling and represent a constant risk for our models to collapse:
 - a. The 'Out-of-Africa' model might seem to promise a clear temporal and spatial progress, but it is muddled by
 - o (i) the (genetically unmistakable) feedback 'Back-into-Africa' movement;
 - o (ii) by the amorphous trickle of diffusion directly from Africa to the north (path B), regardless of the spread of Anatomically Modern Human genes;
 - o (iii) by further diffusion from one point along path A2 to another, in other words, by *contamination*. As a result fundamental uncertainty arises as to whether specific individual traits may be reckoned as belonging to Pandora's Box, or only ended up in Africa (and by extension in West Asia and South and West Europe) as mere feedbacks from (South East) Asia
 - b. By the same token, what would appear to be a 'pristine' region of relatively intact 'Pre-Out-of-Africa' traits, notably the Atlantic side of sub-Saharan Africa,

- can also be considered a region where, through nautical contacts, Asian feedback is particularly marked – especially in the form of Sunda influences; I cannot go into these now, but have investigated them in detail elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c).
- c. Sometimes a particular pattern of mythological traits brings us to postulate, for a particular region, a layered accumulation of converging effects dating from very different periods; *e.g.* for the NarCom of the Spider (and the feminine arts), we reconstructed the Spider as part of Pandora’s Box, but the subsequent reformulation in terms of the feminine arts as Neolithic (and possibly as Sunda related) – both effects occurring, and reinforcing each other, in Western sub-Saharan Africa in historical times.
3. ‘*Anti-Wegener*’:²³⁴ *The remarkable rapprochement between Africa and the Americas.* Another such interpretational puzzle is posed by the mythological parallels that so often appear, in our above analysis, between sub-Saharan Africa, and the New World (especially N America). In the Beijing 2006 international conference, the same parallels were stressed independently by Yuri Berezkin, on the basis of an enviable wealth of finely classified and well referenced distributional data. But for years already I have been familiar with, and have drawn attention to, these parallels from the domains of cleromantic divination and female puberty rites, even before exploring them in the mythological field.
 - a. An overland connection starting from Central Asia c. 15 ka BP, north-east-bound to the New World (via the Bering Strait) and south-west-bound to sub-Saharan Africa would take care of these connections, but would have a number of interpretative disadvantages:
 - b. For all African/American elements involved, we would be forced to take them out of Pandora’s Box and instead attribute them to relatively recent ‘Back-into-Africa’ cultural flow (especially for puberty-rites and for Spider myths this would be unattractive not to say unconvincing)
 - c. But the alternative is also puzzling: even if we heed the old familiar law according to which original, old traits tend to be preserved better in the periphery than in the centre (and clearly, our analysis has shown that both the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa have been peripheral to world mythology in the last 10 ka), how can we expect the relatively recently populated New World to retain or revive so many elements from Pandora’s Box?
 - d. With American MtDNA Types A, B, C and D (producing also Type X in the New World), and with Types M₁ and R feeding ‘Back-into-Africa’, we would not be able to pinpoint a genetically marked population to connect America and sub-Saharan Africa back to Central Asia 15 ka BP
 - e. Linguistically however the link turns out to be as follows (*cf.* Table 8.1, below): both the languages of the New World, and those of Africa, together with the Austric languages of South East Asia, the Indo-Pacific region and Oceania,

²³⁴ This heading is merely a pun: a century ago, Wegener explained the present shape of continents with his theory of continents drifting apart – albeit on a scale of dozens of millions years, not (like in the present case) ka.

constitute a statistically demonstrable, coherent 'Peripheral Group' among the modern languages descending from *Borean; which suggests that the attending cultures (or rather, cultural substrates) have more in common with each other than with the Central linguistico-cultural clusters of the Old World (revolving on Eurasiatic, Afroasiatic, and Sinotibetan).

Chapter 7. An Africanist's itinerary of long-range research, 1968-2007 (2007)²³⁵ ²³⁶

By 2007, it was clear, from such of my studies as I had contributed to international conferences and has posted on my webpage 'Ancient Models of Thought' (now at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/index.htm), that I had been consistently producing, extensive long-range comparisons and synthetic analyses of formal cultural systems. The ambitions implied in such a sustained project, and my confidence in deeming these ambitions capable of being realised, would be unthinkable and absurd unless against the background of a long period of preparation. Let me briefly sketch that background, so as to take away the unfortunate impression that my Aggregative, Diachronic Model of World Mythology approach is the impromptu product of a blinkered natural scientist without allegiance to the humanities – of someone who appropriates the study of myth and turn its into some aggregate model-building exercise without knowing what he is talking about.

My first intellectual identity, back in the 1960s (and one which I have retained across the decades), was that of a budding poet *cum* literary scholar, when (on the basis of an extensive classical training in Greek, Latin, and modern West European languages) I used the European mythical canon in my own poetry, and intensely studied the mythical elements in the literary prose of two (then) prominent writers, the Russian / American Vladimir Nabokov and the Belgian Hugo Claus. I recently had occasion to return to these projects, in my work on transcontinental traditional knowledge sys-

²³⁵ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, 'An Africanist's itinerary of long-range research, 1968-2007', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/itinerar.htm

²³⁶ Introduction originally written for the revised Beijing 2006 paper, but never published because the intended publication by the two Chinese colleagues who had convened the Beijing conference, never materialised. Subsequently, this text was reserved for an introduction of a forthcoming book (in fact, the present one) in which much of the unpublished work reviewed here, was to be brought out – as it is.

tems as inspired by my reading of Sandra Harding in the early 2000s; and in a long theoretical paper on the philosophy and epistemology of comparative mythology (van Binsbergen 2003b, included in this book as ch. 3).

After reading anthropology, sociology and general linguistics, and after specific language training in Arabic and French, I did anthropological and oral historical fieldwork on popular Islam in the Ĥumiri highlands of North-western Tunisia (1968). In this effectively illiterate peasant society, I engaged for the first time with what were to remain life-long passions of mine:

- Ecstatic religion/shamanism,
- Transgressing the anthropologist's professional boundaries of reserve and distance vis-à-vis the host society and its religion and ritual, not only is – instrumentally – good for public relations in the field, but also liberates fieldwork from its hegemonic distancing, and restores it as an incomparably valuable intercultural encounter; already in Ĥumiriyya, I engaged in ecstatic ritual, and as an indicial adept I have kept up, with my family, the cult of the local saint Sidi Mḥammad ever since;
- *Making history where no history yet exists* – here with a time depth of only two to three centuries, and within a narrow spatial horizon of only 12 km (in later decades my scope would enlarge to encompass many millennia, and continents), but always intent on analysing local myth and extracting whatever kernel of history they might contain.
- Trying to make sense of the kind of long-range cultural continuity the local peasants were displaying: their local shrines included Bronze-Age megaliths and fragments of and Ancient Roman ruins, yet continued to function in a nominally Islamic rural life in the mid-20th century CE.
- Shifting my research to sub-Saharan Africa from 1971 on, my first major academic book (*Religious Change in Zambia*, 1981) was an attempt to reconstruct, largely precolonial, patterns of religion (including ancestral cults, royal cults, possession and healing cults) throughout the period 1500-1964 CE, and throughout the South Central African region; data derived from my own field research in urban Zambia and among the Nkoya people of rural Western Central Zambia, and moreover from published sources, archives, and a smattering of archaeology and linguistics. As a regional synthesis effectively and massively transcending the narrow horizons of space and time to which ethnographic fieldwork is usually limited, and establishing an extensive theoretical and methodological basis for regional cross-cultural and historical comparison, this extremely well-received study was in many ways a major preparation for the long-range research that would gain momentum in my work one and a half decades later.

In 1992, similar ground was covered, but for a substantially smaller region (western central Zambia), in my book *Tears of Rain*. Here cosmologies, myths and oral traditions concerning the rise of kingship, were analysed by their own inherent standards, and were also treated as decodable statements on factual regional history. The book was acclaimed as a major achievement in oral history (Vansina 1993). This work established the study of myth as a central theme in my work, and explored some of the

methodological and theoretical challenges attending this field, again in preparation of my later long-range research

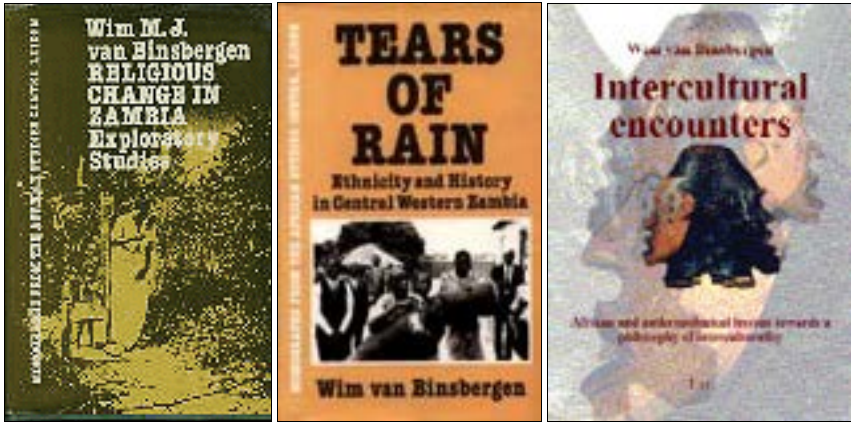


Fig. 7.1. Three books as steps in my itinerary

Meanwhile I had diversified my field experience to include West Africa (1983), and Francistown, Botswana, Southern Africa (1988 onwards). In West Africa, my fieldwork among the Manjaco people of the Upper Guinea Coast (Guinea Bissau) forced me to further sensitise myself to the study of myth in an African context, made me pioneer the role of (not just observer but) patient of local healers, and also brought me to a new African region, on the one hand clearly continuous with the Africa I had come to know,²³⁷ but on the other hand marked by the continuity of social transformation across centuries of mercantile para-colonial trans-Atlantic and Portuguese influences. Similar transregional, ultimately transcontinental, influences transpired in my Bot-

²³⁷ #7.1. STUMBLING ON TRANS-AFRICAN CONTINUITIES IN FIELDWORK. This is not an idle boast. Clearly continuous with ħumiriyya and the whole of North Africa was the cult of the land, with multiple shrines scattered across the countryside, each shrine (the major ones surrounded by a sacred forest, or rather copse) associated with an invisible land spirit (*walis* / saints in North Africa; *irañs* / tree spirits among the Manjacos) with whom the living humans, through pilgrimage, would engage in conditional contracts, of the type 'if you give me.... health, a child, a job, etc.... I will give you one or more domestic animals in sacrifice (or alcoholic drink, for that matter - but that could not be publicly used in sacrifice in nominally Islamic North Africa)'. Among the Manjacos, the continuities with sub-Saharan Africa I knew, especially various parts of South Central Africa, were numerous. In both regions, languages were spoken of the Nigercongo macrophylum, to which also the Bantu phylum belongs. On one of my first trips in Guinea-Bissau, I walked into a village and started a conversation with a local. By that time I did not yet speak the national *lingua franca*, *Kriulu*, indeed a creole language that had developed out of African languages and Portuguese during the Guinean war of Independence (1956-1973 CE); however, many Guinéans had worked as labour migrants in Senegal and France and could communicate in French. The villager pointed to a solitary shrub that was growing in the middle of the village compound, and challenged me to tell him was it was. Nkoya villages, 5000 kms away across Africa, had similar shrubs as village shrines, so I hit the jackpot with my first attempt at an answer. It was my first conscious experience with cross-continental African continuities, such as were to constitute the backbone of my comparative mythology in the making.

swana work (cf. van Binsbergen 1996, 2006, 2021) even though this was at first conceived as a study of cultural globalisation at the local urban level.

Francistown delivered its precious lessons only indirectly, and through a painful process. Being perceived as Dutch, my family and I were subjected to ostracism as ‘Boer’-related hereditary enemies in the urban society of Francistown, just before the end of apartheid in nearby South Africa. Having closely identified with Africa and Africans for nearly two decades, speaking a handful of African languages and having come to consider certain African families as my close kin, such rejection at the hands of Francistownians plunged me into a devastating personal crisis. I could less than ever maintain my professional distance vis-a-vis the host society, and within three years ended up as a certified diviner-healer in a local ecstatic cult – another identity I have since kept up (although I have meanwhile, as a professor of intercultural philosophy since 1998, thoroughly addressed the obvious epistemological puzzles involved. A widely circulated article in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, (1991) ‘Becoming a Sangoma: Religious anthropological fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana’, was the first published scholarly report on this episode in English, many more such studies were to follow, and my final assessment of the intercultural philosophical and especially epistemological implications of this more make up a large part my 2003a book *Intercultural Encounters* – later to be augmented by similar studies in my books *Vicarious Reflections* (2015) and *Sangoma Science* (2021).

Having ‘gone native’, I could no longer bring myself to conduct standard, objectifying anthropological fieldwork. But my intense engagement with local divination and other rituals brought me, as a serendipity, another type of knowledge: in many cultic elements that were locally perceived as African (though not necessarily as purely local), I began to suspect, then to detect on the basis of clearly identified written sources, the resonances of what I then only dimly recognised as the great intellectual traditions from the Ancient Near East, classic Arabian civilisation, West Africa and Malagasy cosmologies and divination systems, and even elements from South, South East, and East Asia. This generated questions that have since been at the centre of my research:

- Could I replace the condescending, objectifying ‘othering’ that is (or was) the typical anthropologists’ stance, by a claim of the underlying interconnectedness of many or all human knowledge systems, so that my own academic scholarship, and the ethnoscience of my diviner colleagues and teachers, could be revealed to be but branches of the same stem?
- Beyond biology – where humankind’s unity has been an well-established truth –, could I make the case for the *intellectual* unity of all humankind – in the sense that ancient, especially prehistoric, knowledge systems, hitherto mainly pressed into service by anthropologists, ideologists and politicians to merely divide cultures and ethnic groups, could also be argued to unite humankind?
- And would I manage to uphold my claims of cultural connectedness and continuities even though these were absolutely anathema in Modern, fragmented, anti-diffusionist, fieldwork-obsessed anthropology? Fortunately, here the tide was turning, in the sense that the extensive interest in globalisation studies from the early 1990s onward had triggered, for better or worse (cf. Amselle 2002), a renewed interest in neo-diffusionist approaches to Modern culture as well as to proto-globalisation, and thus a renewed rapprochement to archaeology.

My quest to trace the world history of cleromantic and geomantic divination as encountered in Francistown, Botswana, soon took me to the limits of documented intellectual history: Islamic occultism, Ancient Greece, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Mesopotamia, South and East Asia, even Renaissance Europe and the modern Caribbean. I thanked my good fortune, that had left me, through my training in General Linguistics and in Arabic, somewhat better prepared for such a task, linguistically and scholarly, than most modern anthropologists (for whom linguistics is no longer the cornerstone it was a hundred years ago, and for whom the cultural and intellectual history of the North Atlantic region is often a closed book).

In the process I came into contact with a similar, but at that point in time far more elaborate, attempt at long-range cultural history: Martin Gardiner Bernal's (1987-2006) *Black Athena* thesis, on the cultural (including mythological) indebtedness of Ancient Greece to Ancient Egypt.

Soon reaching the limits of what my Africanist, anthropological, and ethnic studies environment could offer me, I was fortunate to be co-opted²³⁸ (1994-1995) into the Working Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), Wassenaar, the Netherlands, where specialists in Assyriology and Biblical Studies added a whole new dimension to my anthropological and Africanist knowledge. It was mainly in this context that I wrote and published my first studies in long-range intercontinental continuities, in geomantic divination and in what appeared to have a remarkably similar distribution and history: *mankala* board games. Based on the rule-regulated movement of counters along a series of holes, *mankala* put me on the track of the world-wide (especially Bronze Age and megalithic) symbolism of cupmarks, ultimately to explore cupmarks in the context of a Neanderthal burial.



Fig. 7.2. Cover of the Talanta 1997 collection

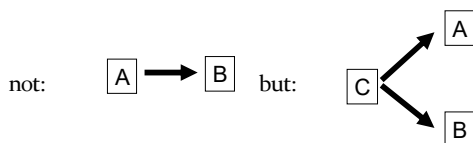
Convening a conference (1996), and subsequently editing (1997) a collection, aiming at a critical but emphatically positive reassessment of the *Black Athena* thesis was my first

²³⁸ #7.2. WHAT I HAVE OWED TO BONNO THODEN VAN VELZEN, ROLE MODEL AND CAREER PATRON. It was my great good fortune that my first lecturer in anthropology, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, gradually developed into my loyal and generous patron, who, as an administrator, helped secure my full-time appointment at the African Studies Centre Leiden (1976); was prepared to join Peter Geschiere and myself as one of the Directors (next to Peter van der Veer) of the national programme on Globalisation and the Construction of Communal Identities which Geschiere and I had initiated (1992); and who nominated me as a suitable candidate to join the Working Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, NIAS, Wassenaar, the Netherlands, 1995-1996. But he was not always impressed with my work, and particularly my explorations into long-range myth analysis (van Binsbergen 1998c-2006), decisive in the context of the present book, he flatly dismissed, reproaching me for appearing 'just an old-fashioned German professor'.

attempt to specifically contribute to studies on the Bronze Age and the Ancient Near East. The collection was a success in that its positive assessment managed to reopen the *Black-Athena* debate, which the American classicists Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers believed concluded with their own dismissive statement in devastatingly critical *Black Athena Revisited* (1996).

However, my own position in the *Black-Athena* debate would not remain so positively in favour of Bernal's views. My next attempt (so far unpublished)²³⁹ was to apply the *Black Athena* thesis to Africa with (hopefully) more Africanist competence than Bernal could muster, I made several striking discoveries:

1. Early Dynastic Egypt was a product, not just (*pace* Afrocentrists, including Bernal) of sub-Saharan Africa, but also, even mainly, of (West-) Asian contributions that had no recent roots in sub-Saharan Africa
2. Instead of Bernal's unilineal, one-way, Egyptocentric model of direct Greek cultural and religious indebtedness to Egypt, both Greece and Egypt derived elements from a common source (Neolithic and older) which also informed much of West Asia, Ancient Northern Europe, and even much of sub-Saharan, Nigercongo (more specifically Bantu-) speaking Africa
3. In order to make his point concerning Egypt/Aegean relations, Bernal often draws a parallel with China/Korea relations: in both cases, the cultural imperialism of the former, greater civilisation, is to explain the dependence of the latter, more secondary and peripheral civilisation. However, I would instead point to a counter-example, notably the case of shamanism in both China and Korea: there is no reason whatever to assume that Korean shamanism derives largely from a Chinese prototype, and there is much more reason to attribute the phenomenon, in both regions, to the influence of a Central Asian shamanistic complex informing both:



My contention is that the latter model provides the real explanation for many of the Egyptian/Aegean connections which Bernal did correctly point out, but failed to explain adequately.


These three findings opened my eyes for the partial, myopic, and ideologically program-

²³⁹ #7.3. A *GLOBAL BEE FLIGHT ENDING IN THE DRONES CRASHING ON THE HIVE'S ENTRANCE PLATFORM*. Ever since I drafted my book *Global Bee Flight* in 1998, I have trundled it behind me in the expectation that, in the lull between more recent and therefore more exciting and demanding research and publication projects, I would come round to finalising the draft into a publishable book. In 2021 I finally decided that the MS had been exhaustively cannibalised by me in earlier, meanwhile published, texts, and that the remainder was too severely flawed and obsolete to be published at this late stage. The draft had been part of a learning process, in which I had familiarised myself thoroughly with the Ancient Mediterranean and with Egyptology (*cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; and my 1997 collection on *Black-Athena* greatly expanded and reprinted in 2011), but in the process I had far surpassed the confines of the initial project.

matic nature of Bernal's thesis, despite its continued value as a critique of Eurocentrist scholarship.

This attempt in which I first set out to explore systematically my surprising impressions of transcontinental continuities in Africa, was initially in the very response to Martin Bernal's own request – he had asked me to contribute my positive assessment of his *Black-Athena* position for a collection planned as a reply to Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers. However, as I was writing the piece I became more and more aware of the severe shortcomings – in the terms outlined above – of the *Black Athena* thesis, and less and less inclined to rush once more to its author's defence. I became engrossed in a rather different theme: *the more I processed comparative historical data on Bantu-speaking sub-Saharan Africa, the more that part of the world (on which my research had passionately concentrated since 1971) turned out to be permeated with mythical, cultural and royal themes that are otherwise familiar from West, South, South East and East Asia, and Ancient Europe.* How was this situation to be explained?

- Had Ancient Egypt been spreading civilisation, not only North to the Aegean, but also South and West, into Africa?
- Was it, as Afrocentrists would have it (and I have been, like Bernal, a major European defender of Afrocentricity), the other way around: sub-Saharan Africa spawning Ancient Egyptian civilisation and the latter, in its turn, Graeco-Roman civilisation and ultimately the European dominant civilisation today under North Atlantic hegemony?
- Or would we have to do away with all monocausality, and instead stress the transcontinental multicentredness of cultural history – in which at least there is no longer room for Eurocentrism?
- Or was there (as indicated above, and as I firmly believe today, over a decade later) an older source partly responsible for Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and Bantu-speaking Africa? And if so, could that source be identified?

Taking the well-known Ancient Egyptian royal title *nswt bit*  ('She of the Sedge and the Bee'; Gardiner 1994) as my main test case, the draft book's rambling argument – still unfocussed for lack of a coherent analytical and methodological perspective – grew and grew under the working title *Global Bee flight*, that I kept announcing as 'forthcoming' for years. Of course I never made it to meet the deadline for Bernal's proposed vindictory collection, but that was the least of my worries.

In ways set out in more detail in ch. 8 of the present book, the dilemmas just spelled out made me look with new eyes at my reconstructions as underlying my 1992 book *Tears of Rain*: I had naively followed my African informants in considering their oral traditions as factual stories about the recent pre-colonial past (second half of the 2nd mill. CE). However, now these traditions appeared to consist, largely, of familiar mythical themes that had percolated through the civilisations of the Old World (and especially Ancient Egypt) for millennia, and that therefore could not convincingly be invoked as pointers to factual recent regional history in South Central Africa! This collapse of my regional middle-range proto-historical reconstructions in South Central Africa, in a positive sense led the way to my subsequent long-range comparative historical reconstructions on a global scale.

The comparative global history of the divination systems (with excursions into *mankala*,

and an application to the *Black Athena* thesis) was the first sustained project triggered by the crisis in my ethnographic habitus in the late 1980s. It has led to a large number of published articles and conference papers, which will soon be woven into one coherent book.

A second project, that is largely beyond our present scope, is the epistemological reflection on intercultural knowledge production – which gave me the chance to trade my Amsterdam chair in ethnic studies (1990) for a Rotterdam chair in intercultural philosophy (1998); cf. van Binsbergen 1999b, 2003a, 2001a, 2015a, 2021c.

When I became a diviner-healer in the Southern African tradition, I was finally ordained at the Mwali High-God shrine of Nata, in the Botswana interior. On that occasion I was singled out to don a Leopard-skin ‘as the traditional attire of my kind of people’. Puzzlingly, such a privilege was without any publicly available explanation within the local cult, nor did it clearly resonate with my personal life history. I was intrigued, could not restrain my curiosity, and started out on ‘a mission from God’²⁴⁰ to find out why my crossing over from anthropology to Sangomahood had earned me the right to don a divinely requested Leopard skin (although I still had to pay for this costly item myself). Therefore, my third recent project, specifically aimed at long-range comparative historical reconstructions on a global scale, consisted in tracing the *amazingly wide distribution and amazingly constant nature of Leopard-skin symbolism* (see ch. 18, below). This brought me to explore iconography, archaeology, comparative linguistics, and Deleuzean post-structural philosophy as basic auxiliary (sub-)disciplines to long-range cultural history. For the first time I became aware, and dared formulate explicitly, patterns of global cultural continuity, that went totally against the grain

- of established paradigms in main-stream, fieldwork based anthropology,
- and of established geopolitical distinctions in terms of nation-states, subcontinents, and continents.

My explorations into Leopard symbolism worldwide were initially intended to make up chapter 8 of my 2003 book *Intercultural encounters*. However, the chapter grew to assume book length in its own right, and at the same pace grew the methodological and analytical problems attending what had started out as a naive act of curiosity. As the publication date of *Intercultural encounters* could no longer be postponed, I decided to reserve the Leopard theme for a later book. This gave me the opportunity to much further develop the argument and to test it at a number of international conferences.

However, many puzzles remained. There was so much that I could not yet explain, partly because I lacked the overall interpretative framework, partly because my grasp of auxiliary disciplines (linguistics, palaeoanthropology, archaeology, astronomy, the History of Ideas) was not strong enough. In combination with my many other commitments, this left me no choice but to confine my very extensive provisional results on Leopard-skin symbolism to the Internet, but postponing definitive publication until I had reason to feel more confident.

²⁴⁰ As also explained elsewhere in the present book, this literal quotation from the cult movie *The Blues Brothers*, pronounced tongue in cheek and with affected American accent, at the beginning of my first presentation before the Harvard Round Table on Ethnogenesis in South and East Asia and Comparative Mythology, Cambridge MA, USA, 2004, created considerable confusion. Having been harrassed for years by religious fundamentalist and nationalist opposition to their own state-of-the-art scholarship, my audience could not appreciate the humour of me self-ironically invoking some divine dispensation as the initiating drive behing my highly ambitious, global project of detached and painstaking empirical scholarship.

These puzzles also came to the fore when, early in the new millennium, and as a fourth major project, I discussed Sandra Harding's (e.g. 1997) inspiring critique of Eurocentric, hegemonic assumptions about global modern science. I was fascinated to see her play with the idea that *the universality commonly claimed for such science may well have to do with its present-day ubiquity*: modern science is implicitly present in every cellphone, every motorcar, every secondary school all over the world. I was immediately triggered to demonstrate the very wide, sometimes continental and even transcontinental, distribution of other forms of (especially *formal*) knowledge systems, such as myths, board games, divination systems, the nomenclature of clan systems. I sought to elucidate the uncanny continuities I believed to have spotted between repertoires of clan names, sets of divinatory objects, zodiacs, and other astronomical nomenclature, throughout the Old World, and time and again I hit on Chinese/South Asian/South Central African continuities. Little in accepted cultural history had prepared me for this – except perhaps some work by despised and allegedly obsolete German diffusionists and 'cultural morphologists' such as Frobenius, Baumann, and von Sicard. Dissatisfied with my results, however tantalising, I once more shelved them on the Internet, and moved on again. (Meanwhile, my 2012 *Before the Presocratics* has presented convincing evidence for a considerable Chinese presence in South Central Africa in the 2nd mill. CE).

Subsequent involvement in networks for comparative mythology centred on Leiden, the Netherlands (Mineke Schipper / Daniela Merolla) and Harvard, Cambridge MA, Massachusetts, USA (Michael Witzel) forced me (and also made it easier for me) to approach the auxiliary disciplines mentioned above at a more professional level, and to add one crucial other discipline: genetics, it which I have only cursorily done during my undergraduate studies.

Finally, my involvement with the Bronze-Age Mediterranean in the Hūmiri context and the *Black-Athena* debate, was renewed, and obtained a major mythological focus, when Fred Woudhuizen asked me to join, initially as academic supervisor, his research on ethnicity in Mediterranean protohistory (cf. Woudhuizen 2006; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011). Trying to situate the contemporary documents and the archaeological data on the Sea Peoples in a long-range perspective, and scanning both *Genesis 10* and the Homeric *Catalogue of Ships* (Ilias 2) for clues as to ethnic structures, brought me to reconsider Flood myths, the 'Back-into-Africa' migration, seafaring in Antiquity, the world history of genital mutilation, East-West parallels in toponyms, theonyms, divine attributes and myths, etc. etc.

It was at this point (early 2005) that Michael Witzel (having patiently accommodated my Leopard argument in the earlier Harvard Round Table) invited me to present an argument on African 'Creation' (I prefer: Cosmogonic) myths, for the Comparative Myths section of the 7th RIHN (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature) / Harvard International Conference on Ethnogenesis in South and East Asia, Kyoto, Japan, June 2005. Under great pressure of time, and in desperation for I had never engaged in historical reconstruction so deeply into the past, I combined the 'Out-of-Africa' scenario with Witzel's idea on myth constituting an independent source on humankind's remotest past. True to my life-long determination to *produce history where previously there was none* (no doubt a neurotic drive going back to some formative infantile conflict in myself and in the families that produced me),²⁴¹ I pioneered an 'Out-of-Africa' comprehensive and integrated history of world mythology (included in this book as ch. 5). From then on, I have worked fanatically to develop the argument, ironing out its inconsistencies, naiveties and signs of professional

²⁴¹ My personal and family history falls outside our present scope, still they have been the subject of several of my literary publication as listed at the end of this book.

ignorance. Against this background, also my 2006 paper for the Beijing follow-up Round Table (included in this book as ch. 6) was an attempt to develop that argument further and remedy some of its inevitable shortcomings.

Chapter 8. The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies (2010)

General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa

Abstract. This chapter (originally van Binsbergen 2010d) looks at mythological continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the Old World – not so much North Africa, but especially Eurasia. This is a remarkably unusual perspective in the field of comparative mythology: the othering and exclusion of Africa and Africans have been an inveterate though obsolescent feature of North Atlantic scholarship. The approach in this chapter is greatly inspired by Michael Witzel's work in comparative mythology, but takes exception to his Laurasian / Gondwana distinction, which is predicated on absolute Eurasian / African discontinuity. Instead, the present argument seeks to include sub-Saharan Africa in the standard comparative mythology as applied to the rest of the world. For this purpose, a two-stage argument is deployed. Since the chapter is essentially a review of several decades of my research, it risks being unusually auto-referential (even more so than the rest of this book), for which apologies are hereby offered. First, twentieth-century CE interpretative schemas are discussed that stipulate mythological continuity instead of separation between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa: Frobenius' South Erythraean Model; cultural diffusion from Egypt; and combined cultural and demic diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (Afrocentrism, Bernal's *Black-Athena* thesis). Then, as background for the more recent generation of models, indications for transcontinental continuities are discussed from the fields of *long-range* linguistics (concentrating on Starostin's *Borean Hypothesis, and adducing new material concerning the place of Nigercongo > Bantu in the *Borean schema), and molecular genetics: the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis, and the Back-into-Africa Hypothesis. This sets the scene for a discussion of the author's Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, suggesting that 'Pandora's Box' (*i.e.* the cultural heritage with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa from 80 ka BP on) contained a few identifiable basic mythological motifs, which were subsequently developed, transformed and innovated in Asia, after which some of the results were fed back into Africa in the Back-into-Africa movement – the entire process inevitably resulting in considerable African-Eurasian continuity. After a discussion, in regard of the last few millennia, of my Pelasgian Model (which proposes cultural including mythological transmission from Western Asia / the Mediterranean by the 'cross-model' mechanism, *i.e.* in all four directions – (a) to Western Europe; (b) to Northern Europe; (c) to the Eurasian Steppe to South, East and South East Asia and perhaps to Oceania; and (d) to sub-Saharan Africa –

from the Late Bronze Age onward), the transition to the second stage of the argument is formed by an examination of the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa, in the light of the famous and widely-adopted Aarne-Thompson classification. This again yields results suggestive of considerable African-Eurasian continuity. All this means that my earlier analysis of Nkoya mythology in terms of local protohistory (my book *Tears of Rain*, 1992), may no longer be tenable. *Contamination* by recent Islamic and Christian proselytisation is discussed and ruled out as a major factor in African-Eurasian mythological continuities. To clinch the argument in favour of massive African-Eurasian mythological continuities, 26 Nkoya mythemes are considered in detail against the extensively referenced background of their global correspondences. *A high degree of African-Eurasian mythological continuity is the argument's main, theoretically and empirically grounded, conclusion.* While this highlights overall African-Eurasian cultural connections, it particularly lends support to my Pelasgian Hypothesis, and throws in relief unsuspected but close and multiplex affinities between a South Central African kingship and the Eurasian Steppe.

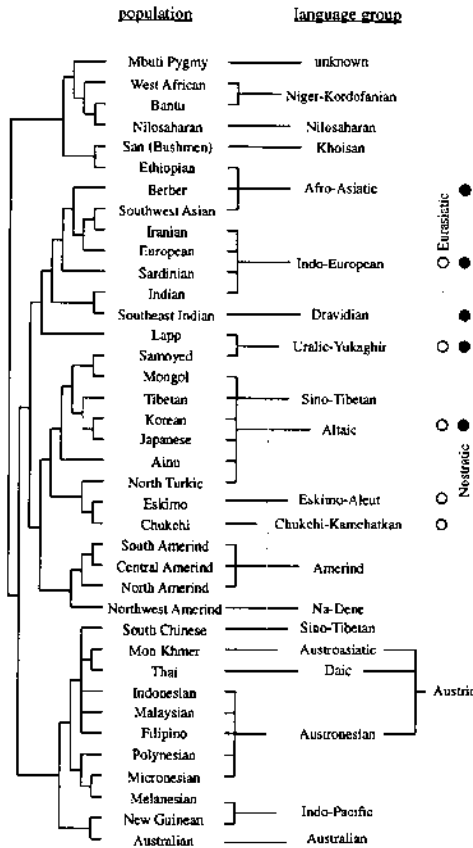
8.1. African transcontinental mythological continuities as a problem

In this paper I will look at mythological continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the Old World – not so much North Africa, but especially Eurasia.

This is a remarkably unusual perspective in the field of comparative mythology. While many comparative mythologists wisely concentrate on one geographic region, culture area or language phylum they know well, it is not uncommon to study East-West continuities across Eurasia. Such studies are facilitated by the fact that from North-western Europe to East and South-East Asia there has been a chain of ancient literate civilisations whose mythologies are particularly well studied; the Indo-European languages, the means of expression of many of these civilisations, encompass much of Asia and most of Europe. This is the part of the world, and the cultural and linguistic tradition, to which most comparative mythologists themselves belong anyway, and with whose mythologies, societies and histories they feel comfortably at home. By contrast, Africa and its inhabitants have, since Early Modern times (Kant, Hegel), been singled out as the proverbial *others*. Although the African continent has produced some of the oldest literate civilisations in the world (Egypt, Nubia), writing and enduring state organisation have been relatively rare in sub-Saharan Africa until modern times. While being locked in orality may constitute an ideal breeding ground for storytelling, relatively few of these stories have been recorded – unless very late (mainly in the late 19th and early 20th century CE), mainly by cultural and linguistic strangers, and usually at a rather lower level of literary and philological scholarship than that informing, for instance, the study of West and South Asian ancient mythologies. African Studies have largely developed in splendid isolation from the mainstream of the humanities. African linguistics (studying the languages in which most African stories have been told for centuries if not millennia) have largely enjoyed the same isolation. For, with the exception of Afroasiatic,²⁴² the historic languages of Africa belong to macrophyla which have been exclusive to sub-Saharan Africa in historical times: Nilosaharan, Nigercongo (with Bantu as a major phylum), and Khoisan. Until quite recently, most linguists would be prepared to take seriously the

²⁴² Afroasiatic has major branches in sub-Saharan Africa (Cushitic, Omotic and Chadic), but also Berber and Old Egyptian as branches outside sub-Saharan Africa, whilst Semitic – extensively spoken in Northern Africa and the Middle East – transcends the distinction, both through Ethiopian, and through Arabic as religious, political and mercantile *lingua franca*.

view of Cavalli-Sforza (leading geneticist of the previous generation and of a previous scientific paradigm in genetics), according to whom African languages represent a particularly peripheral branch of the languages of humankind, as would befit their speakers as, *allegedly*, constituting a particularly peripheral branch of humanity (Fig. 8.1). Increasing marginalisation and humiliation of sub-Saharan Africa, its inhabitants, cultures and economies, have been among the major trends of global history since the late 19th century, and the approach to African mythologies has reflected that trend. Africa, at least in the *utterly mistaken popular perception* of much of the non-African modern world (and of some African elites), is a devastated continent of people who, in cultural, political, nutritional, economic, philosophical and moral respects, are losers, and who would be best served by being liberated from their Africanness.



(© Cavalli-Sforza 1997: 7722, with thanks)

Fig. 8.1. Cavalli-Sforza's well-know array of the populations and language groups of the world

Inevitably, this perspective – conducive, as we know, to overt or hidden racism – has generated major redressive responses. Africanist anthropologists in the classic period (mid-20th century CE) often saw it as their task to vindicate the rationality, effectiveness, complexity and beauty of the African cultures they studied (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1937 / 1972; Frobenius 1954 / 1933; Gluckman 1955a). From the 1960s on (when most African countries gained territorial independence after less than a century of effective colonial rule) the general tendency among Africanist and African scholars has been to insist (cf. van Binsbergen 2019, 2020) that things African would have to be analysed and explained by reference to African conditions (almost as if Africa could only lose from transcontinental comparison, and would necessarily find itself there on the side of indebtedness and deficit). Afrocentrists in the North Atlantic region and (since the 1950s) also in Africa, have adopted an affirmative, counter-hegemonic stance vis-à-vis Africanness, making Afrocentricity (of the Stronger or the more Moderate varieties) the mainstay of their intellectual life and their personal identity. Their good intentions – often in combination with unmistakably poor scholarship – make them ideologically sympathetic, but scientifically vulnerable and suspect²⁴³ – for as we all know, consciousness-raising is only permissible as a major motor of scholarship as long as it remains implicit, and mainstream, which in the world today often means: hegemonic.

Also my own position in this intellectual and identitary mine-field is, admittedly, very far from neutral.²⁴⁴ After finishing my studies as a specialist on the oral history and anthropology of North African popular Islam, in the first half of my career I became, as a professor of anthropology, a mainstream student of African religions and cultures; in the second half, as a protohistorian and a professor of intercultural philosophy, I have been a vocal critic of the implicitly hegemonic epistemological assumptions on which North Atlantic studies of Africa are often based. Between these two phases I allowed the participant observation that has been my standard fieldwork method in various African locations, to go so unprofessionally out of hand, that I ended up as a diviner-priest-healer in the Southern African *Sangoma* tradition (practising till this very day), and as the adoptive son of a Zambian king, inheriting his

²⁴³ Cf. Howe 1999; Fauvelle *et al.* 2000 – however, see my contribution to that same book, and to the *Black-Athena* debate (van Binsbergen 2000a, 1997a / 2011a); for a recent, and more critical, assessment of Bernal and his *Black-Athena* thesis (Bernal 1987, 1991, 2001, 2006), cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

²⁴⁴ On my intellectual stance as a student of mythology, between rupture and fusion, cf. van Binsbergen 2003b, included in this book as ch. 3. In the opinion of my dear colleague Steve Farmer 2010, the best thing that could happen to comparative mythology is that it becomes a ‘rigorous science’ – a variant on the prescription that Husserl 1911 / 1965) wrote to cure philosophy of its ills, with his plea for *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*. My view is rather different from Farmer’s: I see comparative mythology, of all fields of scholarship, as privileged in that it can afford to let its method be informed, in part, by the insight that all scientific endeavour is, among other things, *an attempt at creating imaginative myths: yarns people tell, sufficiently captivating to produce the impression of being real and true, but meant to be superseded by a better yarn as soon as possible*. Speaking of comparative mythology: perhaps, today, humankind’s most dangerous myth is no longer even racism (cf. Montagu 1942 / 1974) or Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, but the naïvely Modernist belief – exploited by governments and corporate enterprise – that science produces lasting, unshakable, universal, and redeeming truth; cf. Harding 1997; van Binsbergen 2001a, and distancing and ironic, 2021c. Yet my view is complementary, rather than diametrically opposed, to Farmer’s. For what, then, constitutes a ‘better yarn’? In the short run, one that is performatively more persuasive and seductive, in terms of the ideology and fashion of the day; but in the long run, one that takes into account all available data, all available alternative explanations, and all criticism – while not necessarily true in itself, and inviting what I have called *mythical fusion* on the part of the researcher, truth still constitutes the ultimate (but constantly receding, and inherently illusory) boundary condition of science, also in comparative mythology.

royal bow and arrows and 25 km² of land at his death in 1993 (cf. van Binsbergen 2003a). I speak (rather, have once spoken) six African languages; have a place in Africa I consider home; count myself therefore (in terms of Robert Sobukwe's inspiring definition) as an African; let a life-force-affirming and kinship-centred spirituality from Africa diffusely (and, of course, without the celebration of violence from which 20th-century Nkoya²⁴⁵ kings already radically distanced themselves) inform my personal life; I rather agree with ben-Bochanan's Afrocentrist adage *Africa, Mother of Western Civilization* (1988); and I deeply regret, resent, and actively combat, the othering and marginalisation to which sub-Saharan Africa, its cultural forms and its knowledges have been subjected.

It is exclusion, and not difference as such, that I am objecting to. Quite rightly, it has been a refrain of contemporary philosophy (especially Derrida, e.g. 1967 / 1997 and Deleuze, e.g. 1968) that *difference* is the very condition for identity, and that the recognition of the other's difference is the ethical condition for equitable relationships and for a sane socio-political system. Difference can still be, and usually is, articulated within the context of an overarching, unifying condition, ultimately that of sharing a common humanity, in the light of which all difference may be taken a relative view of, and may be overcome. Exclusion is when such an overarching unifying condition is denied, or is taken not to apply to certain classes of humans (Blacks, Jews, women, homosexuals, redheads, Basarwa / 'Bushmen', Tutsi, Palestinians, etc. – a form of mental violence that often is a stepping-stone to physical violence.²⁴⁶ It is impossible to study culture, religion, myth without allowing for the difference that is enshrined in, liberated by, and celebrated by, local and regional cultural specificity. Absolute universalism is not the paroxysm, but the annihilation, of culture; hence it constitutes a form of violence in its own right. This also helps to define my project with regard to trans-continental continuities in African mythology: not the blindly-ideological denial of difference and the imposition of one unifying formula for mythology all across the Old World – that would be absurd – but the identification of an overarching interpretative framework in which African mythological difference (and European and Asian mythological difference, for that matter) can yet be recognised and integrated as integral part of a wider system.

Most of my empirical research of the last two decades has been aimed at demonstrating trans-continental continuities involving sub-Saharan Africa. I have pursued this line of research, ultimately in a bid to demonstrate (van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f., 2020f) – in the face of the traumatic insistence on difference or rather on exclusion that is inherent in all thinking in terms of race, ethnicity, nationalism and continentalism – *the fundamental underlying unity of all of us, Anatomically Modern Humans* – the sub-species that came into being in Africa c. 200 ka BP, and that spread from Africa all over the world from c. 80 ka BP. Admittedly, with such a big

²⁴⁵ Having constituted my main (although far from my only) fieldwork associated and companions ever since 1972, the Nkoya people mainly inhabit the wooded plateau between the Kafue and the Zambezi rivers in Zambia, South Central Africa. Numbering only c. 100,000, these form scarcely one percent of the modern Zambian population, and despite national-level representation at the higher echelons of government since the 1970s, among the Zambian peoples they form a modest and inconspicuous minority, whose main claim to fame is their virtuosity in music, since the 1980s expressed in their annual Kazanga Festival. Their language, a branch of Central Bantu, is not taught in government schools and is documented only in a few publications including some by my hand. For further details, see my numerous publications.

²⁴⁶ Wyschogrod 1989; Schroeder 1996; McKenna 1992; with particular reference to Levinas – e.g. 1971 / 1961, 1981 / 1974 –, Girard – e.g. 1972 – and Derrida 1997.

chip on one's shoulders²⁴⁷ it is not easy to produce objective and universalising, high-quality scholarship. However, I suspect that the only difference between me and more common comparative mythologists from the North Atlantic region is that the latter have largely gotten away with their reluctance to fathom their own identitary complacency even while engaging in transcontinental encounters and transcultural knowledge production.

Since comparative mythology is essentially an empirical science, its exponents may well consider such a meta-argument in the intercultural epistemology and politics of knowledge production a waste of time, and prefer to get down to the data at hand. As a concrete challenge of empirical research, then, and in my personal research practice, broadly two complementary problems converge in the topic of Africa's transcontinental mythological continuities:

1. At the theoretical level, there is the recent availability of interpretative schemas that stipulate mythological continuity instead of separation between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa.
2. At the descriptive, analytical level, there is my personal experience to the effect that my earlier, rather standard ethnohistorical reading of the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa (in terms of oblique but decodable statements on regional history over the last half millennium), in my own perception collapsed totally as soon as I realised (by the late 1990s) that what resonated in these Nkoya mythologies were echoes of a well-known Eurasian mythological repertoire that could be traced back to the Bronze Age (van Binsbergen 1998-2006, 2009: 10).

Thus the first point in our empirical challenge to explore African-Eurasian mythological continuities, springs from the availability of models, both inside comparative mythology and in its ancillary sciences, that imply and even dictate such continuity, while in our second point we exchange this deductive perspective of theoretical application, for an inductive perspective of empirical exploration. Here African-Eurasian continuity presents itself, not as a theoretically-underpinned research programme, but as the possible, alternative interpretation for a concrete set of empirical mythological data.

8.2. Recent interpretative schemas that claim mythological continuity, instead of separation of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa

Much of the past and current othering of Africa turns out to be based on obsolescent scholarly paradigms reflecting a colonial, North Atlantic-centred geopolitics of a bygone period; new paradigms have emerged that persuade us to reconsider the position of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of far greater continuity with Eurasia. Let us first review some of the older transcontinental models foreshadowing this state of affairs, and then turn to the most recent statements of transcontinental mythological continuity.

8.2.1. A selective²⁴⁸ review of older transcontinental hypotheses relevant for

²⁴⁷ Cf. Amselle 2001 for an attack on my and Coquéry-Vidrovitch's variety of moderate Afrocentrism.

²⁴⁸ *Selective*, for I am leaving out here one such transcontinental hypothesis that was very popular in the early

comparative mythology

Let us begin our review with a few models that emerged in the course of the twentieth century and that prepared the way for our present analytical tools.

8.2.1.1. Frobenius' (1931) model of the South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red ('Erythraean') 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 the 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 under-estimate 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. In actual fact, there is rather more continuity between Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa, than between the latter and Ancient Mesopotamia. Frobenius' approach offers no convincing or lasting explanation of the communalities he highlighted.

8.2.1.2. Cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument)

Confronting the Egyptocentrism that was in fashion in the early 20th century,²⁴⁹ already Frobenius declined the possibility that major traits in sub-Saharan Africa, such as sacred kingship and regicide, could exclusively be due to Ancient Egyptian influence; he stressed that *regicide* (which we will encounter below among Nkoya mythemes, and which Frobenius considered constitutive of the South Erythraean complex) also occurs in South Asia.²⁵⁰ Yet one can remain critical of the Egyptocentrism displayed till this very day by Martin Bernal (1987, 1991, 2001, 2006), Cheikh Anta Diop (e.g. 1954, 1989), Obenga (e.g. 1992, 1995) and other Afrocentrists, and yet admit that for three millennia Ancient Egypt was one of the world's 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*, more recent research (e.g. that highlighted in the *Cahiers Caribéens d'Égyptologie*, or the work of the Cameroonian Egyptologist Oum Ndigi) is now applying sound scholarly methods to the assessment of Egypt-Africa relations, and making progress. Some of the specific Nkoya / Egyptian parallels may be explained in this light, but others need to be explained by what is

20th century CE: the 'Hamitic Thesis', which – typical product of the racist and colonialist ideology then prevailing in the North Atlantic region – sought to explain the apparent contradiction between (a) unmistakable sub-Saharan African cultural achievements, and (b) the North Atlantic dominant groups's negative stereotypes about Africans, by assuming that all such achievements were due to the influx, into sub-Saharan Africa, of 'Hamitic'-speaking (i.e. Afroasiatic-speaking) West Asians and North Africans. On the surface, this may look dangerously close to my Pelasgian Hypothesis; on closer analysis, it is certainly not, but space is lacking for a further discussion here. I refer the reader to van Binsbergen 2011: 331 f.

²⁴⁹ Smith 1923 / 1970; Seligman 1934; cf. Meyerowitz 1960.

²⁵⁰ Frobenius 1931: 325; 1929: 331-349, where the obvious connection with Frazer's 1911-1915) *Golden Bough* – based on the mytheme of cyclical regicide – is further explored.

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 Africa²⁵¹ (partly – only from the Middle Bronze Age onward – 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 what he takes to be Ancient Greece's almost total dependence upon Egyptian (and, by a later Afrocentrist twist in his argument, African) cultural including mythical materials: such an overstatement does not take into account the *fact that both Egypt, and the Aegean, draw from the same West Asian-Mediterranean-Saharan Neolithic or Bronze Age source* which I will identify below as Pelasgian. This common source is, incidentally, partly responsible²⁵² 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 Egyptian *nsut bit* / Reed-and-Bee complex, and which may well have managed, in this form, to reach South Central Africa and inform Nkoya mythology.

8.2.1.3. Combined cultural and demic diffusion²⁵³ from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (the Afrocentrist position, and Bernal's Afrocentrist afterthought after his Egyptocentrist Black Athena position)

In the course of his *Black-Athena* project, Martin Bernal found that much of what he was trying to say had already been said by Afrocentrist writers such as Du Bois (1947) and Diop,²⁵⁴ and he gradually situated the epicentre of the cultural initiative decisively shaping Greek classical culture (and hence, to a considerable extent, North Atlantic and global world culture), no longer in Egypt, but in sub-Saharan Africa, of which Egypt was considered to be the oldest and most brilliant child. Whatever the deficiencies of Afrocentrist and Bernalian scholarship,²⁵⁵ the main thrust of such studies has been a most timely counter-hegemonic

²⁵¹ #8.1. ON TRANSCONTINENTAL CONTINUITIES BETWEEN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST, AND WEST AFRICA. Since this was first written, I have become aware of the fact that the German Ancient Historian / Assyriologist Dierk Lange (2004, 2012, 2019) has produced a series of convincing studies stressing West Asian / West African exchanges in the Late Bronze Age and immediately after. Already earlier, the Egyptologist Wainwright (1940, 1949, 1951) stressed Egyptian / sub-Saharan continuities (as well as Egyptian / Aegean ones, already in 1930), which were also the topic of studies of kingship by Seligman (1934) and by Meyerowitz (1960).

²⁵² Pace Rice 1990, who insists on a one-way process, from Sumer to Sudan.

²⁵³ For the term *demic diffusion*, cf. Sokal *et al.* 1982, 1991; Barbujani *et al.* 1994.

²⁵⁴ Which, by an analogy with the history of pop music (where also Elvis Presley – 1935-1977 – was chided for appropriating Black achievements), earned Bernal the undeservedly disrespectful epithet 'the academic Elvis'; Berlinerblau 1999.

²⁵⁵ #8.2. MERITS AND DEMERITS OF MARTIN BERNAL IN THE BLACK ATHENA DEBATE. I have suggested (van Binsbergen 2000a, 1997a / 2011a) that these deficiencies have been somewhat exaggerated by critics for reasons of North Atlantic hegemony and mainstream paradigmatic power games. Nonetheless there are major shortcomings, although different ones from ones for which Bernal has been grilled by Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers and their contributors (1996). Bernal's fixation on language as the prime historical source does not permit him to bring major socio-cultural and political processes to life, and leads to repetitious irrelevance especially in Bernal 2006. And his Politically-Correct fixation on African origins (while archaeologically underpinned, e.g. Hofman 1991 / 1979; Williams 1986) prevents him from seeing the major West Asian / Mediterranean contribution to the Egyptian culture, society and state – which I have sought to capture by the Pelasgian Hypothe-

exercise in the politics of knowledge. This makes them important eye-openers in the global politics of knowledge, yet at the same time unmistakably ideological.

On the basis of a kindred knowledge-political position, I have often been a vocal supporter and defender of the weaker, Moderate forms of Afrocentrism. However, in my quest for scholarly, methodologically and theoretically underpinned valid knowledge I have repeatedly been compelled to appear disloyal to the counter-hegemonic cause of Afrocentrism, and I reject the Strong-Afrocentrist, 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 Exodus 80 – 60 ka ago (that claim is fairly 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 common, relativist Postmodern position on local, multiple, manipulable and transient truths in science), has finally forced me to admit (van Binsbergen 2010e, included in the present book as ch. 4) 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 such famous African systems as Ifa, Sikidy and Hakata; for the belief in an unilateral mythical being (*cf.* von Sicard 1968-1969); and for many aspects of mythology centring on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, shamanism, and the kingship. My research in progress seems to indicate that this model of an extra-African origin followed by huge success inside the geographic space of sub-Saharan Africa, applies even to the Nigercongo / Bantu linguistic family.

8.2.2. Linguistic indications for transcontinental continuities

Whereas in the field of *linguistics* the prominent Nigercongo specialist Roger Blench could still insist (2006) on the fundamental and primordial difference between Southern (*e.g.* African and Indo-Pacific) languages on the one hand, and Northern (Eurasian) on the other hand,²⁵⁶ other voices in long-range linguistics have advocated the inclusion of African languages under an extensive linguistic category encompassing much of the Old World (Eurasian / Nostratic), and even most of humankind (*Borean). One of today's primary resources for long-range linguistic research is the *Tower of Babel* Etymological Database, comprising most of the language phyla spoken in the world today, and supported by major research institutions (two Moscow universities, Leiden university, the Hong Kong City University, and the Santa Fe Institute); while defective on Nilosaharan, and truncated on Nigercongo > Bantu, Khoisan is amply represented here, and features as another macrophylum under *Borean – the highest level reconstructible parent language, supposed to be spoken in Central to East Asia c. 25 ka BP. When the designation '*Borean' was chosen, Georgiy Starostin already objected²⁵⁷ that (since it implicitly refers to the Northern, 'boreal', hemisphere) it was based on the prejudice that Eurasiatic / Nostratic, Afroasiatic, Sinocaucasian and Austric would be more closely related to one another than to the

sis, largely (though reluctantly, given my own Afrocentrist inclinations) reversing the direction of cultural transmission in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, from South-North to North-South.

²⁵⁶ In other words, Witzel is not alone in his North / South, Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy.

²⁵⁷ Anonymus, *n.d.* (a).

African macrophyla Nilosaharan and Nigercongo, and possibly Khoisan.²⁵⁸ 259 Although I am not a Bantuist by training, this inspired me to investigate whether also Nigercongo – including Bantu – may be seen as the result of local African (to some extent including Palaeo-African) interaction²⁶⁰ with incoming transcontinental elements. The results²⁶¹ confirm African-Eurasian linguistic continuity: *more than a quarter of all 1,153 reconstructed *Borean roots can be demonstrated to have reflexes in Proto-Bantu, traces of which are found all over the Bronze Age Mediterranean (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), and whose homeland emerges – surprisingly – from an environmental, phyto-geographic and zoo-geographic analysis of Proto-Bantu as a well-watered, rather temperate zone.* Strictly speaking, the compilation of a Proto-Bantu corpus has been too controversial to pretend there is one Proto-Bantu lexicon (cf. Dalby 1975, 1976; Meeussen 1980; Vansina 1979-1980; Flight 1980, 1988; Maho 2003). In the end however Guthrie's (1967-1971) reconstruction offers a useful if far from ideal compromise. Since *Borean is here claimed to account for only a limited part of the Proto-Bantu lexicon, and the Pelasgian influx is claimed to amount to primarily a cultural influence with only slight demographic impact, we need not enter here into a discussion of the obvious heterogeneity and possible polygenesis of Bantu and the plausible rejection of the Bantu migration model (Bennett 1983; Vansina 1979-1980, 1995).

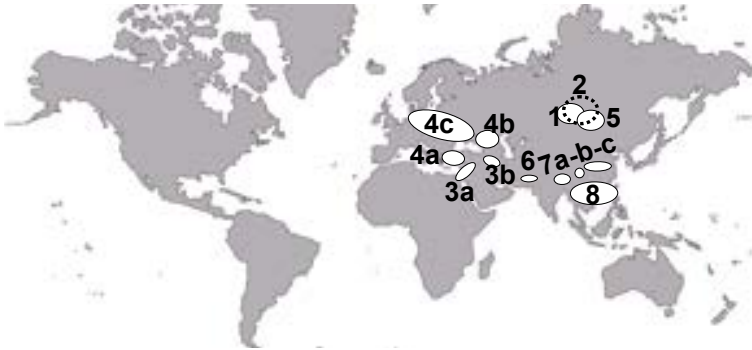
This may also be the place to dwell a bit longer on the reconstructed *Borean language complex, and on the branches (macrophyla and their constituting phyla) into which it is supposed to have disintegrated in the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic. (I call the reader's attention to the cyclical nature of this statement: we have no direct evidence of *Borean, and our indirect evidence consists entirely of the reconstructions based on the reconstructed protoforms of the constituent (macro-)phyla.) In other words, we are admittedly treading on very thin ice here.)

²⁵⁸ Already two decades ago, leading linguists (Kaiser & Shevoroshin 1988) included Nilosaharan and Nigercongo as branches of 'Super-Nostratic', where Nostratic is more or less synonymous with Eurasian. The *Borean nature of Khoisan was accepted, on formal linguistic grounds (e.g. its lexical affinities with Northern Caucasian are obvious), but also in the light of Cavalli-Sforza's hypothesis of modern Khoisan speakers being the descendants of a hybrid Asian / African population whose Asian ancestors still lived in the Asian continent 10 ka BP (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: 176; *pace* Vigilant 1989, 1991). However, I reject Cavalli-Sforza's view (although shared by many others) of African languages as constituting isolated and archaic branches of the world genealogy of languages.

²⁵⁹ Remarkably, the glottochronological analysis presented below as Table 8.1 yet brings out a comparable result: here Eurasian. Afroasiatic and Sinocaucasian constitute one branch ('Central or Continental') of disintegrating *Borean, while Austric, Amerind and African languages constitute the other branch ('Peripheral'). As compared to Starostin's objection, only Austric has changed places.

²⁶⁰ Cf. the comments by Oliver and Simiyu Wandibba in Oliver *et al.* 2001, in response to Ehret 1998, cf. 2001. Considering the commonly recognised affinities between Austric and Bantu, and the insistence, by linguistic specialists, on the contribution, to Bantu, of non-Bantu elements from inside the African continent, the linguistic process of Bantu genesis was probably much more complex than I propose below to have been the case (with my appeal to an unoccupied and defenceless niche of cultural ecology) for the spiked-wheel trap and similarly distributed cultural items such as mankala, geomantic divination and the belief in a unilateral being.

²⁶¹ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011k, and in press (d); summarised as Table 8.1, below.



1. *Borean c. 25 ka BP (location implied in Tower of Babel / Evolution of Human Languages approach and in my Aggregative Diachronic Model)
2. (broken oval) location of tDNA Type B people 30-20 ka BP (Forster 2004)
3. Nostratic/Eurasianic (Bomhard 1984; Renfrew 1998; Gray & Atkinson 2003): 3a. Palestine, Kebaran culture of Palestine (18,000-10,500 BCE); 3b. the Zarzian culture of the Zagros mountains (12,400-8500 BCE)
4. Indo-European: 4a Anatolian (Renfrew 1987); 4b Kurgan; 4c. Broad Homeland Hypothesis;
5. Uralic *Urheimat* (Fortescue 1998);
6. Dravidian (Jacques *n.d.*);
7. a-b-c. Sinotibetan (Jacques *n.d.*);
8. (highly contested) Austric > Austronesian

Fig. 8.2. Proposed *Urheimats* (original cradles) of *Borean and most of the (macro-) phyla into which it has disintegrated

The main macrophyla not treated in Fig. 8.2 are Amerind (miscellaneous), and the African ones with the exception of Afroasiatic, in other words: Khoisan, Nigercongo and Nilosaharan. There is reason²⁶² to see these, too, as branches of *Borean, and to situate their emergence *not* (as specialists in African languages prefer) inside Africa notably in the Lake Chad region c. 8 ka BP, but in West, East, South, or particularly Central Asia, in close association with the emergence of Austric and of Amerind.

The following Table 8.1 succinctly presents the results of an extensive quantitative analysis of *Borean and of the relationships between the macrophyla into which it has disintegrated. These results will often guide our arguments in the course of this book.

<p>BANTU AS *BOREAN (AN EXCERPT FROM VAN BINSBERGEN 2011: 314 <i>f.</i>, <i>cf.</i> in press (d)) My statistical outcomes do suggest an initial bifurcation of the *Borean-speaking linguistic, cultural and demographic stock, with</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. one, ultimately Peripheral, branch vacating the Central to East Asian homeland and moving on (being chased? or better equipped with the necessary technology to explore new continents and their own initiative?) to South East Asia, Oceania, the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, and 2. the other, ultimately Central, branch remaining in the Eurasian homeland, gradually expanding westward to finally occupy most of Eurasia, and the Northern half of Africa.
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²⁶² Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008; Kaiser & Shevoroshkin 1988; van Binsberge; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

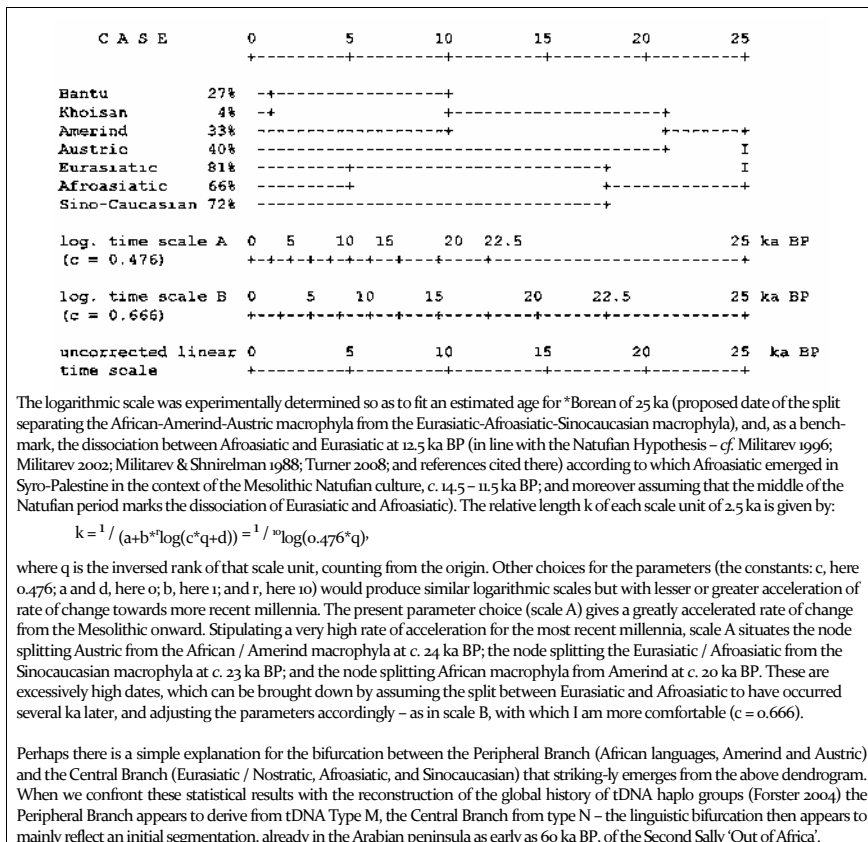


Table 8.1. Glottochronological analysis of the disintegration of *Borean

One of the arguments levelled against long-range linguistic reconstructions such as the Nostratic Hypothesis and the *Borean Hypothesis is the point of 'linguistic drift': the rate of spontaneous change inherent in cultural phenomena including language (and mythologies for that matter; or genetics, with their characteristically huge error distributions) appears to be so high that any effect of genuine long-range transmission would tend to be obscured, reducing the long-range evidence to wishful thinking. However, this argument is not so devastating as it seems. The evidence of many dozens of near-universals of the culture of Anatomically Modern Humans right into modern times (Brown 1991) could be explained in various ways:

- innate patterns – Chomsky;
- a collective unconscious as a palimpsest of a group's deep history – Jung;
- the constant re-creation of culture as a result of the converging capabilities of human minds – neurobiology),

but as compared to these, the hypothesis of

- long-term conservation and transmission, across tens of thousands of years of culture

has certainly the highest explanatory power; such a thesis is also massively supported by specialist studies of lithic industries. The challenge for the sociological imagination is the *improbability of inertia*: if we adopt the latter explanation, we are under the obligation to identify *socio-cultural contexts that are so highly controlled and formalised that relatively lossless long-range transmission becomes plausible; initiation rites, and their associated arts and myths constitute a promising case*. Moreover, there is the eloquent argument²⁶³ of over a thousand *Borean roots that establish continuity across macrophyla, even across tens of thousands of kilometres and tens of thousands of years. Let me present one pet example:

#8.4. EXAMPLE OF A GLOBAL ETYMOLOGY: THE COMPLEX 'EARTH / BOTTOM / HUMAN'he root -*ntu*, 'human, person', although only one of many of hundreds of reconstructed Proto-Bantu roots (cf. Guthrie 1948, 1967-1971: *-*ntu*, Guthrie no. 1789; Meeussen 1980: *-*ntu*, found in many or all languages of the large Bantu family (a branch of the Nigercongo macrophylum), *-*ntu* was so conspicuous in the eyes of Bleek (1851) – the first European linguist to subject these languages to thorough comparative study – that he named them 'Bantu languages' after that root (*ba-* being a common form of the plural personal nominal prefix). However, *-ntu* is not exclusive to the Bantu family. This is already clear from Proto-Austronesian **taw*, 'human, raw' (Adelaar 1995: 345). Looking for an etymology of the puzzling Greek word *ánthrōpos* 'human', the Dutch linguist Ode (1927) had the felicitous inspiration to see this word as a reflex of what he claims to be Proto-Indo-European **nt*, 'under' (cf. the more consensually established Proto-Indo-European: **ndho* 'under' cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 323) – thus proposing an underlying semantics of humans as 'ground dwellers or Underworld dwellers'. This, incidentally, also offered Ode an interesting etymology of the long contested Ancient Greek theonym Athena as an Underworld goddess.²⁶⁴ Along this line, many more possible (pseudo-?) cognates from many language phyla come into view, against the background of the *Borean Hypothesis. Thus, (pseudo-?) cognates of Bantu *-ntu* seem to be Proto-Afroasiatic **tV?* 'a kind of soil' (cf. Old Egyptian *t3*, 'Earth', with cognates in Central and East Chadic and in Low East Cushitic), from *Borean **TVHV*, 'Earth'; a reflex of this root is also found in Sinocaucasian notably as 土 *tǔ* (modern Beijing Chinese), *thǎ*' (Classic Old Chinese), 'land, soil', Karlgren code: 0062 a-c, suggested to be of Austric origin: notably Proto-Austronesian **buRtaq* 'Earth, soil', Proto-Austroasiatic **tɛj* 'Earth', Proto-Miao-Yao **Ctau* (cf. Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994: 60, *ta*k, however the latter two authors – according to Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 'Long-range etymologies' s.v. **TVHV*, 'Earth' – seem to confuse the reflexes of *Borean **TVHV* with those of **TVKV*). Considering the remarkable, especially lexical, similarities between Southern and Eastern African Khoisan, on the one hand, and North Caucasian,²⁶⁵ on the other hand, one should not be surprised that also some Khoisan language families seem to attach to the very old and very widespread Earth / human complex which we have identified here: South Khoisan (Taa): **taʼ*, **tuʼ*, 'person'; North Khoisan (Proto-Zhu) **ʒu*, 'person' – Central Khoisan has **khoe* etc. 'person', which might well be a transformation of **ʒu*. (Note that here, too, like in Bantu, it is the word for 'human' that produces the ethnonyms Taa, Zhu and Khoe /

²⁶³ Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008; Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994.

²⁶⁴ For alternative etymologies, of the name *Athena*, cf. Hrozny 1951: 228; Fauth 1979; Bernal 1987 (contested by Jasanoff & Nussbaum 1996, Egberts 1997; van Binsbergen 1997b / 2011a); Blažek 2010b.

²⁶⁵ As we have seen, Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994 claim a link between Khoisan speakers and West Asia.

Khoi, or Khoekhoe / Khoikhoi!) Further possibilities are contained in the reflexes of another *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', which however is both semantically and phonologically so close to *TVHV'Earth' (however, in *Borean reconstructions, the vowels, indicated by *-V-, had to remain unspecified and therefore may differ) that we may well have to do with one and the same word: Proto-Sinotibetan *dǝǝH'bottom' (e.g. Chinese 底 'tǝǝ?'bottom' Karlgren code 0590 c; 柢 'tǝǝ?', 'root, base', Karlgren code 0590 d) from Proto-Sinocaucasian *dVHV, 'bottom'; from the same *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', also Afroasiatic *duH-, 'low' (e.g. Egyptian: *ḏ* (z) 'low', East Chadic: **ḏwaHdaH-* 'down') as well as Proto-Austroasiatic *dʔuj (also **tuɔj*' tail, vagina'), Proto-Miao-Yao **ʈ o ʈi.B*'tail', Proto-Austronesian: **hudi* 'buttocks' (not in Proto-Austronesian B) (also **udehi* 'last, behind' – the latter, Austric forms being predicated on a semantics of 'lower part of the rump', cf. English 'bottom') (cf. Peiros 1998: 157, 165; most of these data © Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, with thanks).

In the light of these linguistic considerations, mythological continuity between Africa and Eurasia have become thinkable, even probable, despite the theoretical and methodological difficulties attending such a position.

8.2.3. Genetic indications for transcontinental continuities, and their elaboration in the field of comparative mythology

For another ancillary science of comparative mythology, *population genetics*, a similar story of previously unsuspected African-Eurasian continuity has emerged in recent years.

8.2.3.1. Out of Africa

In the first place, the emergence of the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis in the 1980s (Cann *et al.* 1987), meanwhile embraced by most specialists, has made it thinkable – by now even: common-place – that Anatomically Modern Humans (people like you and me) emerged in Africa c. 200 ka BP, and only spread to other continents from 80 ka BP on. Archaeology has brought to light the sophisticated harpoons, cleverly incised lime-stone blocks, and rock paintings, which our direct ancestors were capable of making around about the time of the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and there is no denial: these were people with mental capabilities essentially identical to our own. The study of cultural (near-)universals (e.g. Brown 1991, who presents a long list) allows us a glimpse of what would have been part of the common heritage (which I have termed 'Pandora's Box' – despite the pejorative connotations this term has had since Hesiod), developed by Anatomically Modern Humans before the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and subsequently taken to other continents, to be further transmitted, transformed, and innovated there.

8.2.3.2. Towards an Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology

A few years ago Michael Witzel, prompted by my transcontinental analysis of the symbolism of Leopard skin and of speckled surface textures in general (van Binsbergen 2004), asked me to look at African cosmogonic myths for one of the Harvard Round Table meetings out of which the International Association for Comparative Mythology was to develop, under his inspiring presidency. I was deeply impressed by his seminal paper on world mythology as a window, in its own right, on humankind's remotest past (Witzel 2001), and I set out to 'do a Michael Witzel' on the African material (this book chs 5 and 6). Classifying the African cosmogonic myths then at my disposal into some twenty 'Narrative Complexes', I tentatively formulated an Aggregative (because each complex was an analytical construct of high aggregation) Diachronic (because I adopted a time perspective encompassing the

high aggregation) Diachronic (because I adopted a time perspective encompassing the entire period of 200 ka attributed to Anatomically Modern Humans) Model of Global Mythology. The model is based on recent genetic insights (e.g. Forster 2004, highlighting the diversification and spread of Mitochondrial DNA Types) in the emergence and spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, combined with long-range linguistics, archaeology, and comparative ethnography. In terms of this model:

1. a handful of identifiable initial mythological traits in Pandora's Box in sub-Saharan Africa; these traits I called *Narrative Complexes*, 'NarComs', i.e. coherent complexes of mythemes that we may define analytically so as to impose some manageable order on the confusion and abundance of the data of comparative mythology, and place them in a hypothetical historical sequence
1. were taken to Asia – and beyond, even ultimately back into Africa – on the wings of the demic diffusion process known as the 'Out-of-Africa' migration,
2. and on their way underwent very substantial (and to a certain extent, reconstructible) transformations and innovations,
3. proliferating into a few dozen of further Narrative Complexes.

Initially, I distinguished twenty NarComs on the basis of a corpus of African cosmogonic myths attested in historical times – which I then projected onto Eurasian (mainly literate) mythologies and their distribution maps, so as to try and identify Pre-Out-of-Africa NarComs if any, and to suggest how, from that handful of NarComs in Pandora's Box, the others may have emerged as transformations and innovations, in the course of an extended world history of mythology which largely coincided with the world history of the spread and diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans.²⁶⁶

4. such proliferation especially took place in the context of less than a dozen *Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation* – CITIs, which are in principle identifiable²⁶⁷ in time and space (see Fig. 8.3) although much further linguistic and archaeological work needs to be done on this point; CITIs largely coincide with the contexts in which new modes of production and new (macro-) linguistic families can be argued to have emerged.

It is the segmented nature of this process that allows us to propose dating for its phases. Traits that tend to universality in the cultures of Anatomically Modern Humans may be surmised to have been part of the original 'Out-of-Africa' package, i.e. 'Pandora's Box'. Two Sallies out of Af-

²⁶⁶ Later, when concentrating on the present analysis of a global sample of Flood myths (Isaak 2006; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) I had occasion to define nearly the same number of additional NarComs, which had not been conspicuous in the earlier, African sample: 21 The White God; 22 Astronomy Pole Unilateral Being; 23 Trickster Raven Coyote; 24 Raising The Corn Spirit; 25 Cow of Heaven; 26 Earth Diver; 27 Music Orpheus Flute Reed; 28 Games Contests Combats; 29 The Four (i.e. Elements, And / Or Cardinal Directions); 30 Blood As Poison, Menstruation; 31 Tortoise / Turtle; 33 Fragmented Monster Becomes The World Or Humankind; 34 Vagina Dentata; 36 Fire; 37 Earth-Dragon Mountain Volcano. (also NarComs nos. 32 and 35 were defined but subsequently discarded as superfluous).

²⁶⁷ I have argued (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b; the present book, ch 5 and 6) that CITIs can be identified and dated by a combination of methods, including hermeneutical close reading of mythological material collected in historical times, systematic analysis of the logical relation implied in each NarCom-, modes-of-production analysis, and examination of rock art.

rica have been reconstructed, of which the first (c. 80 ka BP)²⁶⁸ reached Australia along the Indian Ocean coast, but was further largely abortive; while the second, c. 20 ka later, populated the other continents; hence traits that are found in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea and Australia, but nowhere else, could be argued to date from Sally I and possibly from Pandora's Box. The latter's further contents may be argued on the basis of calibration against sub-Saharan African traits in historical times – which must be a combination of

- (a) (evolved) Pandora-Box materials having remained inside Africa, and
- (b) Asia-evolved materials brought to Africa in the context of the Back-into-Africa movement from Asia from c. 15 ka BP on.²⁶⁹

This feedback movement's importance for comparative mythology cannot be overestimated: bringing back to Africa (and, as a side-effect, to Europe) the complex mythologies that had meanwhile evolved in Asia, the result was an amazing (but little appreciated) continuity of mythologies throughout the three continents of the Old World from the Neolithic onward: emphasis on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, the devices to effect their Re-Connection (Demiurge, king, shaman, sacrifice, any vertical nature or man-made object) *etc.*

No doubt my schema has been too grandiose and too audacious to convince in detail, and my initial data were of admittedly poor quality,²⁷⁰ but I will not budge from the basic point:²⁷¹ *most if not all mythologies outside Africa can be taken to descend, in part, from postulated Pre-Out-of-Africa-Exodus mythologies developed in Africa between 200 and 80 ka BP.* To support this claim, I drew up a big table (van Binsbergen 2007b incorporated in the present book as ch 10) where the 20 Narrative Complexes as attested in African cosmogonic myths, are also explored for Eurasian mythologies, with surprising results suggestive of very considerable continuity. As a basis for thinking about African-Eurasian mythological continuity, this could be a meaningful first step towards formulating the overarching unifying system within which to define Asian, European and African mythological specificities.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Population genetics based on multivariate analysis inevitably works with error margins of tens of ka. The date of 80 ka BP reflects Forster's 2004 high dating which I have so far tried to follow, but there is increasing internal evidence that the lower dating of 60 ka BP gives better results for comparative mythology.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004; Forster 2004.

²⁷⁰ Arvidsson (2012: 675), the generally somewhat dismissive reviewer of Venbrux and mine 2010 collection, made a lot of this passage when it first appeared in print:

'Whether one finds the mixture of anthropology, historical linguistics, folkloristics, and archaeology impressive or confusing is perhaps a matter of the individual nature of one's curiosity. Or maybe the problem has more to do with pedagogies – a possibility van Binsbergen proves himself to be fully aware of when he, in his 80 pages long article, writes that his earlier presentations have been

'too grandiose and too audacious to convince in detail, and my initial data were of admittedly poor quality[.]''

In other words (if I understand Arvidsson's elliptical mode of expression correctly), he does not rule out the possibility that he may yet come to buy our particular variety of the New Comparative Mythology, provided we improve on our sales talk. My present volume is an attempt in that direction, and so are my other recent books.

²⁷¹ My formulation here is arrived at by formal analogy with Starostin's *Borean Hypothesis, which could be summarised in the following terms: *most if not all macrophyla attested in historical times can be taken to descend, in part, from a postulated *Borean parent phylum developed in Central to East Asia c. 25 ka BP.*

²⁷² My 2006a summary ended thus:

'While predicated on Witzel's seminal long-range approach to world mythology, his Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy is replaced by a systematically argued combination of continuity, transformation, interaction, and feedback.' (van Binsbergen 2006a: 319; a diagrammatic representation of Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana distinction, radically separating Eurasian and African mythologies, appears on my p. 321).

1 Separation of Heaven and Earth	11 Primal Waters and the Flood
2 Re-connection of Heaven and Earth	12 From the Tree
3 What is in Heaven ²⁷³	13 Cosmic Rainbow Snake
4 Lightning Bird and World Egg	14 Duality Two Children Twins
5 Mantis	15 Spider and Feminine Arts
6 Rescue from the Ogre	16 Shamanism / Bones
7 From the Mouth	17 Speckledness / Granulated Surface Texture / Leopard
8 The Stones	18 Honey bees, (Honey-)Beer
9 The Moon	19 Cosmogonic Virgin And Her Lover-Son
10 The Earth	20 Contradictory Messengers Bring Death

Table 8.2. Narrative Complexes identified in sub-Saharan African cosmogonies as collected in historical times

CITI		proposed Narrative Complex (no. and description)	MtDNA Type	remarks	linguistic context
in time in space					
I. Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic 80 ka BP and earlier	Sub-Saharan Africa	'Pandora's Box': the original mythical package, perhaps containing: 4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg) 8. The stones (as Earth; under CITI VI revised as the stones as connection between Heaven and Earth) 9. The Moon 10. The Earth as primary (10 was subsequently	L (L1, L2, L3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans as a biological mutation? • Africa's soil carrying capacity, even for hunting and collecting, is the lowest in the world, mainly due to geological conditions that predate the appearance of humans by hundreds of millions of years, so it is possible that there was a push out of Africa 	Proto- Human

This message has taken a while to register. Although there has been considerable rapprochement on individual points, *grosso modo* Michael Witzel has continued to rely on his Gondwana / Laurasian dichotomy – in the well-known North Atlantic tradition of the othering of Africans and of the perception of African-Eurasian discontinuity. Michael Witzel's conceptual apparatus on this point is unfortunate. Gondwana and Laurasian are geological terms to designate phases and sections of the postulated original land mass from which, ever since Wegener (1912), modern geo-physics has claimed that present-day continents were formed, on a time scale measured, not in *tens of millennia* like the cultural (including mythological) history of Anatomically Modern Humans), but in *hundreds of millions of years* – which is 10,000 x more, and totally outside the lifespan of any variety of humans on Earth! By its play on such utter primordiality, Witzel's distinction confusingly suggests a fundamental and perennial separation of African / Australian / New Guinean mythologies on the one hand, and Eurasian / Oceanian / American mythologies on the other. Such an approach claims that there are, basically and inevitably, two main branches of mythologising humankind: the primitive southern section characterised by high levels of skin pigmentation, and the more advanced northern characterised by lesser levels. However, my difference with Michael Witzel (while acknowledging the enormous inspiration which his work and person have been for me in recent years) concerns, not in the first place ideology or the transcontinental politics of knowledge, but empirical facts: given the combined, state-of-the-art genetic paradigms of the Out-of-Africa migration and the Back-into-Africa migration, '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 see Table 9.2), while subsequently 'Laurasian'-type mythologies percolated into Africa, overlaying and often – like in the Nkoya case – nearly obscuring the Palaeo-African 'Gondwana' heritage, as a result, in general, of the Back-into-Africa movement (from ca. 15 ka BP), and more recently, and in particular, the southward expansion, into sub-Saharan Africa, of the 'Pelagian Realm' from the Late Bronze Age onward.

²⁷³ Further analysis suggests this NarCom – an analytical construct, like all other NarComs – to be an unfortunate contamination of nos. 4 (cf. Rain), 13, and 19.

		<p>'revised towards cattle, in the Neolithic)</p> <p>12. From the Tree (in subsequent CITIs diversified into 12a 'The world and humanity from the tree', and 12c 'the leg-child')</p> <p>13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake</p> <p>15. The Spider (subsequent transformed into 'the feminine arts' in CITI VI)</p>		<p>• The emergence of myth as constitutive of a new type of human community: self-reflective, coherent, communicating, engaging in hunting and collecting, and creating coherence, through the narrative and ritual management of symbols, leading to articulate language</p> <p>If this last point is plausible, then the earliest phase in the overall process is in itself myth-driven</p>	
II. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 80 ka BP	West Asia, and from there to Australia and New Guinea	5. The Mantis	N and / or M	Leaving Africa and venturing into West Asia is likely to have produced new challenges and to have given access to new opportunities; possibly Neanderthaloid influence;	
III. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 35 ka BP	West Asia	6. Escape from the Ogre	A and B (out of N)	Neanderthaloid influence?	
IV. Upper Palaeolithic, c. 20 ka BP	Central Asia	11. The Primal Waters and the Flood	B (out of N)	Installation of the cosmogony of the Mother / Mistress of the Primal Waters, and the Land	*Borean
V. Upper Palaeolithic, c. 15 ka BP	Central Asia	1. The separation of Heaven and Earth 16. Shamanism, bones	N (H, A, B)	The separation of Heaven and Earth as central cosmogonic theme; shamanism associated with naked-eye astronomy (for hunters, later agriculturalists). The shaman's (belief of) travelling along the celestial axis to Underworld and Upper World, created (the idea of) a politico-religious social hierarchy on which more effective forms of socio-political organisation could be based.	Peripheral and Central branches of *Borean have separated
VI. Proto-Neolithic c. 12 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	2. The Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth (after separation) 19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and her Son / lover 14. Twins	R and M1	Neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; Neolithic arts and crafts such as pottery, spinning, weaving; male ascendance; complex society, the emergence of writing, the state, organised religion, and science; incipient metallurgy	Eurasian and Afroasiatic separate
VII. Neolithic or Bronze Age c. 5 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	7. From the Mouth	too recent and too limited in scope to be interpreted in terms of MtDNA Type	Masculinisation and mythical 'hysterical displacement' of procreative functions, from groin to mouth and head - transcendentalism as triggered by writing, the state, organised priesthood, and science	
VIII. Neolithic to Iron Age c. 3 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	14a. Twins, Two Children, Duality		further reflection needed	

Table 8.3. 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs) in the global history of Anatomically Modern Humans' mythology



LEGEND. 1: CITI: (VII and VIII could not be drawn in location, hence the arrows with hatched lines connecting object and number); 2: Pandora's Box = CITI I, 200-80 ka BP; 3: direct diffusion of (evolved) Pandora-Box / CITI I motifs into Eurasia and the rest of the world, unaffected by the innovation and transformation in the subsequent succession of CITIs; 4: Extended Fertile Crescent, Proto-Neolithic; 5: Back-into-Africa movement, 15 ka BP; 6: Spread and diversification of the MtDNA Types of Anatomically Modern Humans (Forster 2004); 7: Extended General Sunda Thesis (Oppenheimer 1998 and van Binsbergen in preparation (b), van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008).

Fig. 8.3. Provisional situation in space and time of 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs), as crucial stages in the global history of the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans

8.2.3.3. Back into Africa

#8.5. INTRODUCING THE BACK-INTO-AFRICA MOVEMENT FROM ASIA, FROM C. 15 KA BP ONWARD. Nor did this exhaust the inspiration of state-of-the-art population genetics towards the rethinking of African-Eurasian mythological continuities. And that is just as well, because merely invoking a postulated common origin, at a moment in time at least 80 ka BP, risks being as ineffective as a claim of continuity; *cf.* the mythical close kinship of Arabs and Jews (propounded or implied by the sacred books of both groups, the *Qur'ān* and the *Tanach* or *Bible*) turns out to be when it comes to resolving the current socio-political tensions in the Middle East... To make the idea of African-Eurasian mythological continuities a tangible reality, we would like to have something a bit more recent than the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and state-of-the-art population genetics has been good enough to oblige: by identifying, as we have seen, from the indirect and complex evidence of molecular genetic analysis, the 'Back-into-Africa' movement, from East and West Asia, from 15 ka BP on. Population movements massive enough to leave detectable traces to be picked up by state-of-the-art molecular biology, and so relatively recent that they can only have involved Anatomically Modern Humans that were already in full command of symbolic thought and articulate language, – such movements must necessarily have involved (as a form of *demic diffusion*) a measure of cultural, including mythological, transmission from Eurasia, back into Africa, during the same period.

The Back-into-Africa movement makes it understandable, not only that Eurasian and African languages are found to be cognate (as reflexes of *Borean, probably with a proposed cluster Mega-Nostratic), but also that African mythologies as recorded in historical times (and with the exception of the iconographic records of rock art and the performative repertoire of ritual and folklore – both of them posing extreme methodological problems of interpretation and periodisation) must be overlaid with, and may even merge with, Eurasian mythologies. And this is precisely what we observe.

I find it illuminating, and in line with the (admittedly very limited, and difficult to decode, available iconographic) data, to see, in the Eurasian Upper Palaeolithic, the succession, c. 5-10 ka apart, of two main cosmogonic schemas:

- a) first the Cosmogony of the Separation of the Waters and the Land (which gave us Flood myths – evoking the annihilation of the cosmic order, when that order was based on the separation of the waters), and subsequently
- b) the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (connected with the rise of naked-eye astronomy, detailed time reckoning, and of shamanism as an unprecedented concentration of symbolic power).

Although massive vestiges of (a) survived until historical times (notably in the form of the aquatic and marine connotations of the Mother Goddess and of her son-lover, the Hero), (b) has become absolutely dominant, and as a result the central theme in Eurasian mythologies has now been for three or four millennia at least:

- how was the Separation of Heaven and Earth effected,
- how can humankind overcome its traumatic effects (basically, by items coming down from Heaven – such as Rain, Fire, Seeds, Cattle, Humans, Angels, God's Son – , or rising up to Heaven – such as mountains, poles, spires, towers, altars, sacrifices – , or by re-

unifying Heaven and Earth – such as a Demiurge, king, priest, shaman, twin)

- and what eschatological implication does this worldview have.

Well, notwithstanding the prevalence of Flood myths also in Africa, this same preoccupation with the effects of the Separation of Heaven and Earth is found in sub-Saharan African mythologies, in such a way that I have spoken, in connection with that part of the world, of ‘relatively old genes with relatively modern mythologies’.

However, 15 ka is still a very long time span, and one in which ‘mythological drift’ is likely to play havoc with any empirical evidence of transcontinental transmission. Therefore we are fortunate that the ‘Back-in-Africa’ mechanism can be narrowed down, in so far as it refers to Western Eurasia (Underhill 2004 however also claims a substantial Eastern Eurasian influx into Africa, cf. Oppenheimer 1998),²⁷⁴ to the much more recent Pelasgian Hypothesis, which moreover is open to direct study by the examination of ethnographic distributions. In addition to genetics and linguistics, archaeology and comparative mythology, comparative ethnography has been recognised as another venue towards the retrieval of the otherwise undocumented past.²⁷⁵ The distribution of ethnographic traits, used with caution, can provide clues as to the extent and boundaries of culture areas in pre- and proto-history, and indicate affinities otherwise overlooked. Although soon my results proved to be supported by genetic distribution patterns as well,²⁷⁶ it was the analysis of a large number of ethnographic trait distributions throughout the Old World, that has recently made me formulate the Pelasgian Hypothesis, with, I believe, considerable implications for comparative mythology.

8.2.4. The Pelasgian Hypothesis

#8.6. ONCE MORE: THE PELASGIAN HYPOTHESIS. The Pelasgian Hypothesis is one of the tools promising to create order among, and to make sense of, the unmistakable convergence as emerging from the huge global mythological corpus.²⁷⁷ It is an integrative perspective on long-range ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia. This hypothesis proposes an original, primary Pelasgian Realm in Neolithic West Central Asia, which due to westbound population movements in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (greatly facilitated

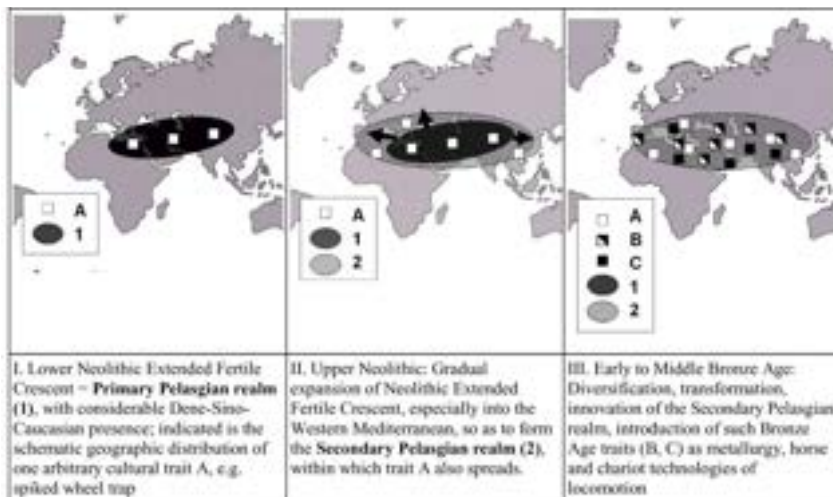
²⁷⁴ #8.7. INTRODUCING THE SUNDA HYPOTHESIS. I refrain here from a substantial discussion of Oppenheimer’s (1998) Sunda thesis. It has two aspects: (a) the General Sunda Hypothesis, claiming that with the global rise of the sea level at the beginning of the Holocene (10 ka BP) the inundation of the ‘Sunda’ subcontinent (now the Indonesian archipelago) caused a massive population movement into Oceania and to Western Eurasia, triggering the civilisations of the Indus valley and of Mesopotamia, if not further a field; (b) the Special Sunda thesis, claiming that in this process the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East including those of Genesis (e.g. the Standard Elaborate Flood myth) were transmitted from a South East Asian origin. A statistical analysis of Flood myths worldwide brought me to dismiss (b), but, especially for Africa, (a) still has a lot to offer (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen 2019, 2020). It cannot be ruled out that a Sunda mechanism was behind the introduction, to South Central Africa, of some of the stories recognised to ‘have travelled’ (Werner 1933; see chapter 17 below); but the Sunda Hypothesis does not throw much light on the data covered in Section 8.5, and their distributions. A carefully edited, lavishly annotated and comparatively referenced Indonesian collection like de Vries 1925 shows only a few Ancient Near Eastern themes (e.g. the motif of the Snake-related Herb of Life) and African themes (which de Vries traces by reference to Frobenius’ story collections); in the Indonesian context, however, these motifs give the distinct impression of distant echoes, not of original prototypes.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Vansina 1968, 1981, 1990; van Binsbergen 1981.

²⁷⁶ For these genetic details, see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

²⁷⁷ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

by Central Asian pastoralists' achievements, notably the rise of horse-riding and of chariot technology) led to the establishment of a secondary Mediterranean-Pelasgian Realm by the Late Bronze Age. Although linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous,²⁷⁸ the Primary and Secondary Pelasgian realms stood out by a package of traits; individual 'Pelasgian' population groups never displayed the entire package, but selectively adopted a number of them, also as a basis for ethno-political identification with other such groups, *e.g.* in the context of the Sea Peoples episode at the very end of the Bronze Age. As many as 80 Pelasgian traits have been identified.²⁷⁹



²⁷⁸ As a result, the term 'Pelasgian' can only be employed as an analytical label, without any implication of a one-to-one correspondence with the ethnic distinctions the historical actors themselves were making. The latter have been taken up by modern students of ancient languages and ethnicities; for an overview of ancient uses of the terms to which 'Pelasgian' refers, see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, and van Binsbergen in press (a).

²⁷⁹ A full list is presented in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chapter 28. A selection of proposed Pelasgian traits includes (in arbitrary order): gold mining and metallurgy; relatively early adoption and transmission (if not invention) of iron-working technology; veneration of a Mother goddess associated with bees; male genital mutilation in at least part of the realm; territorial cults centring on Earth shrines, often in the form of *herms*, with divination function; a central Flood myth and a creation mythology centring on the primal emergence of Land from Water, with the Primal Waters personified as a virgin Creator Goddess; military prowess and pre-marital sexual license of women; veneration of a divine pair of opposite gender (*e.g.* Athena and Poseidon, Athena and Hephaestus, Nü Wa 女媧 and Fu Xi 伏羲 associated with the installation of culture and world order – there are indications that the Graeco-Roman claim of *Lacus Tritonis* / *Šoṭ al-Jerid* (modern Southern Tunisia) as birth place of Athena (and Poseidon?) mirrors an earlier, more eastern, Central Asian birthplace by a major inland lake, and such mirroring occurs in other ancient place names including (H)lberia, Libya, and Africa / Ifriqa (Karst 1931); relatively early adoption and transmission of chariot technology; the hunting technology of the spiked-wheel trap; veneration of a solar god; headhunting and skull cult; common genetic background in respect of certain genetic markers; boat cult, often associated with the afterlife.²⁸⁰ Aarne-Thompson 1973, *cf.* Thompson 1955-1958.

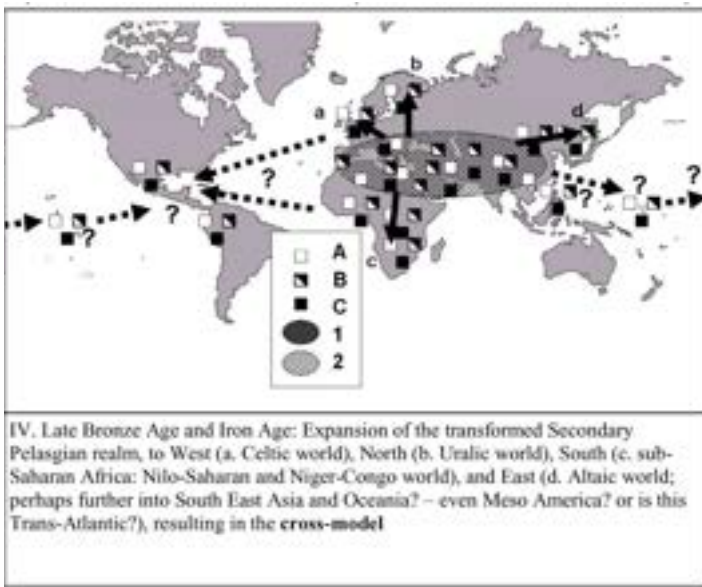


Fig. 8.4. Diagrammatic representation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis

The distribution of these traits brings out one of the essential features of the Pelasgian Hypothesis, notably the ‘*cross-model*’: from the Middle Bronze Age on, and largely on the wings of horse-riding and chariot technology, Pelasgian traits have been selectively transmitted in all four directions: west to the Western Mediterranean and the Celtic World; north to the Uralic and Germanic world; East across the Eurasian Steppe to East Asia, with diversions to South and South East Asia; and south across the Sahara into sub-Saharan Africa – notably the area where Nigercongo (> Bantu) is spoken in historical times.

8.2.5. Good old Aarne-Thompson

But while these are recently formulated models still in full process of testing and refinement, there are also time-honoured approaches to comparative mythology, which are in principle general and universally applicable, and therefore invite specific application to Africa. Ever since the early 20th century CE, the standard tool of comparative mythologists has been the Aarne, subsequently Aarne-Thompson, AT, typological classification of folktales.²⁸⁰ Widely used and highly effective, it was recently updated by Uther (2004). The system has been the basis for much comparative mythological research on a local and regional basis.²⁸¹ Only rarely has it been applied to Africa.²⁸² One elegant way of demonstrating the continuity of African mythologies and those of Eurasia would therefore be to assess how many of the AT

²⁸¹ Cf. British Columbia Folklore Society 2000, which provides an impressive bibliography.

²⁸² E.g. Clarke 1958 (West Africa), and two collections of Ancient Egyptian material (El-Shamy 1980; Maspero 2002).

entries apply to one particular African mythology, e.g. that of the Nkoya of Zambia, South Central Africa, with whom I have done ethnohistorical and ethnographic research since the early 1970s. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther list is very extensive and therefore difficult to handle. Instead, I have used the selection which Fontenrose (1980 / 1959) has made out of this list, with specific reference to the combat myth whose analysis is at the heart of Fontenrose's 1980 / 1959 monograph. Fontenrose's highly selective list (Fontenrose 1980: 583 f., 'Themes and motifs part II') still comprises 399 entries. Of these, as much as one-fifth can be argued to apply to Nkoya mythology, as set out in Table 8.4.

AT number	description	Nkoya application
A128	Mutilated god	Mwenda-Njangula is unilateral
A154	Nectar, soma	mead (<i>mbote</i>) has comparable mythical connotations
A162.2-3	Sky-god fights dragon of the waters or evil demon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga ²⁸³
A162.8	Rebellion of gods against their ruler	creation myth as told by the nature prophet and witch-finder Lubumba (interviews September-October 1973)
A255	Contest with drought demon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga ('Snake child / mother of Drought')
A721.1	Theft of Sun	Kapesh and subjects attempt theft of Moon
A1010	Deluge, inundation of world	Flood myths present although not always in very conspicuous form
A1111	A monster keeps water from mankind until a hero defeats him and releases it	Vrtra-like connotations implied by the name Shihoka Nalinanga 'Snake child / mother of Drought'
B11	Dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga
B11.4.1	Dragon can fly	kings' ambivalent benevolent / malevolent connotations which (cf. Shihoka) approach those of snake or dragon, great powers of <i>malele</i> (wizardry) are attributed, including the powers of bilocation, exceedingly rapid locomotion, shape-shifting and invisibility
B11.5.1	Dragon has power of transforming himself	as previous
B11.9	Dragon as power of evil	as previous
B11.10.3	Fight against dragon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga
B11.11.7	Woman as dragon-slayer	as previous
B11.12.3	Fiery dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga 'Snake child / mother of Drought'
B31	Giant bird	the Creator god and the latter's son are both [giant] birds
B56	Garuda-bird	as previous
B91, 91.1	Mythical Snake, snake-demon	Shihoka Nalinanga
B872	Giant bird	the Creator god and the latter's son are both [giant] birds
D152.1-3	Transformation to hawk / eagle / vulture	as previous; two of these species are royal clan names
D161.1, 162	Transformation to swan / crane	<i>kalyange</i> (stork, heron) as implied evocation of Creator god
D185.1	Transformation to fly / Bee	Nkoya apical ancestress considered queen Bee, and so is bride-taking family in wedding song
D 191, 194, 199.2	Transformation to Snake / crocodile / dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga

²⁸³ Incidentally, there is a Buddhist dimension to this episode. In the Jataka, Mara (the evil spirit of material attachment) seduces the Buddha as an artificial woman in shape of Buddha's wife Yasodhara (Musaeus-Higgins 2000: 237).

D215	Transformation to tree	Manenga, Shinkisha: kings named after trees
D391	Transformation of Snake to man	Shihoka Nalinanga
D399.1	Transformation of dragon to man or other animal	as previous
D429.2.1	Dragon king as wind	Lipepo, 'Royal Person Wind'
D651	Transformation to defeat enemies	kings' <i>malele</i>
D671	Transformation flight	as previous
D950.0.1	Magic tree guarded by Snake	tree connotations of Manenga, Shinkisha; cf. Shihoka Nalinanga
D1171.6	Magic cup, Grail	Cauldron of Kingship
D1344.5	Magic ointment renders invulnerable	kings' <i>malele</i>
D1472, 1472.1.9-19	<i>Wunschding</i> , magic cup, Grail	Cauldron of Kingship
D1710	Possession of magic powers	kings' <i>malele</i>
D2141.0.3, 2142.0.1	Evil demon produces storms, controls winds	Lipepo, 'Wind'
E422	Living corpse	Several people within living memory were known as <i>Mufuenda</i> ('Dead Man Walking') since they returned to life after having been declared dead
E481.1	Land of dead in lower world	Mwaat Yaav, 'Lord Death'
E481.2	Land of dead across water	as previous, north of the Congo / Zambezi watershed
E481.6.2	Land of dead in west	as previous, Nkoya are often called 'Mbwela', 'People of the West'
E485	Land of skulls	Kayambila, 'Thatching with Skulls'
E781	Eyes removed but replaced	obliquely implied in Kapeshe's attempted stealing of the Moon
F93.1	River as entrance to lower world	streams and ponds (whose fishing rights are jealously guarded, usually by king and headman) are considered to be abodes of the ancestors; a reluctant chosen candidate for name inheritance can escape the elders' ruling if he or she runs away and reaches the valley's central stream before being physically caught by the elders and invested with the vacant name
F141.1	River as barrier to otherworld	as previous; but also in the variants presented by Jacottet (1899-1901)
F302.3-4	Fairy demoness entices men to harm them	Likambi Mange's artificial woman
F420.4.1.1	Protean transformations of water-deity	kings' <i>malele</i> ; the underlying image often appears to be that of a water dragon – either terrestrial (of the deep) or celestial (of the sky)
F432	Spirits of wind, storm, thunder, cold	Lipepo
F512.1	One-eyed person, Cyclops	Mwenda-Njangula
F526.6	Snake-man compound	Shihoka Nalinanga
F771.1.9	House of skulls as murderer's abode	Kayambila
G264	La belle dame	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman
G303.1.1	Evil demon is god's son.	Prophet Lubumba's account of creation
G303.3.3.6.1	Evil demon in form of Snake	as previous; and Shihoka Nalinanga
G303.4.1.2.1	Evil demon has one eye in middle of forehead	Mwenda-Njangula
G303.8.1	Evil demon driven from Heaven	Lubumba's account
G308	Sea monster	mystical powers and kings often have the connotations of (celestial or terrestrial) water Snake
G315	Demon cuts off men's heads	Kayambila

	to build with them	
M2	King makes inhuman decisions	Kayambila and several other kings recounted in Likota Lya Bankoya
Q482	Noble person must do menial service	the Kahare royal ancestors suffering humiliation as swine herds at the Lunda capital of Mwaat Yaav, 'Lord Death'
Rt85	Hero fights Death to save somebody	Prince Luhamba's successful war (whose implied purpose was to save his sister Princess Katete) against Mwaat Yaav's ('Lord Death') Humbu punitive expedition
T173	Murderous bride	Likambi Mange's artificial woman

Table 8.4. Selected Aarne-Thompson (AT) traits relevant to the combat theme (Fontenrose 1980) in Nkoya mythology and cosmology

Although we may argue about the justification of some of the entries in this Table, the majority of entries are absolutely straight-forward, and they form a nice initial statement on Nkoya-Eurasian mythological continuities. However, the application of this insight in the Nkoya context threatened to be devastating for my earlier research work, as we shall now see.

8.3. *From myth to proto-history and back, in tears / Tears*

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 pre-colonial 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 c. 2000 CE) 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 century CE. This ethnic label emerged 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 inhabits 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 (which merge with the kingship in the enthronement rite), and female initiation rites are among the Nkoya's central institutions. These 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 Yaav (i.e. 'Lord Death')²⁸⁴ in Southern Congo (whose overlordship used to be acknowledged across many hundreds of kilometres into what is today Zambia and Angola), and *vis-à-vis* the cluster of circumcising peoples in that region: Chokwe, Luvale, Mbunda and Luchazi. The Lozi (Barotse, Luyi) of the Zambezi flood plain²⁸⁵ went through a similar process as the Nkoya, initially parallel with and hardly distinguishable from the ethnic clusters and ruling groups that were to end up under the Nkoya label, subsequently however in an increasingly hegemonic, subordinating relation *vis-à-vis* the Nkoya groups. The latter development especially took place after the Southern African ethnico-military upheaval, known as the *mfecane* (ca. 1820 CE), induced immigration from Southern Africa in the early 19th century CE. This made a Sotho dialect the language of communication throughout rapidly expanding Barotseland. Nkoya court culture especially its royal orchestra has continued to dominate all royal courts in Western Zambia even to this day (Brown 1984; Kawanga 1978), and the Nkoya-Luyana language has remained the Luyi court language. Early Christian mission in what was to be Western Zambia concentrated on these Barotse / Luyi / Lozi of the Upper Zambezi flood plain, from the 1880s CE on. Among the Nkoya, Christian missions only started in the late 1900s CE. To legitimate its control over Western Zambia, the early British colonial administration (from 1900 CE on) had an interest in greatly exaggerating the extent and effectiveness of the Barotse pre-colonial state, which was granted Protectorate status; in the process, Lozi domination over the Nkoya was further enhanced, and for decades, the Nkoya kings (called 'chiefs' since incorporation in the Lozi indigenous administration, and in the colonial state) were forbidden even to have their time-honoured royal drums. Only the Nkoya-staffed royal orchestras serving the Lozi royal establishments throughout the region testify to the Nkoya's earlier exalted position. In recent decades, now that Nkoya musical and ritual culture (despite the re-instatement of royal drums) 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 CE)²⁸⁶ that the Nkoya through a rich repertoire of music (which I suspect to be largely South-Asian derived) and dance present their identity to the wider world at the regional and national level.

Using the Nkoya data first for a theoretical synthetic monograph largely based on the Nkoya data (van Binsbergen 1981) and 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, incorporating 1988; cf. 1987) 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 traditions (as processed by Rev. Shimunika) against the combined background of:

- (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

²⁸⁴ Amidst so many other unexpected reminiscences of the Ancient Near East, one cannot help recalling that also Ancient Syro-Palestine / Canaan knew a Lord Death, Mot.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Gluckman 1941, 1943, 1949, 1951, 1955b; Mainga 1966, 1972, 1973; Prins 1980; Muuka 1966; Coillard 1899.

²⁸⁶ van Binsbergen 1993, 1995b, 1999c, 2003c. 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). Meanwhile, the Kazanga festival has also parallels with East Africa, and Indonesia.

transmitted), but also in commoner villages where the traditions were relatively de-centralised and unprocessed in the light of dynastic aspirations, and therefore reveal many flaws, contradictions and manipulations in the integrated courtly accounts

- (b) the existing historical and theoretical literature on South Central Africa; and
- (c) my own background as a long-standing observer, and increasingly as much-more-than-scientific 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 exists on the area, and no more than a handful older than a century). Given the very recent emergence of the Nkoya ethnic identity, my argument in that book also had to be 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. The transcontinental mythological links which the present argument will assert for the Nkoya people, cannot claim to apply to the whole of Africa, yet they make us look with a different eye at the isolated position in which African mythologies are so often put, in contrast to Eurasian ones (cf. Frazer 1918; Witzel 2001, 2010).

Only after living with the Nkoya and their traditions for almost a quarter of a century, did extensive exposure to Assyriology, Egyptology and comparative mythology in the first half of the 1990s, make me realise that what I had considered, in my Nkoya historiography, to be a distorted traditional account of historical events in Iron Age South Central Africa up to half a millennium BP, yet contained many highly specific parallels with the mythologies attested in the texts of civilisations extremely remote in space and time from Nkoyaland.²⁸⁷ Below I in his compilation of oral traditions will offer a detailed discussion of these possible specific mythological correspondences with Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, South Asia, Central Asia, and even North America. So I had to face the possibility (van Binsbergen 1998-2006; incorporated in the present book as ch. 7) that my historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*, however acclaimed by the doyen of Central African protohistory Jan Vansina (1993) in no mean terms ('may others follow [van Binsbergen's] example', he

²⁸⁷#8.8. A BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORLD'S DIVINATION SYSTEMS. From 1990 on, one of my major research projects has been the comparative study of African divination systems, in an attempt to situate, in space and time, the system I had encountered during fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana, from 1988 on. From this context I derived my first empirically underpinned insight in African-Eurasian continuities (apart from noting the – as I much later was to realise, *Pelasgian* – continuities between Ancient Greece and the highlands of North-western Tunisia, site of my first fieldwork in the late 1960s): the Francistown system turned out to be a form of *geomantic divination*, closely cognate to those in the rest of Southern Africa, Madagascar and the Comoro Islands, and West Africa; these could all be traced to the system of *'ilm al-raml* (Arabic 'Sand Science') or *ḥatt al-raml* (Arabic 'Sand Calligraphy') – a divination system that surfaces in 'Abāšid Iraq by the end of the first millennium CE, probably under influence from both North Africa (the principal author on *'ilm al-raml* is the Berber sheikh Muhammad al-Zānāti) and (with the T'ang dynasty having far extended West, a thriving East Asian trade in the harbour of Bašra, and demonstrable Chinese influence on intellectual life in Iraq) from Chinese divination well-known as 易經 *yì jīng* ('*Y Ching*'; cf. van Binsbergen 1995a, 1995c, 1996b, 1996c, 2012a). In view of the recognised continuity between Islamic 'secret sciences', those of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, and those of Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Near East (Fahd 1966; Bottéro 1992; Ray 1981; Borghouts 1995; Bouché-Leclercq 1879; Delatte & Delatte 1936; Ullman 1972), this project ramified out into Antiquity and the Ancient Near East, in a bid to identify proto-geomancies. In this connection I was fortunate to join the 'Research Group on Magic and Religion in the Ancient Near East', Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), Wassenaar, 1994-1995, whose stimulating impact I hereby acknowledge. However, the antecedents that I was looking for were only found much later, and scarcely in that context (with the exception of the Presocratics), but in a transcontinental elemental system of transformations ranging – in the recognisable *Pelasgian* distribution – from the Mediterranean to East Asia and South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2009a, 2009b, 2012a).

wrote), was yet largely fictitious and based on some sort of proto-historical *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* (Whitehead 1925). In other words, I began to fear that initially 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.

Let me give one example of what this concretely means for proto-historical analysis in the South Central African context.

#8.9. *THE NKOYA KING AS DEATH DEMON*. The legendary Nkoya king Kayambila's throne name (literal meaning: 'the Thatcher' – parallels with the Iron Lady of 20th c. CE British politics are probably coincidental) boasts that he thatched his palace with the skulls of his enemies. This cruel practice has, in the first place, local resonances. It is part of a violent skull complex that was quite central to Nkoya culture before modern times, and elements of which have persisted at least in the form of rumours – e.g. the rumour (as late as 1973 leading to a grim court case; van Binsbergen 1975 and in press (b) that the king routinely sends out his henchmen to kill stray children, because his life force – and that of the country – depends on consumption of their brains. Is Kayambila only an a-historical evocation epiphany of an Underworld demon? And does the same apply to his overlord the Lunda king Mwaat Yaav, whose name means literally the 'Lord Death' and whose very real though distant court at Musumba, far north of the Zambezi / Congo watershed, has long been known as the scene of great cruelty (cf. Frazer 1911-1915)? Or could Kayambila yet have been historical? The political events in Western Zambia 1820-1950 make us read as a counter-hegemonic claim, and hence as potentially mythical, the account of Kayambila graciously extending Nkoya regalia to his alleged poor relative the Barotse king Mulambwa. 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.²⁸⁸ This grandson was explicitly claimed to be still alive in the early twentieth century CE, when Rev. Shimunika – his close kinsman, who described the birth scene in his compilation of oral traditions *Likota Lya Bankoya* – was in his teens. I was therefore persuaded, in *Tears of Rain*, to consider Kayambila as a historical figure, and to situate his rule shortly after 1800 CE. However, the skull motif makes him more than life-size. He has effectively taken on the features of a king of the Underworld. The popular consciousness of common Nkoya villagers has retained this conception of the kingship to a great extent – in this society where sorcery and counter-sorcery constitute the routine imagination and discourse – more than the actual practice – of the ongoing social process (cf. van Binsbergen 1981, 2001), the king is considered the greatest sorcerer of all. This also 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 (pig herding) they were suffering at the court of Mwaat Yaav. Now, when we consider the myth of Nkoya kings leaving Musumba, 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? (Cf. Fontenrose 1980, who considers this the underlying motif of all combat myths worldwide.) Must we reckon, here and in the other cases of extensive Ancient parallels in modern Nkoya traditions and institutions, with the possibility that old mythical 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

²⁸⁸ Cf. van Binsbergen 1992; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d. In ch. 13, below, we shall come back to this custom of dedicating newborn children to the morning Sun, and offer an over view (few) of its attestations worldwide, and propose a tentative interpretation.

continuity with, and legitimacy in the light of, a very dimly remembered, very remote past of several millennia ago? (Much like, in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, kings of the late periods claimed legitimacy by reviving the memory of their very distant, legendary predecessors: Sargon II (early 8th century BCE) naming himself after Sargon of Akkad across 16 centuries; or Sargon II's contemporary the 25th-dynasty Nubian pharaoh Shabaka claiming, likewise across one and a half millennium, a 6th-dynasty throne name for himself.) Or does the Nkoya skull complex have genuine Eurasian parallels, to be explained by Nkoya and Western Eurasia sharing a common cultural source – to be mediated through Pelasgian diffusion, or perhaps through a Moghul / Mongolian substrate traits implied in Chola / South Asian impact upon South Central Africa? Below, Section 8.5 will make the plausibility of the latter positions abundantly clear, to the detriment of my localised, proto-historical South Central African reading of such myths.

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 1960-1980s.²⁸⁹ 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 rain-shrine 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 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.'

Seeking to retrieve the recent proto-historical past of sub-Saharan Africa was very much *en vogue* among historians and anthropologists from the late 1960s onwards (cf. Ranger & Kimambo 1972). Confident in our use of a systematic method to extract fragments of historical fact from local myth,²⁹⁰ we did not heed Wrigley's criticism, which meanwhile however I have come to consider as eminently well-taken. Yet even Wrigley's position still displayed the familiar, main-stream limitation of considering – in a splendid tradition of which Luc de Heusch (1958, 1972, 1982) has been the principal exponent – the Bantu world as the *exclusive* realm within which any mythological interpretation of South Central African oral-historical narrative would have to 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. However understandable in the light of the hegemonic Modern history of North Atlantic involvement with Africa and of African Studies's need to dissociate from that history, the condescending futility of this position is clear when we try to apply it, *mutatis mutandis*, to the study of Christianity as a conspicuously European expression (but not Europe-originating, which from Early Modern times onward, moreover, spread over the entire globe); or to the explosive question of the autochthony of Indian languages and of the Vedic scriptures, etc.²⁹¹ *African societies and cultures cannot be studied meaningfully by reifying their Africinity, but must be studied, like any other societies and cultures in the modern world, as part of the global constellation as a whole* (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020).

²⁸⁹ Cf. Schoffeleers 1985, 1988, 1992; Wrigley 1988; van Binsbergen 2010 / this book's ch. 8.

²⁹⁰ Vansina 1965, 1985; Schoffeleers 1979, 1985; van Binsbergen 1981, 1985.

²⁹¹ Cf. Witzel 1989, 1997, 2003.

My progressively confident re-reading of Nkoya oral historical narrative as possibly parallel with widely circulating and very ancient Eurasian mythology, set the scene for a long book draft provisionally entitled (by reference to the Egyptian royal title 'She of the Reed and the Bee') *Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, And The World – Beyond The Black Athena Thesis*, on which I have worked 1998-2020, constantly rewriting previous drafts in the light of successive and hopefully more valid models of global mythology since prehistory; and constantly cannibalising the emerging book's chapters for use in other, more urgent and more expedient writing projects. This intellectual struggle was an attempt, among other motivations,²⁹² 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. However, the same tendency has also been endemic, in varying degrees, in all other area studies of an ethnographic, philologico-linguistic, or archaeological nature. It has likewise been built into the very structure of Modern academia with its differentiation and organisation of disciplines, journals, libraries, funding structures etc. – producing such apparent factuality that it is difficult *not* to project it onto the world of our data. Admittedly, without localising compartmentalisation no ethnography, no coherent linguistic description, no recording, archiving and comparing mythologies, no funding. 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. Recent globalisation studies have taught us that, as one of the salient aspects of the world today; established forms of localising compartmentalisation are now giving way both to the effacing of time-honoured boundaries, and to the rise of new ones. Such approaches have led to a spate of neo-diffusionist studies (considering the global transmission, especially in recent decades, of artefacts, identities, innovations, of political, artistic, scientific and religious ideas). This has 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.

However, the plausibility of transcontinental continuity between African and Eurasian mythologies is not only called in question by the bad name that traditional diffusionism has obtained (partly as a result of its own deficiencies, partly as the predictable demonisation resulting from its being supplanted by the classic anthropological paradigm). There is also the very real problem that no long-range implications can be attached to such continuities, even if empirically established, as long as they could be suspected, let alone demonstrated, to result

²⁹² As already indicated elsewhere in the present book, the book draft with the working title *Global Bee Flight* (the most obsolete part of it sought to trace the global ramifications of Ancient Egyptian royal titulare) grew out of a request from Martin Bernal, 1997, to contribute to a collection of papers by scholars sympathetic to his *Black-Athena* thesis. However, when I found that the Pelasgian West Asian / Mediterranean contribution to the Ancient Egyptian dynastic state and culture had to be regarded as independent in its own right, and could not be reduced to an Afrocentric South-North model emanating from sub-Saharan Africa, the text expanded far beyond article length, frictions arose, and I did not make Bernal's deadline. Frustrated, doubting my provisional results but initially lacking the transdisciplinary resources and inspiration to do better, I allowed the draft to be shelved ever since – ready for cannibalising until I discontinued the entire project in 2021.

from recent, deliberate cultural transmission notably in the context of Christian and Islamic proselytisation, and the diffusion of modern formal education and publishing. This is the problem of *contamination*.

8.4. *The problem of contamination*

From the very beginning of the modern study on African myths, scholars have been conscious of the possibility of transcontinental borrowing. Many of these scholars were Christian missionaries, and they were particularly keen to detect similarities between African myths and those of the Bible. Such correspondences were also spotted with regard to South Central Africa.²⁹³ Werner (cf. Ananikian & Werner 1964), in her valuable and influential collection of myths from the Bantu-speaking peoples, includes an entire chapter on 'stories which have travelled', even though she declares herself not to subscribe, in general, to 'the Diffusionist Hypothesis' (Werner 1933: 307); we shall come back to her work in ch. 17, below.

But it is not only direct Christian and Islamic proselytisation that might be held responsible for the recent intrusion of Eurasian themes in sub-Saharan Africa, *i.e.* in historical times and especially from the 19th century CE on. Another, though related, cause is the availability and often wide circulation of printed texts in which North Atlantic scholars and missionaries have laid down their early researches in the fields of African ethnography, oral history and oral literature, – texts which in many cases are subsequently appropriated by African informants and presented as the unadulterated truth concerning their own, local cultural traditions. Historians and anthropologists working on the Lower Congo region were among the first to note this phenomenon (specifically for the Lower Congo region) and to label it 'recycling' (cf. Janzen 1985). In Western Zambia, with its large number of missionary vernacular publications dating from the early 20th century, this effect is inevitable and considerable.

#8.10. RECYCLING IN RECENT AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH PROBLEM. Thus the main Nkoya oral-historical text, *Likota Lya Bankoya*, in format (short chapters opening with a large, uncial-like chapter number, and numbered verses) and also in contents (cf. *Kings* 1 and 2) owes a considerable debt to the *Old Testament* (whose principal translator in Nkoya, Rev. Johasaphat Shimunika – note the Biblical given name – was also the compiler of *Likota Lya Bankoya*); *Likota* also contains elements of recycling, especially of published compilations of Lozi royal traditions concerning king Mulambwa. My own book *Tears of Rain* was published in 1992 in a bound edition, and was issued a few years later in a low-cost Zambian edition; within a few years I could detect traces of its being recycled into Nkoya oral historical accounts pretending to be authentic and unadulterated. The same phenomenon was noted by the oral-historian the late lamented Robert Papstein among the Luvale of North Western Zambia, where his own texts, and those of his predecessors such as C.N.M. White, were rapidly and constantly recycled (R. Papstein, 1979, personal communication).

Under such circumstances, the present argument's central claim is far from obvious: that elements of mythology found among the Nkoya in the second half of the 20th century CE, are continuous with Eurasian mythologies, *hardly as a result of recent recycling from the Early Modern period on, but mainly because of long-range connections in space and time going back to the Bronze Age or earlier*. This is why a detailed, fully referenced examination of the transcontinental evidence is necessary, however great the cost in research time and printing space. These findings, presented in Section 8.5, will demonstrate beyond reasonable

²⁹³ *E.g.* Torrend 1905, 1910, cf. 1921; Jacottet 1899-1901.

doubt that the great majority of the transcontinental correspondences in Nkoya mythology have nothing to do with the spread of Christianity and Islam – neither thematically, nor as far as concerns the mechanisms of their transcontinental transmission.

8.5. Major mythological themes among the Nkoya, with a discussion of their salient transcontinental correspondences

In this section, 26 mythemes²⁹⁴ are considered that circulate in Nkoya mythology (van Binsbergen 1992). Per mytheme, first the Nkoya data are summarised, then such *Comparative* data given as I have at my disposal.²⁹⁵ In a few cases I found it useful to include distribution maps, but I have not attempted, at this stage, to provide such maps for all mythemes. Throughout this section I will use a smaller type-face and line spacing, to mark this text as documentary rather than argumentative.

8.5.1. The Reed-and-Bee complex

Nkoya: Among the Nkoya the Reed-and-Bee complex takes a number of different manifestations:

- a. The apical ancestress of the Nkoya, Libupe, as a Queen Bee travelling with her Swarm and landing at the land of Nkoya
- b. 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
- c. *Mbote*, 'mead', being male Nkoya courtiers' paroxysm of bliss
- d. Primordial mythical twins of complementary gender, Katete ('Reed Person') and Luhamba ('Royal Person Going from Branch to Branch' / 'Beehive') hide from the Lord Death (Mwaat Yaav) in a Reed Mat and a Bee Hive (!).
- e. A reed mat is the central, eponymical locus of investiture / enthronement / name inheritance (*ushwana*)
- f. Royal courts, *ushwana* ritual sites, royal dead bodies and royal graves (*cf.* Cunnison 1968 for an Eastern Lunda parallel) are sheltered by reed mats
- g. Reed mats are the standard bedding
- h. The Eastern Nkoya (Mashasha) consider the reed mat their emblem, probably as a moveable shrine containing royal ancestral relics

Comparative:


²⁹⁴ Conceivably, I could have considered these Nkoya motifs in the light of the Narrative Complexes making up my Aggregative Diachronic Model. That would have nicely closed the circle of the present argument, and remains a task for further elaboration. Here, however, I have refrained from doing so, because the point here is merely to demonstrate the Nkoya mythemes's continuity with Eurasian motifs, rather than classifying and periodising them within the history of global mythology. The two lines of argument are complementary, not consecutive.


²⁹⁵ As my dear fellow-editor of the 2010 collection in which this chapter first appeared, Eric Venbrux, did already point out to me in the editorial process of our original collection (van Binsbergen and Venbrux 2010), my successive overviews of the comparative data, spanning the better part of the Old World since the Neolithic, are handicapped by the fact that, admittedly through unforgiveably being human, I cannot claim to have had access to all the original sources in all the relevant original languages, hence – like in all comparative mythological research that proceeds beyond the strictly local or regional – I often had to rely on secondary sources. The same objection was levelled against Witzel's 2012 *magnum opus*, as we shall see in the final chapter of the present book, and there I shall defend him (an accomplished philologist, to boot) against this senseless criticism. Sometimes the secondary sources I had to rely on were, admittedly, of mediocre quality: *e.g.* Graves 1964, van der Sluijs *n.d.* However, having access to well over a dozen languages including the original Nkoya language has seemed to me at least some protection against a risk that, frankly, adheres all comparative mythological work. Specialist regional philologists will have no difficulty replacing my defective sources by better ones and yet arriving at more or less the same overall results.

Mead: In the Ancient Near East (especially Anatolia and Ancient Egypt), Ancient Europe including classical Greece, Germanic and Celtic Europe, South Asia (cf. *soma*) and in Madagascar, mead was a focal element in cosmology and social interaction (cf. Dickson 1978; Fontenrose 1980: 538; Beaujard 1994; Kerényi 1976: 35; *Ryveda* V, 43:3-4, VIII, 5:6); theft of mead / *soma* (Jakobsdóttir 2002; Knipe 1967).

Bee and Honey: *Hymenoptera* (including bees) and *Diptera* (including flies and midges) have tended to be associated with the Sun, the Rainbow, and the Supreme God in Ancient Egypt and throughout the Ancient Near East (combined with symbolism of air, and of shimmering; Draffkorn Kilmer 1987). In Ancient Egypt, this link even gave rise to the golden fly as an accolade for military prowess (Houlihan 1996: 192). In the Anatolian *Kumarbi Epic*, a Bee saves the world (Güterbock 1948). In Egypt, the Bee motif is connected with 'tears of the divinity' motif (see below), since not only humans, but also bees, are reputed to have sprung from such tears. The Bee as a ritual focus and symbol was a constant element in Greek art from Minoan times on, with extensions to the isles of Rhodes and Thera; bees fed the infant Zeus on Crete, hence Melisseus as name of the father of the nymphs who attended the infant Zeus – likewise the female priesthood of major goddesses is called Melissae, 'bees'; cf. the motif of bees and kingship (Apollodorus / Frazer 1970: I, 7). In the Celtic world, Ogmia Cermaith 'of the honeyed mouth' is the Irish equivalent of Arthur / Gvrydion (Cotterell 1989: 62); below we will see several more instances demonstrating the closeness of Nkoya and Celtic mythologies. In Northern Europe, the 15th Canto of the *Kalevala* (Tamminen 1928) abounds with Honey and Bee motifs.

Reed: had a central symbolic, cosmogonic significance (the original reed clump to rise out of the Primal Waters and to serve as place for the Bee to alight) in Ancient Egypt from earliest dynastic times (Emery 1961); there is evidence of mat burial here (Goneim 1956: fig. 19, opposite p. 64). The same Reed complex is in evidence in Neolithic Çatal Hüyük and in Ancient Mesopotamia, which is likely to have influenced earliest temple and royal architecture in Egypt (Rice 1990). Reed mats play a conspicuous role in the lives of Central Asian peoples such as Mongols and Kyrgyz (Sommer 1996; Waugh 2002). Prometheus in Ancient Greek myth brought Fire from Heaven in a *narthex* i.e. a hollow Reed; the return of the fire is a much more widespread Flood motif. Reed is associated with origin of the world, among the Zulu (Callaway 1870), the Japanese (*Kojiki*, I, cf. Chamberlain 1919

and Philippi 1968), Egypt (Chemmis / Aḥ-bit, ) and spelling variants; Helck 1979; also see below, the motif of Royal Sibling Complementarity / Rivalry), and Yoruba (van der Sluijs, *n.d.*). Werner (1933) records a myth from the Bantu-speaking area where the first couple come forth from an exploding reed stalk; cf. Prometheus (fire stolen in reed stalk / *narthex*), and many North American Flood myths and cosmogonies, where reed plays a central role notably as a Flood-escaping device (e.g. Navajo, cf. Capinera 1993: 226-228, Newcomb 1990; Hopi / Sia, Alexander 1916: 203; Pima, Frazer 1918: 283-287; Hopi, Waters 1963: 12-20 and Voth 1905; Caddo, cf. Erdoes & Ortiz 1984: 120-122; Isaak 2006). In the Gilgamesh epic, after the gods had decided to destroy humankind, the God Enki went to warn the prospective Flood hero Atrahasis using the very words of the Nkoya myth of Katete and Luhamba: 'Do you hear, Reed Person?' (cf. Lambert & Millard 1969; Cagni 1975; Frymer-Kensky 1977). A distant echo of the same motif comes through in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe (Shakespeare (1879), *A Midsummernight's Dream*).

Reed and Bee: one of the principal Ancient Egyptian royal titles, *nswt-bit*  'She [the two t's ∆ doubly mark the expression as feminine] of the Reed and the Bee', as attested in writing and iconography from Earliest Dynastic times onward (cf. Thierry 1913; Sethe 1930; Müller 1938; Kaplony 1963; Schott 1956; Otto 1960, and numerous more recent general accounts including Edwards 1985; Spencer 1993; Kemp 1995; Gundlach 1997; 1998; Dosrev 1993; Wilkinson 1990; no consensus on explanation of this title (not Upper / Lower Egypt!)). Probably: cosmogonic evocation of the Primal Hill (reed clump) emerging from the Primal Waters, and touched by the First Sun (or Bee). 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). Lower Egypt has featured, from earliest dynastic times, a Sais-based cult of a goddess associated with Bees and Honey. This cult is a variant, no doubt, not so much of Upper Egyptian and ultimately African continuities, but of more general Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age mother goddesses (some of them persisting well into the Iron Age) similarly associated with bees and honey (cf. Gimbutas 1982 for the European Neolithic) notably a priesthood designated as bees. The Indian god of love, Kama, seems to have borrowed the Reed-and-Honey symbolism: he carries a bow made of sugar-cane stalk strung with a line of humming-bees and he shoots arrows tipped with flowers.

8.5.2. Lord Death

Nkoya: The Lunda king / hereditary royal title Mwati Yamvo / Mwaat Yaav ('Lord Death'), overlord of the Nkoya kings, and in general of many kings in Northern South Central Africa. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915 / 1911-1915) described (on the basis of travelogues and other antiquated sources) the remarkable fate of the Lunda king, who at the end of his allotted term of office was to be physically torn apart by his councillors (as in emulation of such cosmogonic monsters as Germanic Ymir, Chinese Pan Ku, or in an adulterated form the South East Asian vegetation goddess Hainuwele, whose body in death would furnish the parts out of which the natural world was to be constituted (cf. van Binsbergen 2020: 147, 382, 176n, with references).

Comparative: Ancient Greek Hades / Pluto, South Asian Yama, Chinese 閻羅 Yanluo and Japanese 閻魔大王 Enma Dai-O. Like the Lunda and the Nkoya king, the Turkish king is strangled at the end of his reign (Los 1969: 260).

8.5.3. Kings herding pigs

Nkoya: kings when staying with Mwaat Yaav ('Lord Death').

Comparative: A taboo on pork consumption (which, ironically from a Judaeo-Islamic perspective, could be interpreted as affirmation of belonging to the pig clan) in many parts of Nigercongo speaking Africa, and moreover among Israelites / Jews and Muslims. The pig was sacred to Ancient Egyptian Seth and Isis, and to Greek Circe. As a strange combination of solar Underworld deity out in the Ocean (retaining, in fragmented and barely recognisable fashion, the most crucial aspects of the Mother of the Waters 'Below, Aside and Above'), Circe as host of Odysseus and his companions with Circe, turning them into pigs (*Odyssey* X, 212 f), has striking structural correspondences with this Nkoya motif – while the Circe motif has also been recognised in South Asia (Gerland 1869), and its general Pelasgian nature is further highlighted by the associations between Circe (and Odysseus) with the kingship of the Tyrrhenians / Tyrsenians – a people of seafarers and pirate speaking a non-Indo-European language (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 1011 f; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011:282n f).

8.5.4. Stranger hunter seizes the kingship; menstruation considered to be disqualifying for the kingship

Nkoya: the standard form of this myth in S.C. Africa (cf. Turner 1955; Hoover 1980) is that of Chibinda / 'Hunter', depriving Luwēji / 'Moon' from her kingship on the pretext of her menstruation;²⁹⁶ among the Nkoya a version circulates featuring royals from the local tradition. The motif also occurs in the West African Sundjata epic (Innes 1974; Jansen 1995).

Comparative: Medb (cf. Edel 1986), legendary Irish queen who because of her name ('She Who Makes Drunk', cf. 'mead'), her aquatic connotations (her nickname is 'great-bladdered' – she is a 'Mother of the Waters'), her affirmation of menstruation even though it disqualifies her from giving battle (a common motif in the Irish early literature), further confirms our general impression of the closeness of the Nkoya and the Celtic mythological worlds – a closeness further brought out by the emphasis on bards and music, Arthurian themes such as the brother's usurpation of his sister's kingship or, alternatively, and sister's plotting to wrench the kingship from her brother's hands and kill him, etc.. The disqualifying nature of menstruation is an important comological

²⁹⁶ The early comparative mythology, of the late 19th century CE, was fascinated by the possibility of interpreting many myths as 'Nature myths', as illustrating aspects of natural processes – e.g. the sequence of the season in the Grimm fairy-tale of Snow White. In particular, astronomical processes were favourite in such myth interpretations. When in the Luweji / Chibinda myth one of the protagonists has the name of the nocturnal luminary the Moon, it stands to reason to try and interpret her counterpart as symbolic for the Sun. Human menstruation – which is to be Luweji's downfall as a female ruler – follows normally a near-monthly cycle hence in many culture is designated by reference to the Moon; e.g. among the Nkoya: *ulina ngonda*, 'she has the Moon, she is menstruating'. Astronomically it is not very obvious that a mythical character representing the Sun should deprive the Moon of its splendour – the latter is often recognised, anyway, to be secondarily derived from the Sun, as in the Shakespearean quotation we shall consider a few footnotes down. However, meteorologically the effect is unmistakable: the Moon and *a fortiori* the stars only appear in their full splendour in the absence of the Sun, i.e. after nightfall – and when the Sun rises its much brighter light makes the stars invisible and greatly dims also the Moon's splendour.

theme in Bantu-speaking societies; it also surfaces in the Dogon cosmogony (‘the Creator Amma removed the Earth’s clitoris in the form of an anthill, and had intercourse with her, but *menses* began when the offspring of that union committed incest with his mother’). However, the strongly negative connotations of menstruation have also been highly elaborated in Judaism, many forms of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Shintoism – transmitting a trait widely circulating in the Pelasgian Realm from South Asia to the Mediterranean.

8.5.5. Regicide as socio-political renewal

Nkoya: prominent motif in *Nkoya* mythology; cf. Mwaat Yaav (cf. 8.5.3. above) and Zimbabwe and N. Nigeria (Smith 1919: 114f). Frobenius (1931) sees this motif as constitutive for the societies of South Central Africa. Simonse (1990) on the basis of extensive fieldwork in modern South Sudan reconsidered the issue and offers a new theory. A similar Nilotic society, that of the Shilluk, had already brought Evans-Pritchard (1948) to radically reconsider Frazer’s theory, but probably the Shilluk case is too much regio-specific to provide a convincing empirical refutation of a much wider theory.

Comparative: widespread motif of comparative mythology, cf. *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1911-1915).

8.5.6. Stealing the Moon

Nkoya: King Kapesh Kamunungampanda, with several South Central African parallels

Comparative: Uralic world: the primordial smith Ilmarinen plucks the Moon from a tree in Heaven (*Kalevala*, Tamminen 1928: 139). Bringing down the Moon is a central motif in Graeco-Roman magic as well as an activity attributed to witches by Russian peasants (Hastings 1908-1921: VIII, 270, 273f, 282, IV: 815). Egypt: Seth steals the Eye of Horus (usually identified with the Moon) (Monet, *n.d.*; de Buck 1935-1961). Korea: a dog is ordered to steal the Moon (Grayson 2001: 254f). Burma: a plot to steal the Moon (Davison 1994). Highly significant, considering the abundance of Central Asian reminiscences in *Nkoya* mythology, is that the motif of stealing the Moon also occurs in the Kyrgyz Epic *Manas* (Köçümkulkiti 2005, lines 3180 *f.*). Among the 侗族 Dong minority, China: there is the annual festival of ‘Stealing Moon Dishes’ (Anonymous, Dong minority, *n.d.*). Stealing the Moon (with or without the Sun) is a frequent motif in North American mythology, where Raven engages in this act among the North West Coast groups (*e.g.* Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl, Dogrib, Tsimshian) and Coyote and Antelope or Eagle try to outdo each other in this act in the Northern Rocky-Mountains region and among the Hopi (Jones 1914; Swanton 1909; Clark 1966; Hastings 1908-1921: V: 706). Frazer’s *Folk-lore of the Old Testament*²⁹⁷ (1918: ch. 2, ‘The Fall of Man’, § 3. ‘The Story of the Cast Skin’) plausibly explains this mytheme by the Moon’s (not unlike the cauldron’s, see below) being as a widespread symbol of death and rebirth. In the background are widespread mythemes of heroic theft (cf. Jakobsdóttir 2002; Knipe 1967): in Nordic mythology, Loki turns into a fly to steal Freya’s golden necklace; cf. the theft of सोम *soma* in Indian mythology, by Garuda, Varuṇa, or some other agent. Whatever botanical or symbolic associations attach to the highly complex concept of Soma, it is essentially the Moon, so at an abstract level the motif of stealing the Moon is structurally equivalent to that of stealing soma. But also cf. Prometheus’s theft of Fire from Heaven (see the Reed motif, above), for the benefit of humans, allegedly his own creatures. However, from the perspective of Flood myths – to which both Prometheus and the Tower / Kapesh motif are intimately related – new Fire needs to be brought so as to restore the natural and human order after the Flood. Human’s theft of what is jealously guarded in Heaven is an act of defiance and hope in the face of death, – two attitudes that are essential to the human condition. The heroic theft motif will also appear below, when we discuss the cauldron of kingship.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Responsible, however, for the widespread but utterly wrong notion that Flood myths are absent from sub-Saharan Africa.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Table 9.3, AT mytheme ‘stealing the Sun’, with *Nkoya* application. It is interesting that the Moon, itself only in indirect possession of its light (but that is far from obvious, and in the Western tradition took an exceptional mind like Anaximander’s – 5th century BCE – to realise), should inspire so many motifs of stealth and stealing. Cf. Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*:

*The Moon’s an errant thief
and its pale Fire it snatches from the Sun.*⁷

This is the central motif of Nabokov’s (1962) intertextuality-centred novel *Pale Fire*, where the critic’s / editor’s treacherous secondary appropriation of text is set off against the poet’s original light.



Fig. 8.4a. Ornate Buddhist poles at the Museum of Thai / Lanna Folklore, downtown Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020

8.5.7. A Flood and Tower complex; 1. the Tower into Heaven

Nkoya: The Nkoya, Mbwela, Ila, and Kaonde, of Western Zambia, have the myth that a royal Kapesh²⁹⁹ Ka-

²⁹⁹ Kapesh has no convincing etymology in Nkoya or other Bantu languages. Considering that the best known Flood stories are from the Ancient Near East and especially the תנ"ך *Tanach*, it is relevant that שרף *qps* occurs in Biblical Hebrew as 'the capering movement of a fleeing deer' – semantically unconvincing although a swaggering gait has been associated with kingship (Graves 1988). Semantically and phonologically a perfect fit is offered by the Indo-Aryan form **-gabhasti-*, 'forked carriage pole, hand' (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Indo-European etymology'; de Vries 1958 s.v. 'gaffel'), which also reminds us of chariot technology as the main mechanism of spread of the Pelasgian package from the Middle to Late Bronze Age on. Forked poles are not just mythical references among the Nkoya: they do not feature as village shrines (which are usually shrubs of a significant species, whereas royal compounds and burial sites may feature straightforward poles (of wood, reputedly also of iron), sometime with buffalo's antlers in top), but they are the principal shrines in the Bituma ecstatic cult which was founded in the Interbellum by the Angolan prophet Simbinga, who subsequently settled in Nkoyaland (van Binsbergen 1981), and whose cult suggests Buddhist elements, e.g. the veneration of the water lily / lotus. Already in 1915 Ilaland (now Western Central Zambia, immediately east of Nkoyaland, and with overlapping cultural and political affinities) and widely surrounding regions came in the clutches of the shortlived ecological prophetic cult of the Ila leper Mupumani, and the adepts planted debarked forked poles all over the countryside as cultic shrines (van Binsbergen 1981).

This does not preclude that bifurcation as a model of thought may be an ancient and virtually universal pre-Modern model for the handling of different and identity at the same time – and as such fits into a series including Range Semantics, Cyclical Element Transformation, Triads, etc. However, rather than reaching for such a lame appeal to near-universalism, I propose the following solution for the Forked-Pole Theme.

The Nkoya Kapesh myth may have Buddhist overtones. I have so far tried to interpret Kapesh by reference to a royal personage Kashyapa featuring in the life of the Buddha; another one similarly named and associated with the towering mountain fortress of Sigiriya at central Sri Lanka; (see chapter 20 of this book, below). My visit to the Museum of Thai / Lanna Folklore, downtown Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020 (van Binsbergen 2020b) has opened my eyes, at long last, to the most obvious interpretation of forked poles as *essentially Buddhist*. Forked poles turn out to be widely used, at least in Theravada Buddhism (the oldest school of Buddhism, still dominant today in Thailand and Sri Lanka), as additional

munungampanda ('The *Kapesh* – understood to be a vertical structure – Joining Forked Branches', or 'Joining with a Sibling'³⁰⁰ – let the people build a tower to bring the Moon down from Heaven, so that it could serve as a

supports of the widely extending hence sagging branches of the *Bodhi* Tree – which is exemplary for the sacred tree in the Ganges valley, North India, under which the Buddha is considered to have reached enlightenment in the middle of the last millennium BCE – as the pivotal event in the foundation of Buddhism, and as the initial moment of the Buddhist time reckoning still observed in Thailand. (Incidentally, in 2002 during a conference trip to Patna, India, I took part in an organised tour to the original Bodhi tree, but due to logistic and medical difficulties we never reached there (the expedition stranded halfway at a Japanese Buddhist hotel and restaurant; it took me three days, including my birthday, to recover from the gastroenteritis contracted there. Years later, in Anuradhapura, Northern Sri Lanka, I was fortunate to visit and worship at the temple shrine where the oldest surviving shoot of the original Bodhi tree is still venerated.) Having elsewhere argued at length the case for extensive Buddhist influence upon the Nkoya and upon South Central and Southern Africa as a whole, this new finding concerning the Buddhist background of the forked poles is of considerable interest and relevance. The museum text explaining the supporting poles reads:

In the Lanna dialect, the Pho tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment is called *sari*. The Pho of course is famous for its longevity as well as its multiple trunks and many aerial roots. Since the wood is pliable, the branches tend to droop, and following Lanna tradition are propped with long poles, known as the *mai kham sari*. Propping the Pho's branches is associated in the minds of the Lanna Buddhists with supporting their religion, and they believe that those who do so will be blessed with peace, happiness and longevity.



The *mai kham sari*, coming from a hardwood, is a small and tender support with a fork at the upper end, and should be of a length equal to that of the branch it supports. It tends to be ornately carved, and to have coloured paper attached, and the small 'cushion' between the support and the branch will contain the dedicators' names and such supplicatory notes they may care to include. '

Remarkably, the museum text presents the supports as a particular Lanna custom, whereas the proness of odho's branches to sagging must be universal. If this can be confirmed, we may have narrowed down the specific origin of the *Kapesh* myth among the Nkoya to one specific region in South East Asia, the Lanna kingdom.

³⁰⁰ #8.11. THE INCESTUOUS IMPLICATIONS OF 'JOINING WITH A SIBLING' IN KAPESH'S NAME. In Nkoya, *mpanda* is a common word for (especially female) sibling. In this respect *Kapesh's* nickname, if to be read as a reference to the kinship term, ties in with the theme, widespread among the Bantu-speaking peoples, of incest, not only as a royal prerogative (cf. de Heusch 1958), but as a model implicitly underlying all human heterosexual sexuality. Nkoya lovers address each other by fondly using the kinship terms of address for 'sibling': *mpanda*, but also *yaya* ('elder sibling') and *mukondo* ('younger sibling'). Also the Nkoya have known royal incest in the most literal sense until this very day: before enthronement, the new incumbent of the kingship is to have sexual intercourse with a classificatory sibling. Since Nkoya syntax knows no gender, the kinship terms in question are gender-neutral. I suspect (but could get no confirmation of this idea from my present-day Nkoya interlocutors, among whom the standard Flood story seems to be exclusively known in its Biblical version) that underlying this constant play on incest is the mytheme of a pair of siblings as Flood survivors, compelled (for the sake of humankind's continuity, since all other people have perished in the Flood) to incestuously repopulate the earth together – much like Lot and his daughters in the Biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis* 19:30 f.) as a fiery variant of the Flood; also see ch. 16, below. Incidentally, the Nkoya use the verb 'committing incest', *kuluyana*, not only for illicit sex between close consanguineal kin (i.e. blood relatives), but also for other cases of sexual trespassing, e.g. when a royal prince sleeps with his brother's wife (*Likota Lya Bankoya*, 44:3). The form of incest in question is intragenerational; in over half a century of intensive association with the Nkoya I have not come across a single case of intergenerational incest, e.g. between father and daughter, not even in rumours and slander – and since incest played a devastating role in my own childhood, I am scarcely likely to miss any such reference had it occurred. The extent to which royal incest is implied to be constitutive of the kingship in Western Zambia, may be gauged from the fact that the Lozi dynasty, which originally (early 19th c. CE – before the advent of the Kololo from South Africa) was indistinguishable from the various Nkoya kingships in the wide region, is designated *Luyana*, in other words is defined by reference to incest. For an intimate study of Nkoya sexuality, see my essay 'The shadow you are not supposed to step upon', in my 2003 book *Intercultural Encounters*; literary evocations of Nkoya sexuality may be found in my Dutch-language book of short stories *Zusters Dochters* (van Binsbergen 1984).

breast pendant for the royal child; the Tower collapsed and the nations were dispersed.³⁰¹ Almost the same story was recorded for Barotseland, Mbunda, Bena-Lulua, Kiokwe, Kanioka and Rozwe of Zimbabwe (cf. [Ba-]Rotse of Zambia, i.e. Lozi?) by Frobenius (1931: 166 f. – in the Zimbabwe case the emphasis is on immortality through the royal pendant, cf. Frazer 1918 as mentioned above; Jensen 1932: 76). This myth is also recorded among the Bemba of Zambia (Roberts 1973) and in Mozambique (Feldman 1963); Willis (1994: 273) perceives a belt of Tower myths in Africa from Angola via Zimbabwe to Mozambique (e.g., in the latter country, the Tonga or Tsonga, Frobenius 1954: *Märchentext* 1). Among the Nkoya's northern neighbours the Luba, the Tower was allegedly built by the Rainbow Serpent, waging war on the Sky King³⁰² (Reefe 1981). This is almost identical to the Pare version from Tanzania (van der Sluijs *n.d.*). It also comes close to the story told among the Nkoya's close Western neighbours (Luyi / Lozi, Subiya; Jacottet 1899-1901; Jalla 1903), where Nyambi and his wife Nabile flee from their original dwelling on Earth along a Spider's web, pursued by humans whom they have come to fear; the humans build a Tower to continue their pursuit, trying to kill Nyambi, but to no avail, because the Tower collapsed, followed by the Confusion of Nations and of Tongues. Among the Boni or Sania, near Lamu, Kenya, Indian Ocean coast, such confusion is attributed, not to the Flood, but to a famine (van der Sluijs *n.d.*). Among the Chokwe (originally – by 1900 CE – a few hundred kms North-West of the Nkoya as well as in Angola, but today due to recent migrations also in their near vicinity) mention is made of a Kaposhi clan, with the bird totems owl (*Strigidae*) and nightjar (*Caprimulginae*) as their totem (both highly speckled birds; see the footnote below on Heracles and Hera, and throughout this book several references to the themes of Speckledness and the Leopard), and reputed to have been one of the oldest clans, and one that enslaved others so as to work on their ritual building projects (Matthe 2003).

Comparative: Like the stairs and the bridge, the Tower is also among the common symbols of shamanism, with its imagery of the shaman travelling between Upper World, the ordinary life world and the Underworld (Eliade 1968). In order to perceive the relation between the Tower myth and the Flood myth (see next section), it is useful to define the widespread model of the *Standard Elaborate Flood Myth*,³⁰³ whose principal characteristics may be summed up as follows:

1. The cosmic order is provisionally established, including humans, but Heaven and Earth still merge, or are at least still connected through a tower, ladder, pole, thongs, ropes, etc.
2. Humans commit a transgression (sorcery, murder, eating from forbidding fruit, discovery of sexuality in general, more specifically incest, etc.)
3. The connection between Heaven and Earth is severed, and humankind is destroyed by a Flood
4. Usually by the intercession of a (or the) Divine Being, there are one or more Flood survivors, whose main task is to repopulate the earth; a typical mytheme here is – as we have already seen – that of the twin siblings who survive the Flood and repopulate the world incestuously (cf. Katete and Luhamba; cf. Egyptian  Shu and  Tefnut, Greek Ἀπόλλων Apollo and Ἄρτεμις Artemis, and Dogon Nommo among the West African Dogon) – note the parallel with the discovery of sexuality, murder and incest (2)
5. Renewed humankind attempts to re-connect to Heaven with the various natural, personal and ritual devices listed above – especially a Tower

³⁰¹ A clearcut example of the Confusion of Nations (and of Tongues) motif so common in Elaborate Flood Myths world-wide. Gender is not expressed in Nkoya by syntactic means; by projection of today's conditions (throughout the 20th c. CE, practically all Nkoya kings were male – but this was in deviance from the time-honoured precolonial pattern). Therefore Kapeshe's gender is now assumed by present-day Nkoya interlocutors to have been male, perhaps doing violence to the original story (cf. van Binsbergen 1992).

³⁰² A mythical Supreme Being whose name has the same semantics: *Nasin Batsi*, 'King of the Sky', heads the local pantheon among the Manjaco people of Guinea Bissau. His child Cassara, implicitly considered to be of male gender, is the Demiurge who once a year descends from Heaven to cleanse the Earth from witches (cf. van Binsbergen 2017: chs 6 and 7). The Pelasgian Hypothesis accounts in principle for continuity between West Africa and South Central Africa, of which many examples could be given.

³⁰³ On the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth as a model, cf. Smith 1873 – first decipherment of Babylonian Flood text; Frazer 1916, 1918; Dundes 1988; Isak 2006 (hundreds of Flood stories summarised, with bibliography); Dang Nghiem Van 1993; Lewis 2006; Walker 1976; Marler & Robbins Dexter 2003; van Dijk 1983; Witzel 2010; van Binsbergen with Isak 2008; van Binsbergen, chs 15 and 16 below, and in press (f):

6. In the process the Confusion of Nations occurs – a multitude of ethnic and language groups emerge.

However, among the twentieth-century Nkoya, the Flood motif appears to be absent (unless in its recently imported Biblical form) and the very central Tower mytheme is completely divorced from the Flood motif. In the Nkoya version the defiance of the Sky King is strictly speaking absent (although it is also a form of *hubris* to try and bring the Moon down), but such defiance is central to the Luba³⁰⁴ version. The latter is very close to the Nimrod myth (*Genesis* 12). Greek mythology knew the Aloadae, Giant twin brothers who tried to overthrow Zeus, seeking access to Heaven by stacking major mountains on top of one another (*Ilias* V, 385, *Odyssey* XI 305; Pindarus, *Pythian Ode* IV, 89; Apollodoros *Bibliotheca* I, 7, § 4; Atsma 2000-2010). In Phoenicia, Astarte / Ashtaroth was known as 'Lady Tower', the town goddess of Sidon, Tyre, and Byblos – she wears a Tower as a crown (cf. Greek / Phrygian / Arabian / Egyptian: Rhea, Tyche, Cybele, Allat, Hathor); she is a Mother of the Waters (Athirat). In South China the Flood-associated Tower takes the form of a ladder (Willis 1994: 93f); the ladder is also conspicuous in Egyptian (Seth) and Hebrew (Jacob; *Genesis* 28:12) myths, but without clear Flood connotations. Making a rope of arrows along which to travel from Earth to Heaven is called a characteristic [Native] American motif by Fontenrose (1980: 513 n. 40).

8.5.8. A Flood and Tower complex 2. the Flood

Nkoya: Again, among the twentieth-century Nkoya, the Flood motif appears to be totally absent and the Tower motif is not or no longer understood as connected with the Flood. We do not need to accept this lacuna as definitive. Namafe (2006) and Kamuwango (2007), hailing from Western Zambia themselves, claim that there is a Lozi Flood myth – which stands to reason, because the annual transhumance of the royal household in response to the annual Zambezi flooding is a central theme in Lozi society – whose musical and ceremonial life is largely in the hands of Nkoya specialists. Having demonstrably merged with Lozi mythology on other motifs (e.g. Mulambwa; and the Unilateral Being), against the background of a shared court language and court culture, one can hardly assume Nkoya mythology to have been impervious to Lozi Flood myths, even if the Nkoya did not yet have them in the first place. But it is thinkable that the Flood motif was deliberately rejected by the Nkoya in the course of the last hundred years because it was recognised to be associated, no longer with the remotest past, but with the hated Lozi as dwellers of the Zambezi flood plain. Geographically, culturally and linguistically close to the Nkoya, are also the Luvale and Chokwe; and the female Mwene (Ruler) Manenga features extensively in Nkoya traditions as she does in those of Luvale and Chokwe. Among the latter the following localised Flood myth was recorded:

A FLOOD MYTH FROM SOUTH CENTRAL AFRICA FEATURING MWENE MANENGA. 'A Queen named Mwene Manenga sought food and shelter in a village. She was turned away, 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 Dilolo [in Eastern Angola close to the Zambian border].' 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).

Meanwhile, in Jalla's versions collected in Western Zambia at the end of the 19th century (Jalla 1903: Appendix, pp. 319 f.; 1909; 1921; cf. Bouchet 1922; Rooke 1980) selected elements of the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth are included, still in such a way that at first glance one is not aware that a Flood myth is involved.³⁰⁵ Nyambi and his first human creatures (especially the male Kamunu) live in each others' proximity, Kamunu engages in a series of transgressions for which relatively mild punishment is meted out by Nyambi, until the latter finally, after crossing a great river, withdraws to Heaven along a Spider's thread, after which humankind each morning humbly greets the rising Sun in an attempt at a ritual re-connection of Heaven and Earth.³⁰⁶ Deeply implied in the Lozi story seems to be a reference to the discovery of sexuality as a central

³⁰⁴ As also remarked elsewhere in this book, linguistically, Luba and Nkoya are closely related.

³⁰⁵ In Feldman 1963 this myth is erroneously attributed to Mozambique.

³⁰⁶ A parallel version also in Mackintosh 1922. Nyambi is attended not only by a Spider but also by a wagtail bird (*Motacilla capensis*), which opens up an interesting comparative angle. In the main Japanese creation myth virtually the same bird (*Motacilla grandis*) showed the sibling pair of primal gods Izanami and Izanagi how to engage in sexual intercourse by the suggestive, incessant up and down movements of its tail, after which it is named in several linguistic contexts, e.g. in English and Dutch (*Kojiki*, cf. Philippi 1977; van Binsbergen 2009a). It is as if the wagtail in the Western Zambian story signals that, implicitly, we are in the presence of a Flood caused

transgression – in line with the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth, whose other elements we also detect: initial merging, later Separation and partial Re-connection of Heaven and Earth, the Flood (here reduced to a great river,³⁹⁷ and no longer explicitly destructive, but what could be worse than God's withdrawal from Earth?). Significant other elements however are left out: destruction by Flood, and the Confusion of Nations – which however surfaces in other local accounts.

Comparative: For the global connections of the Flood motif, see under Tower motif, elsewhere in this chapter.

8.5.9. The Bird-Like Nature of Gods

Nkoya: the Nkoya (*Likota* 4:1) equate Nyambi with a bird, and Nyambi's child, the Demiurge Mvula / Rain (both of indeterminate gender) is also a bird; the specific birds are unspecified in this particular context, but the human clans Hawks (*Accipitridae*) and Buzzards (*Buteo*) are declared to be the relatives of Mvula, so Mvula may be thought of as a large bird of prey. The Nkoya consider their kingship to derive from (the tears of, see below) the Demiurge Mvula / Rain, and their kingship has an intimate connection with birds. The two clans contesting the kingship are both named after bird species (Hawks and Buzzards). The major headmanship of Shipungu is also named after a bird species, the Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus*). There is moreover the cosmogonic symbolism of the *kalyangu* bird, the white heron (*Ardea alba*). Finally, the king's alter-ego, his court jester, has the official title of *Kayoni ka Mwene* ('the king's bird'), and appears in public (notably during the annual Kazanga royal festival) as a large-billed giant bird. These aspects of Nkoya royal symbolism are reminiscent of the giant bird sculptures adorning the famous sanctuary of Great Zimbabwe. Distantly they are also reminiscent of the veneration of the hornbill as an epiphany of the sacred in both westernmost West Africa, and South East Asia – probably a Sunda phenomenon.

Comparative: The conception of major gods as birds occurs in West Asia (e.g. Egyptian Horus, Mut), Central and East Asia (e.g. Garuda), and may have shamanic connotations. Cf. the white, often aquatic, bird-like connotations of creation gods in the Mediterranean and throughout the Pelasgian Realm (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), but also the Raven and Eagle characters in North American mythology.

8.5.10. The Annual Extinction and Rekindling of Fire

Nkoya: In the Nkoya foundation myth of kingship, a blissful celestial downpour (of Mvula / Rain, Nyambi's Child) appears after the successful removal from the fire of the Cauldron of Kingship by the qualifying clan, followed by the adage 'Our kingship is from the Raindrops / Tears of Mvula / Rain'. I propose this implies an aetiological myth of the annual extinction and rekindling from a unique royal source, of all humanly used fire. Among the twentieth-century CE Nkoya this custom is no longer found. However, it has been recorded for the Bantu-speaking groups of Central Zambia (Sala, Soli, Nsenga; cf. Apthorpe 1959, 1960; Argyle 1959; Brelsford 1935, 1965); these groups are closely connected with the Nkoya by language, custom, historical traditions, migrations and diplomatic relations (van Binsbergen 1992). In Swaziland (Kuper 1968), once a year 'the dirt of the past year' is burnt on a sacrificial fire, and rain, again, is supposed to extinguish the fire at the cattle byre. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa fires are extinguished at the king's death and rekindled at the enthronement of the successor; van der Sluijs (*n.d.*) attributes this custom to the following peoples: Mundang, Haussa, Gwari, Nupe, Mossi, Yoruba, Ruanda, Wasegue, Wadoe, Wawemba, Walumbwe, Wahemba, Mambwe, Lunda, Kanioka, Bangala, and Bihe.

Van der Sluijs (generally unreliable, and unreferenced...) also cites a gruesome African accession rite that brings out how much the fire extinguishing custom may re-enact Creation, or Second Creation after the Flood:

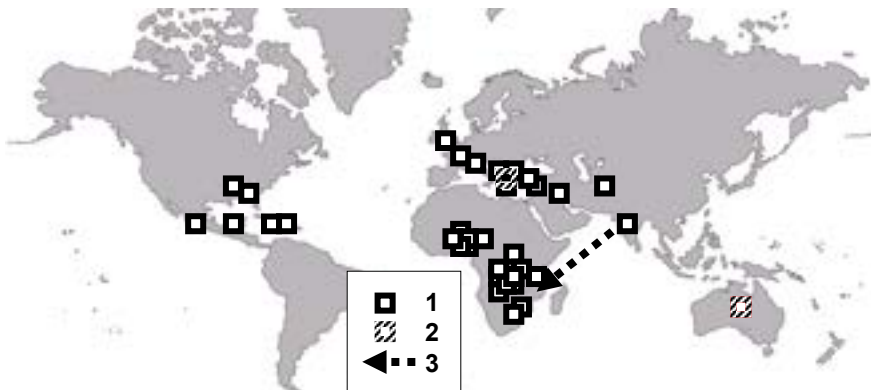
by the invention of sexuality. *We hit here upon a controversial but logical and crucial implication of the idea of transcontinental continuities: if the latter can be taken for a fact, then in principle well-attested, studied and understood symbolic relationships in one location may be used to illuminate less explicit similar relationships in another location belonging to the same complex, even though in another continent – not just on the basis of a formal typological similarity (as in Lévi-Straussian structuralist analysis) or an appeal to inherent convergent properties of the mind of Anatomically Modern Humans, but on the basis of real historical cognateship between cultural forms with a common origin.* This methodological claim is basic to my work in the field of comparative mythology, geomantic divination, transformative cycles of elements, astronomical nomenclature etc.

³⁹⁷ Or is this river not so much an evocation of the Flood, but equivalent to the separation of the ordinary life world and the domain of the Underworld, of Death and of the Supernatural – as in the Japanese cosmogonic myth of Izanami giving birth to Fire?

'Upon the accession of the new king, a pubescent boy and virgin appeared naked before the king, rekindled the fire with their fire-sticks, performed their first act of love, and were buried alive'.

Unfortunately, no source accompanies also this account; and although it is reminiscent of the ethnographic vignettes out of which James Frazer's work was built up, I have been unable to find it there. The sexual element is reminiscent of the Moatsü Mong agricultural festival of the Ao people of Nagaland, India, however, the latter does not feature human sacrifice.

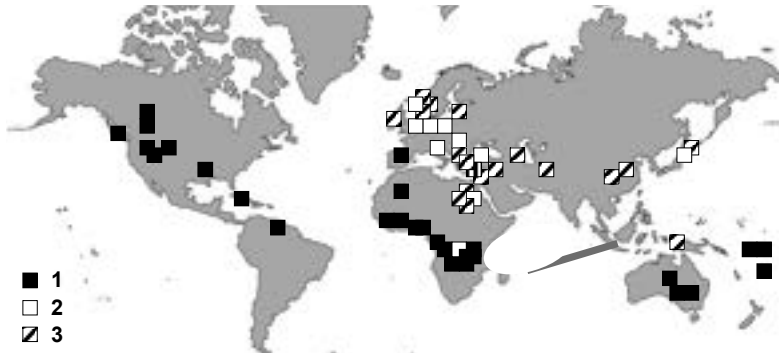
Comparative: Annual communal renewal of the Fire was a widespread phenomenon in Pre-modern Europe. This custom has been recorded for the remarkable Aegean island of Lemnos, which moreover stands out for such (presumably Pelasgian) traits as a Fire cult dedicated to the god Hephaestus, the iron-working and piracy-prone Sintian people, and a mythical tradition of (temporary) female rule and female sexual revolt (Burkert 1970; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*). The *badnjak* Christmas log of the Serbs and other Balkan populations clearly marks a cognate custom (Evans 1876-1877). Annual extinction and rekindling of the fire is also found in Bulgaria (Conrad 1987) and Anatolian Turkey (And 1980). Annual extinction and rekindling of fire was part of Jewish ritual of the Karaites during the Middle Ages (Frank 2001). A similar rite has been part of Christianity especially in connection with Easter (Idinopulos 1982; MacGregor 1992). The custom was given much attention in the English Christian annual ritual and festive cycle during the Medieval and Early Modern periods (Hutton 1994); it was closely related with the folklore institution known as the Need-fire ritual (Davidson 1955). The same custom was also reported in the *Perlesvaus*, a medieval French version of the Arthurian narratives (Williams 1937). At least partially informed by Christianity, the same custom is part of carnival celebrations in the Caribbean (Liverpool 1998) and in the Voodoo-related Santeria rituals in the same region (Wirtz 2005). A similar annual rite has been recorded for India (Jurewicz 2004; Mookerjee 1998) and among the Hindu immigrants that settled in Africa from the 19th century CE onward (Murray 1956; broken arrows in Fig. 8.6). Similar customs exist among Native Americans of the Southeast (cf. Johnson & Hook 1995: 5) but explicitly not among the Powhatan Indians of Virginia (cf. Rountree 1992); and in Meso America among the Aztecs (Elson & Smith 2001) and the Mayas (Long 1923). A limiting case is the Ancient Israelites' temple fire, which could not be lit from an external source (*Leviticus* 10:2). Apparently, this temple fire was of a different, transformed and more transcendent class than the fires evoked in the Nkoya narrative of the Cauldron of Kingship and its parallels, for it is a widely held Rabbinical contention that throughout the history of the Israelite temples, the Fire was never extinguished by rain – it belongs to a godhead, יהוה YHWH, who (contrary to the Nkoya one) is not in the first place a god of Rain.



LEGEND: 1. trait attested; 2. cognate trait attested; 3. limited transmission of trait (accounting for only two African data points) through Indian indentured labour and other migration, 19th-20th c. CE.

Fig. 8.6. Major attestations of the annual communal extinction and rekindling of Fire

8.5.11. Spider-like elements of the Creator god



1. Spider Supreme god; 2. oblique references to Spider in folklore *etc.*, not mythical; 3. spinning and weaving goddesses, with Spider connotations; full references in: van Binsbergen, in preparation (b).

Fig. 8.7. Attestations of Spider-related mythemes

Nkoya: Nyambi as Spider: not directly stated in Nkoya context today; but it is a Spider that helps Nyambi escape from humans by climbing to Heaven; thus also among neighbouring Zambian groups, where the Creator god is called Leza (Cotterell 1989: 89). It is not sure whether we can consider Nyambi in the Nkoya conception a High God – he / she appears as immanent, Earth-dweller, and intimidated by the ever more demanding humans,³⁰⁸ and the retreat to Heaven is a flight. Some of the missionary accounts of Nyambi collected around 1900 suggest that Nyambi in fact is not God in his / her own right, but God's child: Jacottet (1899-1901) has a story where Nyambi has fallen from the sky, like the Greek Fire-god Hephaestus (*Ilias*, I, 568 f., *etc.*), Egyptian Min (whose belemnite symbol ☉ equates him with lightning), or any Demiurge. This makes it conceivable that Nyambi's shift to transcendent High God status is a result of the introduction of Christianity in the early 20th century. The missionary Smith (1907: 300 f.), who had a special comparative interest in African ideas of God (Smith 1950) notes a similar indeterminacy in the conception of god among the Ila, the Nkoya's eastern neighbours.

Comparative (on Spider-like elements of the Creator god): Nyambi (with variants) carries Spider-like connotations in West and Central African cultures (where there is a link with the Trickster figure Anansi, considered a son of Nyambi carrying, probably, another variant of the Nyambi name).³⁰⁹ The comparative mythology of the Creator / Creatrix as Spider is very rich (also see ch. 12, below) and reaches from West Africa (besides Nyambi / Anansi also the Yoruba war god Ogun – Cotterell 1989: 143; cf. Crooke 1917), via Egypt (Neith), the Middle East and Ancient Greece (with the semantically and phonologically closely related cluster of Neith / Athena / Anahita / Anath / Inanna / Uttu, goddesses of weaving and warfare and perhaps to be understood as domesticated Creation Goddesses demoted and supplanted under a later masculine cosmology), to surface also throughout Oceania (Cotterell 1989: 151, 133 f., 219, 224, 240 f.; Willis 1994: 294). The Spider-like equation of weaving and the Sun is manifest also in the Japanese Sun goddess Amaterasu. Also the Tiwi of Northern Australia have a Spider Woman myth (Venbrux 2003). Apparently the circum-Pacific line is continued in North America among the Navajo (the benevolent Spider Woman Naste Etsan – note the palindrome! – facilitating two twin

³⁰⁸ Note the shift in victimisation: in the Ancient Near East, the gods instrumentally and callously decide to destroy the humans they created, because the latter are found too noisy; in the Biblical Nimrod story, the High God is alarmed by the Tower which Nimrod builds, but thwarts the building project by a ruse (the Confusion of Nations). In the South Central African version, finally, the divinity is intimidated by humans, and flees them to Heaven.

³⁰⁹ In later work I have returned to the name Nyambi, its etymology, and the surrounding literature, in: van Binsbergen 2015a: 18-21. .

culture heroes' access to the Sun god), and in the North American Prairie the culture hero and Trickster Inkotomi (Cotterell 1989: 240; Willis 1994: 227). More isolated, the Spider appears as an ancient Australian icon (Stubbs 1978; Cotterell 1989: 58). Almost as if to encapsulate the vanquished goddess of an earlier dispensation, the Spider is one of the Egyptian shaman's spirit familiars (Helck 1984; along with the midge and the mantis; the mantis would then be another old god, cf. Khoisan Heitsi-Eibib, with probably a West Asian prototype in view of that regional original of the Khoisan speakers, cf. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994).

8.5.12. The Creator god associated with speaking

Nkoya: implied in the *Nkoya* theonym Nyambi (found, with variations, throughout West and Central Africa) is perhaps the Proto-Bantu root *gamb-* 'to speak' (Guthrie no. 770), but this may be a popular etymology which I have not myself heard among the *Nkoya* (cf. their *Ngambela* = 'Speaker', Prime Minister). Baumann (1936; also Pettersson 1973: 144) claims that no etymology for the name Nyambi can be found; this amounts to the claim that the origin of that name lies outside the Bantu-speaking region – a claim I am inclined to support in the light of the proposed continuity with West African, Mediterranean and West Asian theonyms *[n][a][t][n][a][t], such as Neith, Athena, Anat *etc.*, cf. Ghanaian Nyame. The bird-like connotations of Nyambi are found also in Northern Angola (Capello & Ivens 1886; Wastiau 1997). Nyambi abounds in Dennett's (1906: 166f and *passim*) intriguing discussion of West African kingship, and his explanation, although with the appearances of another popular etymology, is worth quoting:

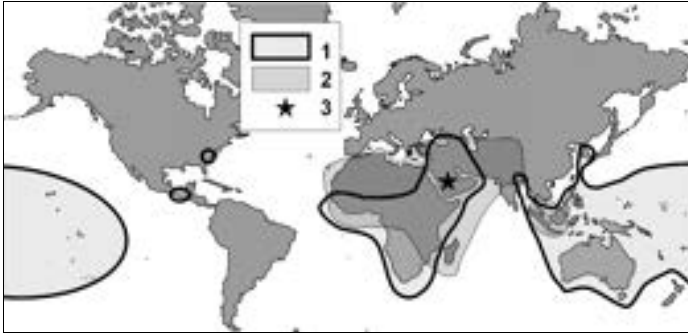
"The name for God is NZAMBI and its literal meaning is the personal essence (IMBI) of the fours (ZIA or ZA = four). What then are the fours? They are the groups each of four powers called BAKICI BACI [i.e. "representatives of all the different families owning sacred ground within his kingdom"]" (Dennett 1906: 13, 166f).

Comparative: the idea of the Creator / Creatrix who through an utterance brings the world into being has many Eurasian parallels e.g. *Genesis* 1: 3; Babylonian Marduk in *Enuma Elish*, see: King 1999 / 1902). This brings to mind two animals with widespread Eurasian connotations of speaking: (a) the Bee (both in Eurasiatic / Nostratic and in Afroasiatic) because (e.g. Budge 1898; *Judges* 4: 4f) of its humming noise and as a divine epiphany (also see the Reed and Bee complex discussed above) (b) 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 (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011).

8.5.13. Aetiological myths of circumcision

Nkoya: According to *Nkoya* traditions, their kingships were established when they fled from a tyrannical king (Mwaat Yaav, see elsewhere in this Section) seeking to impose the circumcision rites that he controlled. The *Nkoya* claim that 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.

Comparative: male genital mutilation is widespread globally (see Fig. 8.8) and its origins are lost in the mists of time. The *Tanach* contains one of the few aetiological myths known to me on this topic (*Genesis* 17:10-14, cf. *Joshua* 5: 4-7). For the Dogon, whose recorded elaborate mythology however has been called to question, circumcision originates in the desire to remove primordial reproductive organs of the opposite gender (Bonney 2002 / 1991: 125f). The Tsonga of South East Africa attribute (Junod 1962: I, 72f) the institution to the Lemba people, conspicuous for their apparent remnants of West Semitic culture (Parfitt 1992; van Warmelo 1966; von Sicard 1952: 140 f.). Among the Tañala of Madagascar (linguistically, at least, more cognate to South East Asia than to Africa) circumcision appears in several myth but more as a taken-for-granted background than as an *explicandum* (Beaujard 2004). The *Nkoya* account is reminiscent of *Exodus* 4: 24-26: 'And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. 25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. 26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.'



1. Regions where male genital mutilation has been practiced 'traditionally' since Premodern times; 2. Diffusion in context of Islam from 7th century CE from 3; 3. Mecca; from: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, where full references are given.

Fig. 8.8. Global distribution of male genital mutilation

The Central and South African connotations of the Nkoya kingship make it possible to connect the motif of fleeing from a tyrannical king who seeks to impose circumcision, (a) to the advent of Islam in Northern India c. 1000 CE – groups fleeing such imposition fled to West Asia, Europe and East Africa as 'Gypsies', Tzigane, Roma people; the alternative name for one of the two major Nkoya royal titles, Kahare, is Kale (Smith & Dale 1920), which in five continents, including Africa, is a Gypsy name meaning 'Black'; (b) to the Islamisation of Central Asia around the same time.³¹⁰

8.5.14. The Cauldron of Kingship

Nkoya: In the Nkoya myth of the institution of kingship (in their own perception one of their two central institutions, the other being female puberty rites³¹¹) the Cauldron of Kingship,³¹² full of meat, is cooking on an enormous fire, and the challenge is: which of the clans can lift it off the fire? Only one princess / clan leader succeeds, and takes the kingship. (The episode concludes (see above) with a blissful downpour of Rain / Mvula, and the royal adage linking Nkoya kingship with the Tears / Drops of Mvula / Rain.) An illuminating variant was published by Jacottet 1899-1901 (cf. Jalla 1903): here it is the superior resourcefulness of humans over animals /

³¹⁰ For a background on Roma / Gypsies, cf. Turner 1926; Kenrick 1993; Marushiakova & Popov 2001; Guy 2001; Fonseca 1996; Hancock 1987.

³¹¹ Among the twentieth-century Nkoya no aetiological myth of female puberty rites could be collected, even though these rites featured prominently in my decades of fieldwork, and I was granted access to secret string figures and songs texts. My student Thera Rasing (2002) had the same experience, working on female puberty rites of the Zambian Bemba.

³¹² Probably there never were any cast-iron cauldrons made on African soil. The Nkoya story of the Cauldron of Kingship, set in a context of hunting-gathering as still the sole mode of production, would have to refer to an earthenware pot if historical logic were to be strictly applied; however, I am confident that latter-day Nkoya implicitly take the Cauldron of Kingship to have been of cast iron. Portuguese-made iron cauldrons have been part of Nkoya court life ever since the penetration of eastbound long-distance trade beyond the Zambezi, in the 17th century CE. At the height of the slave trade (which was only effectively suppressed in the 1900s, whilst slavery as an institution lasted till 1930), cauldrons were only second to guns as major articles of wealth and exchange against slaves. As late as 1919, Barotse *indunas* (royal representatives) still exacted a tribute in pots (as, most probably, slaves) from the Kahare area (Zambia National Archives, file ZA 1 / 13). The surprising but multiple Eurasian Steppe connotations of the Nkoya kingship lend another dimension to this problem: Hunnic cauldrons of typical design specific of the invading Steppe pastoralists were found all over Europe for the middle of the first millennium CE (cf. Maenchen-Helfen & Knight 1973).

clans which decides the outcome – the humans pour Water on the Fire; of course, the animals in Jacottet are identical with the clans (named after animals) in the Nkoya version – the same kind of transformation is standard in North American Flood myths, which are typically set in a primordial time when society still consisted of speaking and acting animals, *i.e.* clan totems.³¹³

Meanwhile, in historical times the central symbol of royal office has been, not a Cauldron, but a *Conus*-shell white disc to be worn as a pendant (*mpande*, with equivalents all over Southern Africa, where also the term *ndoro* is used), and the royal drums,³¹⁴ to which human sacrifices were customarily made comparable to the foundation sacrifices for the royal palace, fence, and tomb. Also in South East and East Asia, a typological convergence can be noted in recent millennia, from bronze vessels symbolising high status, to bronze drums and bells for royal orchestras (*cf.* Han Xiaorong 1998; van Binsbergen 2020: 37 *f.*). To further complicate matters, von Sicard (1952), in an intriguing and well documented study that however (like most of his work) has been flatly dismissed by classic anthropologists of South Central Africa, sees the royal drums of that region as equivalents, even transformations, of the Ark of the Covenant of the Ancient Israelites. Such drums are certainly, as ultimate group symbols, comparable to the aniconic *palladia* of West Asia and the Aegean (Gardiner 1893; Pötscher 1979b) – including those associated with Hermes and with Athena. At the same time they carry implied associations with the vessel in which the Flood hero made his escape – not without significance, for throughout the Pelasgian Realm (which includes Ancient Egypt) boats are venerated as ritual objects, and part of royal ritual throughout the Pelasgian Realm (including the motif of royal twins, possibly Flood survivors) can be understood as a re-enactment of the Flood and Second Creation, the retrieval of Fire, the repopulation of the Earth, *etc.*

Comparative: This motif confirms once more the closeness between Nkoya and Celtic mythology – I submit: because of the Pelasgian / West to Central Asian origin of both. Cauldrons of kingship abound in the Celtic world (the cauldron of the Tuatha Dé Danann; the cauldron of the Dagda; the cauldron of Dymwach the Giant – which was one of the 13 treasures of the Island of Britain (Bromwich 1991; Rhys 1891; Squire 1905, 1906; MacCulloch 1908-1920; Macalister 1941). A magic cauldron played a major part in the story of the birth of the great Welsh bard Taliesin, as recounted in the last of the *Mabinogion* stories (Quest 1849; Clouston 1887); however, even though the cauldron and fluid of inspiration have correspondences in the Nordic and Sanskrit Asian world, I am inclined to consider the Celtic narratives in question part of the legitimisation of the bardic profession, and of relatively late and secondary nature. Arthur acquired his Cauldron of Kingship through theft. Cú Chulainn, himself a divine hero, steals his royal kettle from a god. A similarly stolen kettle appears, as Aegir's, in Nordic mythology. Also in Baltic mythology there is a very close parallel with the Nkoya narrative of the Cauldron of Kingship (Meistere 1997-2002, based on the Early Modern author Fabricius): 'They pay homage to Perkons by first pouring him beer, which is then brought around the fire, and at last pour it in this fire, asking Perkons to give them Rain.' Celtic kings at enthronement are reported to be symbolically cooked in a cauldron full of horse meat (Graves 1988: 384; a more extensive and scholarly source is McCormick 2007: 91; O'Meara 1982: 110; Squire 1905: 73 *f.* For a wider Early Indo-European perspective on this *cf.* Puhvel 1970; this includes (Puhvel 1970: 161 *f.*) the Indian *asvamedha* ritual mating of queen and stallion.)³¹⁵ Various properties were attributed to these cauldrons (*e.g.* as symbols of rebirth and of the Goddess's womb, as granting of longevity, rejuvenation of slain bodies, Holy Grail, torture instrument, divination instrument (with a Japanese temple / tea counterpart, Hastings 1908-1921, Index volume, *s.v.* 'cauldron') and evocation of the leader's largesse, cornucopia-like; the latter is certainly compatible with a pre-food production, hunting-gathering mode of production, *cf.* Sahllins 1965). Many of these elements survive in modern Wicca cults. Such features are not limited to ancient Ireland but extend all over Iron-Age Europe, from Gaul (where a famous cauldron, that of Gundestrup was crafted c. 100 BCE) to Denmark (where that cauldron ended up in a peat bog) and Thrace (which has

³¹³ The North American / sub-Saharan continuities here suggests the myths in question to date from before the separation of Amerind and African languages in the Central to East Asian Upper Palaeolithic.

³¹⁴ These are kettle drums, *cf.* below, Cauldron of Kingship.

³¹⁵ *Cf.* in Greek mythology the mating of Pasiphae – Cretan Minos's spouse and as 'All-Shining' an evocation of Sun or Moon; but also, in Nkoya enthronement ritual, the transgressive incestuous mating of the prospective king with his – nowadays classificatory – sister; is this another displaced Central Asian Steppe / South Asian motif, along with the gha-basti-carriage pole? 'Classificatory kinship' is a technical term forged by the early American anthropologist Morgan (1871), to denote a system where members of society are subsumed under a small number of very broad categories, whose nature and implied relationships are nonetheless modelled after primary relations existing between close biological kin. *E.g.* among the Nkoya, every person has a considerable number of 'fathers', 'mothers', 'brothers', 'sisters', 'children' – including distant, putative and fictive kinsmen, and their spouses, in addition to close biological kin.

been claimed to be the home of the narrative themes displayed on that cauldron (Klindt-Jensen 1959; Olmsted 1976; Kaul & Martens 1995; Kaul *et al.* 1991); another comparable cauldron, from the Bronze Age, was found at Hassle, Sweden, in 1936. Also the Graeco-Roman war god Ares / Mars is reputed to rejuvenate himself by bathing in a kettle of boiling water, *cf.* the above royal enthronement rites (Anonymous, 'Early Roman Religion', 1955: 28). The mytheme of the Cauldron of Kingship is also related to the struggle over sacred tripods, such as mark the mythical encounter between Apollo and Heracles in the context of the Delphi temple precinct (Fontenrose 1980: 401 *f.*). The tripod at Delphi was not only seized by Heracles but also by Lykos (Lykoros) / Pyrrhus / Deucalion (Fontenrose 1980: 422 *f.*). Ino (Leukothea / White Goddess, the mother's sister of Dionysus) was stricken with madness by Hera and put her infant Melicartus (< Melqart, 'Lord of the Town', major Phoenician god equated with Heracles) into a seething cauldron (Euripides *Medea* 1284 *f.*; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.9.1 *f.* 3.4.3; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4, 506-542; Farnell 1916; Meyer 1884). Cochrane (*n.d.*: 130) claims worldwide cognates for this story. This does not exhaust the motif of the cauldron of kingship. Also in the *Tanach* is the flesh pot (*Exodus* 16: 3) a symbol of abundance. The motif also surfaces in the Egyptian Pyramid texts, when the megalomaniac utterances of King Unas (c. 2,400 BCE) in his so-called 'Cannibal Hymn' boasts about the cannibalistic contents of his cauldron (Mercer 1952: utterances 402a *f.*; Faulkner 1924). The motif also surfaces in Indian mythology in a myth about the cosmic god Vishnu (Keith 1917: 78 *f.*):

'The sound *ghrm*, with which Vishnu's head fell, became the *gharma*, or sacrificial kettle; and as his strength dwindled away, the *mahdvira*, or 'pot of great strength', acquired its name.'

Highly significant, considering the abundance of Central Asian reminiscences in Nkoya mythology, is that the cauldron of leadership also occurs in the Kyrgyz Epic *Manas* (Köçümulküzi 2005, lines 2970 *f.*). Bronze vessels were the major regalia in Shang 商朝 China, and foretold the end of that dynasty; the fact that the Chinese emperor had no monopoly of the vessels but merely was allowed to have a larger number of them than other nobles, suggests this to be a pre-Imperial trait marking leadership. Still further Eurasian parallels can be found (*e.g.* Zourmatzi 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: 437 *f.*) – again an African / American parallel.

8.5.15. Female royal prowess

Nkoya: Legendary Queen Shikanda of the Nkoya,³¹⁶ whose epithet is *Shikanda bakandile baKaonde* 'Shikanda who destroyed / circumcised the Kaonde [the Nkoya's northern neighbours]', is a formidable mythical female warrior – true to a model of female military prowess (combined with total sexual liberty) ranging from the Queen Nzingha / Jinga c. 1600 CE of the Mbundu people of Angola (*cf.* Fraser 1988), 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; *cf.* Law 1993; Alpern 1998 however considers the Benin women regiments as merely an Early Modern phenomenon).


Comparative: Female prowess is found in the warrior connotations of North African women in Antiquity (Lhote 1959), and the West Asian Amazons. The latter have been habitually dismissed as a mere myth of male altering self-construction (Blok 1995), yet were in the recent decade to a considerable extent confirmed by sound archaeological research (*cf.* Davis-Kimball 2002; Guliaev 2003). In perfect accordance with the Pelasgian cross-mother, we also find warrior women in Celtic Europe *e.g.* Queen Boadicea, Ancient Nordic Europe (Saxo Grammaticus 1979), and in the Extreme East: Japan's women *samurai*. Moreover there is the series of warrior goddesses discussed elsewhere in this Section, from Neith / Athena / Anahita *etc.* Shikanda's name may be indicative of a further South Asian connection, *cf.* the war god Skanda (ultimately a corruption of Alexander the Great's name) who defeats the demon Taraka and thus saves the world (Willis 1994: 84); pronounced by Nkoya-speaking mouths, Skanda would sound as 'Shikanda'.

8.5.16. Royal sibling complementarity / rivalry

Nkoya: In Nkoya mythology, Katete and Luhamba are a royal sibling pair; so are Shihoka Nalinanga and his (classifica-

³¹⁶ Her name was officially bestowed upon my middle daughter Sarah Nicolien Shikanda, by my adoptive father Mwene Kahare Kabambi in 1989, who in honour of her ancestral status played the royal bells for her, while inhabitants of the royal capital came running to press money bills as gifts upon her head in recognition of her royal status. As a result my Nkoya name is Tashikanda, a teknonym (when parent is named after child, a common African practice): 'Father of Shikanda'. A clear example of *fusion* (ch. 3, above) on the part of the mythographer.

tory) sister Likambi Mange / 'Sorceress', but the latter are locked in mortal rivalry and envy. Shihoka lived at Lukolwe near the Kabombo / Zambezi confluence, while Likambi lived on the Zambezi, in the flood plain. Shihoka's people produced boats and wooden dishes, and when Likambi sent messengers requesting her rightful share of these products, her envoys were chased. This made Likambi resort to sorcery, she had a diviner-priest produce a beautiful artificial woman full of poison; when this object was sent to Lukolwe, she proved irresistible, and – as a murderous bride of the AT category T173 – the cause of Shihoka's death. In general it appears (van Binsbergen 1992) as if the Nkoya male king (and his counterparts among neighbouring groups) only rules in the name of his sister – and this is a widespread pattern among Ngerongoro-speaking peoples (Claessen 1981, 1984).³¹⁷

Comparative: Many Flood stories following the Standard Elaborate format (see above) have primordial twins as Flood survivors, who incestuously repopulate the world, and who thus at Second Creation may emulate the First Creation. Cf. Genesis 1 f (Adam and Hava / Eve). In Ancient Egyptian mythology the first two creatures, Shu and Tefnut, are raised in the very swamp at Aḥ-bît ('The Horizon of the Bee [Ruler]') / Chemmis (they are called 'the two royal children of Chemmis' (Helck 1979), where also Hōrus (formally their grandchild, but clearly belonging to a different tradition) was to be hidden by Isis. For a possible link with the Nkoya kingship, see above, the 'Reed and Bee complex'. In Celtic mythology the royal twins, with the rivalry element, appear as Arthur and his sisters Morgause and Morgana le Fay / Sorceress (who possibly feature among the Nkoya as 'the two royal ladies' – which incidentally is also an Egyptian throne name,  nbt). As a result of this rivalry, Arthur 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 / 1485) created and sent by one of his sister's sorcery acts. Also in Uralic mythology: in the *Kalevala*, Vaeinaemöinen and Joukahainen struggle over bows, boats, horses and gold in a way reminiscent of Shihoka and Likambi (Tamminen 1928: 90).³¹⁸

8.5.17. Serpent, Child [or mother] of Drought

Nkoya: In Nkoya mythology, a prominent character is King / Mwene Shihoka Nalinanga: 'Snake, Child [or Mother] of Drought', known as a cattle raider and locked in deadly rivalry with his royal sister. Here we may perceive a link between Nkoya mythology and that of neighbouring Eastern Angola, whose cultures and languages are continuous with those of Western Zambia. One of the major Angolan tales (Chatalein 1894) deals with the descent of the male Sudika-Mbambi into the Underworld. Sudika is in love with the daughter of the Underworld king Kalunga-Ngombe ['Grave-Cattle'], but she has been kidnapped by Kinioka kia Tumba ['Snake of Tumba / Skin? – worldwide, the association of skin and dryness is a common one], apparently a cognate character to Shihoka Nalinanga. In the Underworld, Sudika is swallowed by a monster, Kimbiji ['Two-Persons' ?] kia Malenda a Ngandu ['With Crocodile Scales']; however, Sudika's brother Kabundungulu ['Mr Great Butcher??] catches the monster and cuts it open, after which he magically restores his brother to life from the bones, in shamanic fashion. A great Water Serpent is also very conspicuous in the stories which Jacottet collected in Western Zambia at the end of the 19th century CE (e.g. Jacottet 1899-1901: III, 71 f., 136 f., narrative XXV and LVII.); under the Luyi name Lingongole, this mythical character is reminiscent of the Rainbow Serpent / Snake.³¹⁹ It should be distinguished from the Great Forest Snake (Jacottet 1899-1901: iii, 138), which in the modern Nkoya consciousness has become indistinguishable from Mwenda-Njangula.

Comparative: The Snake / Serpent is a feature of mythology everywhere and of all times. I felt justified to claim

³¹⁷ Underneath the Shihoka-Likambi rivalry we could also suspect that between Nkoya and Lozi, but since *open* expressions of animosity *vis-à-vis* the Lozi are common-place in 20th-century CE Nkoyaland, it seems less likely that such animosity would have to be concealed in myth.

³¹⁸ The transition from paradisiacal sibling complementarity to deadly sibling rivalry is not obvious, and suggests that two mythemes of widely different background and origin have been combined here: (a) the motif of the paradisiacal siblings, at First or Second Creation (in other words, after the Flood), and (b) a masculinising telescoping of generations and authorities, that transforms (under the impact of the new cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth) the Virgin Mother of the Waters with her Only Son and Lover, into an uneasy dyadic union, in which the male partner, with celestial connotations (but compare the myth of Chibinda and Luweji), claims equality and usurps the female partner's seniority, both in generation and in prerogatives of ruling.

³¹⁹ *Ngorongoro*, and variants, is a common name for the Rainbow and Rainbow Snake throughout Bantu-speaking Africa. The name resonates with many other mythical names in the Id World, all the way to Chinese 龍 Lung ('dragon').

the presence of a Snake Narrative Complex already in the very oldest mythology, that is, included in Pandora's Box. The primordial Snake often appears in the form of the Rainbow Serpent (in Australia and archaic Africa; Buchler & Maddock 1978), but this celestial form often has a complement in a terrestrial or aquatic Serpent; the celestial and terrestrial / aquatic forms may also coincide, which stands to reason since in many archaic cosmologies there is considerable equivalence between 'the Waters Above' (the sky), 'the Waters Below' (the Underworld, Apsu etc.), and the Waters 'Aside' of the ordinary life-world, the seas and rivers. The Rainbow appears when Rain is over (cf. *Genesis* 9:13, after Nūah's Flood) and therefore is the adversary of Rain, the harbinger of drought. Cf. the Australian notion of drought as the son of Rain, the former seeking to prevent the latter, his father, from falling (Andrews 2000). However, Rain, as Demiurge, in Nkoya cosmology and myth appears, not in a paternal but in a filial role, as bird-like child of a bird-like High God which in recent centuries has been known under the name of Nyambi. I prefer to interpret Shihoka's mythical character not by reference to Pandora's Box, but to much more recent mythical connotations. Shihoka's symbolism is somewhat reminiscent of the West Asian Snake symbolism informing such Biblical passages as *Genesis* 3 (temptation by and cursing of the Snake, causing humans to be evicted from Paradise into the wilderness which by implication is drought-stricken) and *Numbers* 21:8 (the raising of the brazen Snake in the desert). The association of the Underworld with cattle is common-place in European mythology (cf. Hercules with the cattle of Geryon (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.5.10) and of Cacus (Virgil, *Aeneid*, VIII), but also Pluto's / Hades' association with cattle as the most obvious form of wealth in Indo-European contexts; the association also surfaces in several of Grimm's *Hausmärchen*; Grimm & Grimm 1812-1815 / 1996) – and Shihoka is, among other things, a cattle raider (also see Unilateral Being, below). Not only as a conflict between royal siblings of opposite gender, but also in terms of the dry / wet opposition, this conflict is reminiscent of that of Arthur and Morgana. Morgana's name means 'sea-born' (Rhys 1891: 22 f., cf. 324 f.), and she, again, is an epiphany of the Mother of the Waters – hence the rightful Lady of Avalon (Rhys 1891: 348), whose position is usurped by male ascendance. According to one version Morgana, too, resorts to the production of an artificial human being to inflict fatal harm upon Arthur. In Shihoka Nalinanga, 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 Shu, the ancient Egyptian air-god whose name means Emptiness or Dryness, has a son Geb, the Earth god, – the latter is not himself represented as a snake but displays the chthonic connotations of the snake which are virtually universal; for the Geb motif in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Ndigi 1996). Also cf. Zmey Gorynych, the dragon of the Slavic mythology; its name is translated as 'Snake son-of-mountain', cf. Earth / drought; and in Indian mythology: Vṛtra, the drought-causing Serpent (Mackenzie 1913). In many mythologies, the opposition wet / dry creates a central dynamism. It is this opposition, in fact, that informs the old Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land. Here the senior position is accorded to the aquatic side, 'the Mother of the Waters', who gives birth to the Land as the junior component of reality, and who had to do this from a virginal state because there was no other being to impregnate her. In the Nkoya narrative the dry / wet opposition is applied in several ways. 'Snake Child or Parent of Drought', although producing boats, lives in the forest, while his counterpart lives in the flood plain, as the structural exponent of the Mother of the Waters, who in vain claims her privilege of supremacy, after her position has already been redefined from intergeneration (Virgin Mother and Only Child, who becomes her lover) to Elder Sister / Younger Brother – with further humiliation in stock for the Elder Sister. The opposition between Rain and Drought is, however, not just a binary cosmological opposition, but may be interpreted as part of a transformational cycle involving not only Fire and Water, but also Earth, Air, Metal, and possibly other elements such as Aether (cf. van Binsbergen 2009 and 2012, where the implied presence of this cycle among the Nkoya is discussed). The suggestion of cyclical transformation around Shihoka Nalinanga has a parallel in Nordic mythology: the Rain god Freyr on the day of Ragnarok (the Nordic Apocalypse) will battle without weapons (for he gave his sword away to Skirnir), and will be the first to be killed by the Fire giant Surt [a Fire Giant] – again enacting the same scheme of Water being destroyed by Fire. The late lamented comparative mythologist Nick Allen (2010) treated the same essentially cyclical and elemental opposition for Hephaestus (Fire) versus Scamander (Water), and Vṛtra (Drought Serpent) versus Indra (Rain). So at one level the conflict between the siblings is to be explained as the antagonistic interaction between elements within a transformative cycle: 'Water destroys Fire', 'Fire destroys Wood', etc. May we interpret the artificial women as a third, catalytic element? This leads on to the next item:

8.5.18. Artificial woman wreaks doom

Nkoya: When Shihoka Nalinanga does not meet her demands, Likambi Mange has a diviner-priest construct an artificial woman, who is sent to Shihoka and causes his death.

Comparative: The motif of artificially constructed human beings is so central in today's popular culture (cyborgs *etc.*), that we are inclined to consider it the expression of highly developed technological culture, in which electronic and digital advances have brought about the situation where man-machine communication (*e.g.* through the cell phone) is increasingly supplanting the direct bodily and sensory interaction between humans. However, the same motif is prominent in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (*cf.* Higley 1997a, 1997b), where the artificial beings are rumoured to have been created by some of the finest male minds in European cultural history: Virgil, Simon Magus, Pope Sylvester II, Albertus Magnus, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Paracelsus, Rabbi Loew of Prague, René Descartes, Thomas Edison, and so on into the twentieth century CE – with such parallels as Daedalus, Hephaestus, Talus and Pygmalion in the imagination of the Ancient World. The related motif of the cyborg has so proliferated in recent years that we cannot begin to indicate the relevant literature. A major early study in this field was: Haraway (1991). Meanwhile the most famous example in this category is Mary Shelley's literary creation, Frankenstein, *cf.* Shelley 1831; Heideman 2001. Artificial humans are a feature of the imagination worldwide – combining the appropriation of divine creative power, with the evil connotations that such *hubris* predictably entails. The divine artificial creation of humans, especially from Earth or mud, is a widespread motif: Chinese 女媧 Nü Wa (Willis 1994: 91), Oceanian gods, the Biblical god (*Genesis* 1-2; alternatively from Adam's rib, and *anyway the perpetrator of the Fall of Man*), and, by Hephaestus from the Earth / Earth / Gaia, Greek Pandora is created as punishment for humans' acquisition of Fire from Prometheus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X; Willis 1994: 13). *Cf.* Penglas (1997) on the Near Eastern antecedents of the Pandora myth (as distinct from Egyptian antecedents of Pandora, as in Bernal 2001: 25 *f.* after Walcot 1966). As we have already seen above, the Greek shape-shifting sea god Proteus (according to one minority version of the Trojan ar) substituted Helena by a dummy to be sent to Troy to be the doom of her times, keeping the original Helena at his island Pharos before the Egyptian coast, where innocently she was later reunited with Menelaus. Bata, Anubis' brother, flees after a Potiphar-like incident (*cf. Genesis* 39: 1 *f.*), to Syria, where the Ennead (the nine principal Ancient Egyptian gods) have a wife for him made by the Creator god  Khnum. This wife is almost violated by the personified Sea. Bata has emasculated himself and has hidden his heart in a pine tree, *etc.* Bata becomes a bull, then an avocado tree, then a piece of furniture, whose splinter kills the bad woman. Bata ends up as king (Willis 1994: 53). This does not exhaust the mythical motif of an artificial woman wreaking doom. Its further manifestations include: continental European Melusine, an evil shape-shifting mermaid (Skeat 1866) who – with all her Snake connotations – appears to be essentially a domesticated transformation of the prehistoric 'Mother of the Primal Waters' (*cf.* Couldrette 1866; Higley 1999); the Lilith of Hebrew tradition (*cf.* Koltuv 1986 and references cited there); Roman Fama, 'Rumour'; and Blodeuwedd, the artificial woman created out of flowers so as to marry a man whose mother (Aranrhod) has cursed him never to marry a mortal (*Mabinogion*, IV; Jones & Jones 1949). Melusine and Blodeuwedd spring from the Celtic world and reinforce the Celtic dimension of such Eurasian continuities as surface repeatedly in the Nkoya case. In a way, Graeco-Roman Aphrodite / Venus (born not from a womb but from sea foam / from Uranus' severed genitals (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 176 *f.*; *cf.* Solmsen 1990), and the cause of incessant mischief in the world of gods and men) is quite at home in this company. Widespread in medieval European literature is the myth of the poison girl (Hertz 1905), featuring Aristotle of all people, and with reminiscences also of Medea, who was of divine birth, granddaughter of the Sun god Helios, daughter of Jason's adversary Aeetes of Colchis, and niece of Circe. The motif is also sporadically found in North America: in a Tlingit myth, Raven made a woman under the Earth (Swanton 1909: 32). Usually, then, the evil artificial human is female, but also male examples may be found, *e.g.* the 9-miles-long Mokerkjalif ('Mist Wader') created out of clay by the evil Jotun giants for their battle with the Germanic gods (Guerber 1909: 74 *f.*); or the Golem of medieval and Early-Modern Jewish tradition, again out of clay, usually male, and whose evil deeds are scarcely compensated by the fact that he was intended to protect the Jews from accusations of ritual human sacrifice (*cf.* Idel 1990; Looby *nd.*).

8.5.19. Building with skulls

Nkoya: The legendary Nkoya king Kayambila's throne name boasts that he thatched his palace with the skulls of his enemies. This cruel practice 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. It is to the hunter and explorer George Copp Westbeech (*apud* Tabler 1963; Sampson 1972) that we owe a description of this Nkoya use of the occiput. The Nkoya's eastern neighbours, the Ila, despite Ila defeat, kept piles of skulls in memory of the Barotse (*cum* Nkoya!) attack upon their cattle in the 1880s (Smith & Dale 1920: 1, 44). For parallels to the Nkoya skull cup among the Nkoya's northern neighbours the Kaonde, *cf.* Jaeger 1974; for Zimbabwean / Ndebele parallels, *cf.* the numerous references to smashed skulls in Selous 1893, 1896. Among the Ila, whose culture and language overlaps with those of the Nkoya, still in the early 20th century CE the practice prevailed that a suitor was only eligible for marriage if he brought his prospective affines the skull of a slain enemy (Smith & Dale 1920: 1, 44, 77; Muntamba 1973). Moreover, especially at the annual royal Kazanga harvest festival, the king would conclude his royal dance pouring a libation (nowadays of village-brewn beer, originally most probably of slave blood; in the latter case the episode would be strikingly similar to Early-Dynastic Egypt-

tian rites, cf. Wilkinson 2001 – for more koya / Egyptian parallels see elsewhere in the present chapter, and van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 5) for his royal ancestors at an arboreal shrine, and drinking part of the liquid – 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 a drinking vessel (Mayowe 1994).

Comparative: The skull cult is likely to go back, ultimately, to Palaeolithic times. Admittedly, Binford (1981) has argued that what has been construed and widely circulated as evidence of cultic and cannibalistic practices of Palaeolithic Man (e.g. among the Sinanthropus, 'Peking Man', 500 ka BP) may very well be attributed to the known actions of predatory animals, which leave similar traces in the archaeological record as the subdiscipline of *taphonomics* studies in much detail). Despite this well-taken criticism by one of the most prominent archaeologists of our time, 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 (Maringer 1952: 75-82 and *passim*, which contains a wealth of information of skull cults, see index of that book, s. v. 'schedel' / 'skull'; Gahs 1928). A general study of the place of the human skull in cultural history was made by Henschen (1966). Skull cults are a widespread feature of Neolithic cultures in the Near East (Mellaart 1967; Edwards *et al.* 1986: index, s.v. skulls (painted, plastered, on floors, skull-burials and cult, Jericho, pp. 505-506). Like heads conserved in honey, human skulls were widely used in divination (Betz 1986: 75: PGM IV.2125-39; Montgomery 1911), which may have extended to libation or drinking from such skulls.

Building With Skulls. Before we discuss this gruesome form of architecture, let us consider the more positive case: the Building-With-Skulls mytheme has associations not only with extreme violence and destruction, but also with cosmogony: in Ancient Nordic mythology, the gods fashioned the Sky out of the skull of the giant Ymir, and used his eyebrows as a protective barrier (Rosenberg 1994). However, as we have seen in Table 9.3, the Kayambila motif reflects two AT motifs that have a wide global distribution: F771.1.9 – house of skulls as murderer's abode; and G315 – demon cuts off men's heads to build with them. The parallels with the Kayambila motif in Greek mythology are unmistakable. Cygnus / Swan (Fontenrose 1980: 29) was reported to be in the habit of ambushing travellers and piling up their skulls, from which he intended to build a temple for the god whose son he was reputed to be: Ares, [Phoebus] Apollo, or Phoebus (Apollodorus *Bibliotheca*, 2.114; Stesichorus, Fragment 207); only Heracles' victory over Cygnus prevented this architectural feat. Fontenrose argues that Cygnus is primarily a manifestation of the Underworld god Hades, hobos being the god of fright; the association with a Sun god (such as Phoebus Apollo) is no longer puzzling once we realise that – as highlighted in Egyptian belief – the Sun passes through the Underworld during the night (an action also attributed to Christ after dying on the cross); an ulterior explanation would be that the swan is an evocation of the Mother of the Primal Waters under the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land, and that later this Creator deity was fragmented into Sky god, Sea god and Underworld god,³²⁰ and masculinated. Nor was the possession of a mound of skulls limited to Cygnus: Diomedes son of Ares was reputed to possess a similar mound of skulls, apparently a rudimentary shrine in the nature of a *herm*, an Earth shrine such as found all over the Old World from Khoisan speaking Namibia (where it is sacred to the Trickster god / Demiurge Heitsi-Eibib) to Mongolia, Tibet and even North America, typically located at through-roads and at crossroads, and to which individual travellers are supposed to add a stone in token sacrifice. Antaeus son of Poseidon boasted a similar collection of skulls (Fontenrose 1980: 330, with extensive references). Like Cygnus, Antaeus was reputedly killed by Heracles,³²¹ notably in

³²⁰ In a famous Homeric passage (*Ilias*, Book XV), Poseidon explains how the world had been divided between him and his two brothers, Zeus and Hades.

³²¹ A CLOSER LOOK AT HERACLES AND AT HERA: THE CELESTIAL AXIS AND THE NOCTURNAL, STAR-SPANGLED SKY. The question as to why Heracles / 'Glory of Hera', should have the task of clearing the world from monsters is a challenge in its own right for comparative mythology. As long as we stick to the naïve, popular etymology of Hera as 'heroine', we will not make much progress towards answering this question. Nor should we take Heracles as one, monolithic and integrated character – a great diversity of characters hide under this designation (Gruppe 1964; Pötscher 1979a; Brundage 1958; Levy 1934; Graves 1988; Slater 1992). Burkert (1979) sees Heracles as originating in Palaeolithic hunter culture and traditions of shamanistic crossings into the netherworld; that is less profound or revealing than it sounds, since we have some reason to presume (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, and above chs 5 and 6) that *all* mythology has that kind of background.


As one of the possible readings of the Heracles character I submit the following. Typical of mythological complexes is their layeredness (cf. Farmer *et al.* 2002). Often, older dispensations of a worldview and the attending

Libya, which in classical Antiquity was a name for the land mass we call the African continent today, but Libya did not just apply not to Africa alone – there also being vast stretches of Asia designated by that name (Karrst 1931). Whereas in the Cygnus 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 Gaia / 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 in Heracles' capacity of the celestial axis. Nor was this the end of the sinister skull collection in the Greek myths. According to Fontenrose (1980: 333):

‘...Oinomaus, Euenus, 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 respective daughters] who lost the race; and

mythology are not downright supplanted by later, dominant ones, but forced into an uneasy, twisted, compromised relationship with them. Hera is, from one point of view, a transformation of the Mother of the Primal Waters under the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land. This is clear, for instance, from the fact that the same myth in which Mwene Manenga caused a village to be destroyed by the Flood since her request for assistance was rejected by the locals, is also told of Hera – but Jason did heed her request, and received favours. But at the same time Hera is an exponent of the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, which seems to have largely supplanted the earlier cosmogony. Under the new dispensation, Hera despite her female nature) appears as a Sky goddess – her association with speckled or striped animals (cuckoo – *Cuculidae* – , peacock – *Pavoninae*; cf. van Binsbergen 2004, ch. 17 below, and in press (h), her enmity of the solar complex of Colchian Aëtes and his sisters Circe and Pasiphae, the plausible Kartvelian etymology of Hera's name 'setting Sun' (Proto-Kartvelian *čwer- (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Kartvelian etymology'; Klimov 1998: 525), and her complementarity / marriage with the Sky god Zeus, all make that at least one aspect of her is that of a goddess of the Sky at night, when the revolution of the Heavens around the celestial pole and axis is most conspicuous. The militant Heracles, with his star-spangled association with the brightly speckled quail (various families and species of the order of the *Galliformes*), his Lion-skin and his club evocative of the celestial axis, rounding up the mythical cattle regardless of whether it belongs

- to the Heavens (as in Egypt and the Ancient Near East; Hera is *boōpis*, 'cow-eyed' and *europia*, 'broadly seeing'; Heracles is *bouphagos*, 'cow-eating', *ouranios*, 'celestial')
- or to the Underworld, *primarily represents the aggressive subjugation of the older cosmogony (and its human adherents) by the newer cosmogony.*

Heracles is in the first place the celestial axis – the great discovery of naked-eye astronomy by the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic (cf. Rappenglück 1999); hence Herodotus, (*Historiae*, II), is found by commentators – notably Lloyd 1988: 29 – to have equated Heracles with Egyptian  Shu, who holds up the Heavens. In so far as the recognition of the celestial axis is *shamanic* (it is the shaman's privilege to move up and down the axis into Heaven and Underworld), Burkert is right that Heracles has shamanic aspects. Heracles's works (typically organised as a dozen, but very far from constituting a standard zodiac; for full details on this point see van Binsbergen, in press (j), Table 8.3, p. 180 f.) summarise the overthrow of the demonised protagonists of the older cosmogonic dispensation. Hence even Heracles as *ipoktonos* 'grub-eater': if we may appeal to Egyptian-Aegean mythological continuity, in so far as Neith / Bee Ruler as Mother of the Waters represents the older disposition and was replaced by the solar god Rē, Heracles as championing the new disposition kills the Bee's offspring, the grub. The celebrated woman classicist Jane Harrison shows a picture of Heracles using his club to fight keres (female death spirits) – the latter look like bees in the Ancient Egyptian conventionalised iconography (my Fig. 8.8). This is reminiscent of Aristaeus (as a god an evocation of the prototypical Pelagian rustic) in conflict with Orpheus but a son of the Neith-like goddess Cyrene, in other words a variant of the *blt*, saw his bees killed but restored from cattle. This approach also throws some light on nocturnal Hera's otherwise unexplained enmity vis-à-vis the solar / diurnal Aëtes c.s. and on Jason's rival Pelias' emphasis on Aphrodite, and refusal to include Hera, in the annual festival at Iolcus. The principal heroes associated with Hera (besides Jason also Menelaus, Antenor, and Orpheus) are all donning Leopard / panther skins as befits a goddess of the star-spangled night-sky, and it is her hatred that brings Jason to adventure into Colchis (Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*), thus alluding to all the symbolic dimensions of Leopard-skin symbolism which my comparative research has brought to light (van Binsbergen 2004, this book ch. 17, and in press (h).

the first two are linked with Phorbas, Cygnus, and Antaeus.³

Onomastic tragic strategy concerning his daughter Hippodameia formed the motif of the great temple sculptures at the Parthenon and Olympia. Even the name of Geryon, whom Heracles relieved of his cattle, may be etymologically linked to *karanos*, 'cranium, skull' (Fontenrose 1980: 333, where also other etymological associations are cited, with ample bibliography). Also Hercules's enemy Cacus, another death demon and cattle rustler (*cf.* the Nkoya tradition on Shihoka Nalinanga as cattle rustler), 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 (Fontenrose 1980: 54). If that name can be considered to derive from Indo-European *bh1 e jleg-*, 'to burn black with smoke' and hence as a cognate of our word 'black' (Partridge 1979, *s.v.* 'black'), then we might suggest that the Phlegyans, though mythical, were at one stage thought of as Black people, and perhaps were among the Pre- or Proto-Bantu presences in the Eastern Mediterranean and West Asia (*cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011); however, more authoritative is Starostin & Starostin (1998-2008: 'Indo-European etymology') Proto-Indo-European: **bhleig-* 'shining bright'. Skull-decorated temples are characteristic of Kali in Hinduism, and are also found in other South Asian contexts. The human skull is a favourite decorative motif in the dwellings of leading men in South East Asia, and for some Meso American temples – *e.g.* the walls of the Maya centre of Chichen Itza are adorned with numerous sculptural representations of skulls. Skulls moreover used to abound in European Christian churches, when still in regular use as burial sites. In South Asia it is not necessarily an act of cruelty to use a deceased's skull as a drinking vessel – it may even be an act of mourning (Eliseev *et al.* 1994: 459, 180).

Drinking from skulls: In comparative mythology, the *locus classicus* for drinking from the skulls of slain enemies is Herodotus's accounts of the Scythians (*Historiae* IV, 64). A related example from Eastern Europe is the drinking vessel which the Pecheneg Khan Kurya made out of Svyatoslav's skull (Schreiber *n.d.*: 304). This Kiev practice combines Steppe with Viking antecedents, and we are not surprised that there is disagreement as to whether the Vikings of North-western Europe did or did not drink from skull cups. At any rate, nearly a millennium later the skull of Blackbeard the Pirate (c. 1680 – 1718), whose original name was Edward Teach, a.k.a. Thatch (*cf.* *Kayambila*) or Thache, was turned into a cup – so that his fate appears to be one that *Kayambila* 'the Thatcher' could have predicted. A clear-cut parallel with the Nkoya case comes from the European Iron Age: In 216 BCE, the Boii Gauls in Gallia Cisalpina (modern North Italy) killed the consul Lucius Postumius Albino and used his skull as a sacrificial vessel (Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, XXIII 23.4; Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, XV, 3.2). 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 end of a skull complex that extends across the Steppe belt of Eurasia all the way to the Pacific coast. Los (1969: 58, 116) sees the use of the skull cups in the first place as a Turkish-Mongolian custom, later also among the Bulgars, and during the Migrations of the Nations also occasionally among Germanic kings in Europe (*e.g.* Alboin had the skull guilded of the Gepid king Kunimond (Los 1969: 244 n. 209; Thierry 1856: 112 *f.*). Laoshang Chanyu 老上單于 defeated the Yueh-chi 月支 (probably a branch of Tocharians) in 170 BCE and made their king's skull into a drinking vessel, after which the latter's people fled westward (Los 1969: 116). Glimpses of the Inner Eurasian skull cult can be found with Herodotus (on the Issedones, Herodotus, *Historiae*, 1, 201; 4: 13, 16, 15 *f.* *cf.* Baldick 2000: 17; also the Herodotus commentator Corcella elaborates on this point, *cf.* Corcella 1984; Asheri & Corcella 2007), and by the 10th-century Iranian geographer Ibn Rusta (Baldick 2000: 29). General ownership of enemy skulls is reported for the Avars (Baldick 2000: 36). Drinking from enemy skulls has been reported from the Bulgars of the Danube (Baldick 2000: 31) and the Mongols (the king of the Hsiung-nu / 匈奴 / Huns in 202 BCE – Baldick 2000: 23; such drinking vessels are indispensable for Hsiung-nu when sealing a treaty, Baldick 2000: 36; interestingly, Nkoya in the 19th century CE had the same war tactics as the Hsiung-nu: luring the enemy to distant places. The skull-cup practice was also found in Korea (Hulbert 1905; Serruys 1958; Yetts 1926 as a practice associated with Chinese in Korea). Head-hunting³²² practices in Taiwan are well attested (Watson Andaya 2004; Shepherd 1993). In Japan the custom appears to be transformed into drinking from an animal skull (Blacker 1967; Seki 1966), while 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); highly decorated, such skull cups are conspicuous especially in Tibetan Buddhism. The practice of skull drinking is also reported from Native (North) Americans (Chacon &

³²² Of course, head-hunting constitutes an important aspect of the skull complex. A fuller discussion would be out of place in the present book on comparative mythology, but I have made head-hunting the concrete empirical focus of an elaborate methodological exercise setting out how geographic distributions may be systematically used to produce long-range historical reconstructions; van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 12.



LEGEND: (a) Heracles and *k̄er*. Source: Harrison 1903: 166, Fig. 17; Furwängler 1893: 33. The lower inset shows the *k̄er* figure from the wooden Abydos label (here presented as (b)); the upper inset shows the hieroglyphic signs for 'h3', i.e. the Early Dynastic Egyptian king 'Aha' and 'h4' [the Ruler of Lower Egypt, as subordinated by the Upper Egyptian kingship in the legendary Unification of the Lands]. Source of (b): Petrie 1905.

Fig. 8.9. Heracles *keram̄ntēs* and a *k̄er* on a *pelikē* from Thisbe — and its continuity with the Archaic Egyptian wooden Abydos label, suggestive of Heracles impersonating the Early Dynastic Egyptian king 'Aha.

So here a number of greatly different themes need to be distinguished: the skull as a memento of human mortality on the one hand evokes violence and unrestricted power – the realm of the gods of war and death – but on the other hand resignation with the finitude of human life, of continued commitment after the death of a loved one, and even of liberation from life's woes, or eternal salvation. In the Nkoya case, however, the emphasis is clearly on violence and unrestricted power, in amazing continuity with the Eurasian skull complex, especially with the Turks of the Eurasian Steppe (cf. Lot 1969: 50 f.).

8.5.20. Creation from Tears of the Divinity

Nkoya: The Nkoya myth of kingship concludes with the adage 'Our kingship is from the Tears / Drops of Rain'.

Comparative: In Ancient Egypt, the 'Tears of the Divinity' image first emerges with the *Coffin Texts*, after the Old Kingdom: Anthes 1966: 30; de Buck 1935-1961: VII, 465 a. 'Mankind arose from the tears of the Sun's / Re's eye'. In another version humankind did not directly issue from Re's tears, but Re's tears fertilised the Earth so that it could bring forth mankind: 'The Sun-god wept and from the tear (*remet* $\overline{\text{remet}}$) that fell on Earth, there sprang man (*remet* $\overline{\text{remet}}$)' Hart 1993: 186; hieroglyphic text added; in van Binsbergen & Woodfinizen 2008 an argument is presented to link Egyptian *remet* and the Eurasian / Latin place name *Roma*, to Proto-Bantu 'dómé' (Guthrie no. 697), 'husband, man', cf. *Roma* as a 'Gypsy' ethnonym, against the background of other indications of Proto-Bantu in the Bronze Age Mediterranean). By a very close parallel with the Egyptian case, the Nordic Sun-god Balder was called 'God of Tears', not only because he was accidentally killed by his blind twin brother Hod, but particularly because humankind emerged from his tears. In Indian myth, the motif of a god's creative tears (Prajapati's, notably) comes very close to that of the Egyptian case (Mackenzie 1913: vi). Japanese mythology also knew the creative tears, notably those that were shed by the god Izanagi, out of grief over his sister-wife Izanami; these turned into 'a beautiful babe, the goddess Nakusame-no-Mikoto, the goddess of wells and clear water (Kojiki).

But not all divine tears coagulate into humans. In Babylonian mythology (*Enuma Elish*) the tears of the female

chaos and water goddess Tīamat became the source of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Here it is the blood of Kingu, Tiamat's consort, from which their victorious adversary, the male Sun god Marduk, created the first humans; cf. Aphrodite's co-creatures the Giants, the Erinyes (furies), and the Meliae *apud* Hesiod (Aphrodite herself allegedly springing forth not from the blood of Cronus when castrated but from the sea water's foam, which may be a euphemism for sperm). According to the Ancient Greeks, the inundation of the Nile was due to the tears of Isis (Hopfner 1940-1941: II, 1041, p. 175), which fell into the water when she was violated by her son Ḥorus (*Papyrus Harris*, VII, 10) – another case of a mythical virgin mother (she was only posthumously impregnated) and her only son being transformed in the direction of masculine dominance, with a twist. In Graeco-Roman mythology, morning dew is said to spring from the tears the goddess Eōs spilled over the loss of her lover (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 842 f.); likewise, in Oceanian mythology (which shows many unexplained parallels with that of Western Eurasia – these are discussed at length, and elucidated, in my 2020 monograph on *Sunda*, Part II, pp. 353 f.) dew is interpreted as the tears of the celestial god Rangī over the terrestrial goddess Papa (Best 1922: 14). Back in Greece, also the river Kokytus, identical to or closely related to the better known river Styx, is made up of tears – but tears of humans, not of gods. The Achelous river in Asia Minor sprung from Niobe's tears when, in retaliation for her idle boasting, the two divine children Apollo and Artemis had killed Niobe's children (*Ilias* XXIV 602). Other rivers and lakes were supposed to originate from the tears shed by nymphs; in Germanic mythology, *nixies* / stream maidens were depicted in the same manner. Among such nymphs is, in Italy, the otherwise unknown 'Nestis, who with her tears feeds the life stream of beings' and thus represents water among the four elements (Empedocles, *Fragments*, 6, Leonard 1908; my translation); this comes close again to tears creating humans. In Judaism, God is claimed to weep over the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, and out of pity with his creatures, thus bringing about a silent stream (Schwartz 2004: 37 f.; Fishbane 2003: 167).

Nor are all divine tears benevolent and creative. Relatively close to Egypt, among the Nilotic Dinka people venerating the Demiurge Deng, the adage exists 'Deng's Tears are Blood' (Scheub 2000) – apparently an adage setting forth the inevitability of bloodshed. And all the way across Asia, the tears of the storm god *スサノヲ* Susanoo also carried violent associations: 'Susanoo's tears, which caused the Rain, were tears of destruction. Like the tears of the Egyptian Seth and of angry gods in other lands, they dried up the oceans and withered the forests' (Andrews 2000: 196). In the New World, the Inca Creator god Viracocha, having completed his creative activities, often takes trips to Earth disguised as a beggar to check up on the state of the world, which usually causes him to cry (Urton 1999: 64; Salomon & Urioste 1991); note the parallel with Mwene Manenga above. In Mi'kmaq mythology (South Eastern Canada, with optimal opportunities for trans-Atlantic influences from Africa and Europe) tears shed by the Creator Sun god brought about a Flood (Whitehead 1991). Similar instances of crying gods in the New World causing a Flood are given in Andrews 2000: 35. In a Kathlamet myth from the North Western USA, it is tears shed by a rejected lover that bring about the Flood (Frazer 1918: 325-326; Kelsen 1988: 148).

8.5.21. The Rain god has junior / filial status in the pantheon

Nkoya: Mvula / Rain, child of Nyambi.

Comparative: Junior pantheon status of the Rain god (in terms, not so much of power, but of formal genealogical position; e.g. Zeus in the Greek pantheon, as son of Cronus and grandson of Uranus, although the king of Heaven, is yet junior) is widely attested in Western and Eastern Eurasia. This fits in with the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, where Rain, as a principal connection between Heaven and Earth in societies based on rain-fed agriculture, tends to be regarded as the child of the supreme celestial god.



From: van Binsbergen, in preparation (b), where full references will be given

Fig. 8.10. Global distribution of Rain gods with junior status in the pantheon

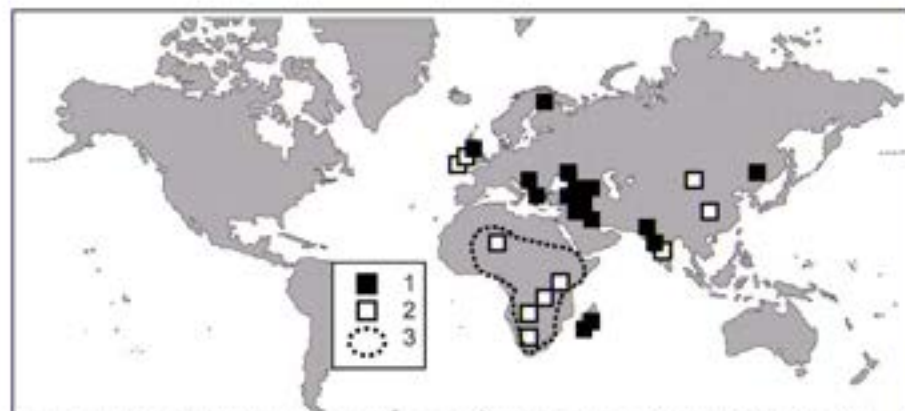
8.5.22. The Unilateral Mythical Being

Nkoya: Among the Nkoya, Mwenda-Njangula ('Walker of the Height') is a mythical being with only one side to his / her body. One meets Mwenda-Njangula in the forest, and if one is the first to extend a greeting, one will gain great knowledge and riches, but in the alternative case, misfortune, even death. In the narratives which the missionary Jacottet (1899-1901: III, *passim*, and II, 122 *f.*) collected in Barotseland by the end of the 19th century CE, Mwenda-Njangula (and various alternative names), appears as a cattle herder who, every morning, crosses a boundary consisting of a river, where his mother makes a fordable passage. Also *cf.* van Binsbergen 201e.

Comparative: Werner (1933: ch. XIII) has recognised the prominence of this motif in the mythology of Bantu speaking peoples and devotes nearly an entire chapter to it. The mytheme of the Unilateral Mythical Being, whose standard discussion is in von Sicard (1968-1969), has a global distribution of typical Pelasgian shape (*cf.* van Binsbergen in press (a)).

Jacottet (1899-1901) suspected direct Judaeo-Christian influence in Mwenda-Njangula's daily river crossing (*cf.* Moses' Red Sea crossing, *Exodus* 14: 16) but a more convincing reading of this story is to consider the boundary the one between the Underworld and the Upper World – such as is also found in Japanese mythology regarding Izanagi's return from the Underworld (the Land of Yomi) where, with relief and relish, he leaves his wretched sister-wife Izanami. Throughout the Old World, rivers constitute the abode of the ancestors, in other words, the Underworld.

This motif is akin to that of Mwene Manenga testing generosity (elsewhere in this Section), and of Jacob wrestling with an unspecified being at the ford of the Jabbok (*Genesis* 32:24); without satisfactory etymology in Afroasiatic including Semitic, this hydronym has a transparent etymology in Proto-Bantu *-jàbok-* (Guthrie no. 916), 'to cross river', and is one of the indications of a Proto-Bantu presence in the Bronze Age Mediterranean (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; Karst 1931; van Binsbergen 2021d). We are in the presence of transformations of the postulated 'Mother of the Waters' here, who especially appears in her capacity of ruler of the Underworld – for as we have seen, the stream, among other mythical references, marks the boundary between life and death.



1, von Sicard's (1968-1969) attestations of the unilateral figure outside Africa; 2, attestations of the unilateral figure from other sources than von Sicard; 3, generalised extent of von Sicard's numerous African attestations of the unilateral figure; from: van Binsbergen 2000 (this book ch. 8), with full references.

Fig. 8a. Global distribution of the mytheme of the Unilateral Mythical Being

8.5.23. The king 'with only one hair'

Nkoya: King Kahare 'With One Hair'; I have usually interpreted this as a reference to the very tall conical hair-dress of the Ila, with which people especially the Kahare kingship has great affinities.

Comparative: This mytheme is complementary to the skull complex. There is the Nordic case of princess Syrith, daughter of king Syradak; she had been abducted by a giant, who had twisted and pressed her locks together so that they formed on her head one hard mass which hardly could be combed out except with the aid of an iron tool (Byrdberg 1906: III, 774). Greek mythology knows a King Nisus of Megara with one crucial hair (Parada & Förlag 1907). The unshaven magical hair in the *Tamoch* (Shimshon, Judges 13: 24 f.) is reminiscent of Greek mythology rather than of the Biblical milieu (Apollo 'never shorn'; King Nisus, and king Pererebas Margalith 1986); note that both Shimshon (whose name means 'Sun') and Apollo have solar connotations. However, for this mytheme the Eurasian Steppe connections seem to be most to the point here, and they seem to confirm the Scythian / Pelagian continuities in the *Nkoya* kingship. Several Central Asian peoples (Warang, following the Agrippaeans and Turks; Seyratoslov of Kiev adopted the same custom) had as the standard coiffure of adult men: a clean-shaven head with only one tuft of hair left (Los 1969: 267 n. 290). This is also the standard hairstyle of mythical and royal children in the Ancient Egyptian tradition – another indication of the latter's possible Steppe connotations, along with artefacts such as spoke-wheeled chariots and the royal diadem, and elements of Uralic in Egyptian theonymy (van Binsbergen & Woodhuizen 201). The infant Ijorus, with the unique tuft of hair, was impersonated by an adult priest on the 16th of the month Kojak (Stricker 1969-1980 IV: 402 f.). Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV, 23) describes the Agrippaeans (Scythian in dress but with their own language) as a group of pacifist and mediators, comparable to North African saints (Gellner 1969), the Sudan Leopard-skin chiefs (Evans-Pritchard 1967 / 1949), and the mediators that established themselves in the middle of the second millennium around the Congo-Zambesi watershed (White 1962; Vansina 1966; van Binsbergen 1986) – with whom they have, in my opinion, not just a formal but also a historical connection, besides all displaying the tendency of wearing a Leopard-skin (van Binsbergen 2004). The mytheme of one hair also has attestations in the New World: World Buffalo, also a symbol of humankind, loses one hair every year (Leeming & Page 2000: 37); bridges of only one hair width occur in a Meso American myth of the hero Nakal who is engaged in a Orpheus-like descent into the Underworld in order to retrieve his wife (Seal 2001). Although North Atlantic Modern popular culture has associated scalping primarily with Native Americans, Scythians, and probably also Sarmatians, also scalped their enemies and attached the scalps to their horses' bridles (Los 1969: 78). In North America, deceased Pawnee who have been scalped are supposed to name each other after the few patches of hair still left on their heads: 'One-Hair, Forehead-Hair, Hair-Back-of-the-Head, all of you come!' (Anonymous, *The mystery of death*, n.d.). Among the Omaha Native Americans, one strand of hair is dedicated to the thunder (Anonymous, *The gods of the elements*, n.d.).

8.5.24. The frog as a cosmogonic evocation

Nkoya: One of the principal mythical *Nkoya* kings has the title of *Kambotwe* ('Frog Person').

Comparative: cf. the widespread cosmogonic connotations of reed and swamp as discussed under Reed and Bee; in Ancient Egypt (Hermopolitan cosmogony) the primal gods are represented as pairs of frogs. However, an Australian myth (with a strange parallel in Grimm's *Hausmärchen*) sees the frog as the origin both of the Flood, and of the Drought that preceded it (Thomas 1923).

8.5.25. Once again: The goddess as a crone testing generosity and punishing with the Flood

Nkoya: As we have repeatedly seen above (Section 8.5.8) among the *Nkoya*'s neighbours, the legendary Queen *Manenga* (who also features prominently among the *Nkoya*) presents herself in the form of an old woman asking favours, and when these are refused, she brings down a Flood.

Comparative: In Apollonius Rhodius' Greek *Argonautica* story, in order to test Jason before entrusting her mission to Colchis to him, Hera appears to him as an old woman and asks him to carry her across a river. Such generosity tests are common worldwide. A similar story to *Manenga*'s is told about the Hawai'ian goddess of Fire, *Pele* (Monaghan 2010: 262); and for the Spanish male mythical figure *Nuberu*. Elsewhere in this Section we have seen how also the Inca Creator god *Viracocha* goes around disguised (Urton 1999: 64; Salomon & Urioste 1991). So does Nordic *Odin*, while the same is told of *Charlemagne* and of the Baghdadī *Sultan Harun al-Rashid*. Also the Christian *Christophorus* motif is related.

8.5.26. The mytheme of matriarchy

Nkoya: Although since the late 19th century CE, nearly all *Nkoya* kings have been male, a careful decoding of the *Nkoya* oral traditions, written in a language that (like most languages) does not mark gender morphologically, suggests out that, initially, *Nkoya* kingship was reserved to women (van Binsbergen 1992).

Comparative: It has been a moot point among scholars, ever since the mid-19th century CE (Bachofen 1861 / 1948, Morgan 1871, 1877 / 1963, Engels 1884 / 1976, etc.), whether there ever was a historical society that could be called matriarchic in the strict sense of implementing, in real-life situations of the family, political and economic institutions, the premise of female supremacy implied in the cosmogony of the Water and the Land. However, throughout the huge global corpus of comparative mythology we see time and again traces of a claim of female supremacy, and of its challenge and effective rejection by males (cf. Sierksma 1962).

8.6. Conclusion

Several hard conclusions can be based on the extensive data presented in Section 8.5.

In the first place, this material proves, beyond reasonable doubt, the existence of massive comprehensive transcontinental Eurasian-African mythological continuities, in the case of the *Nkoya*, and of sub-Saharan Africa in general. Just like *Newton* (1687 / 1947) established that celestial mechanics should coincide with terrestrial mechanics, there can no longer be a separate comparative mythology for Eurasia, and another one for Africa.³²³ This does not

³²³ This sentence has been misread, by an otherwise perceptive reviewer of our 2010 collection (Arvidsson 2012), as if I am directly comparing myself with *Newton*, and of course he chided me for it. 'Standing on the shoulders of his predecessors' (a *Newtonian* phrase), *Newton* was certainly a better reader than *Arvidsson*. I am not in the least pretending to be at a par with the greatest synthetic mind of Early Modern science (I have, however, repeatedly taken my distance from the 'Newton world' of macrocosmic appearances attuned to humans's relatively crude senses, and rendered obsolete by Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity), – although, having an obscurantist tendency myself, I do have lots of sympathy for *Newton* as an obscurantist who allegedly

mean there are no profound differences between mythologies in the world. Yet sharing a common origin in Africa (hence always carrying a substrate, however submerged, of Palaeo-African mythemes such as the Earth, the Spider, the Tree, and the Serpent), and being subject to transcontinental movement and feedback in more recent millennia, have produced a complex pattern of partial and fragmented continuity that cannot and must not be reduced to a simple North-South dichotomy.

In the second place, on the basis of these extensive data, we can simply rule out Christian and Islamic contamination as the principal source of such transcontinental mythological continuities.

In the third place, it is no exaggeration to claim that for most of the mythemes considered, the Pelasgian Hypothesis offers a sufficient explanation for their presence among the Nkoya. Claiming to take effect over a period of only a handful of millennia, the time span of this hypothesis is sufficiently short to allow for sometimes uncanny, precise correspondences, whose very identification admittedly borders on the insane (e.g. 'Do you hear, Reed Person' – as an example of likely continuity between the Nkoya and the Gilgamesh epic). However, the data show that we cannot take recourse to the Pelasgian Hypothesis for all mythemes listed. Thus, in relation with the mytheme of 'Stealing the Moon', while largely Pelasgian in its more recent distribution, the extensive North American attestations coupled with the paucity of this mytheme outside the Pelasgian Realm might suggest a New World, trans-Beringian origin.³²⁴ By the same token, Flood myths as such are at least Upper Palaeolithic

dabbled in astrology and considered his Biblical world chronology (spanning a full six millennia!) his lasting life's work. However, I am merely comparing the field of comparative mythology (which should have a worldwide method and object, and not single out Africa as if it were a freak continent unrelated to the others) with mechanics in the times of Newton (which could no longer accommodate the idea of a separate mechanics for the Heavens and one for Earth). If *applying* Newton must be chided for being equivalent to *comparing oneself* to Newton, every architect, builder, artillery operator, amateur astronomer, operator of fireworks, cyclist, thrower of snowballs, must be so chided, for they are all applying Newton's mechanics. It is as with today's unmitigated but merely iconic popular adoration of Einstein: the worshipper is almost entirely unaware of that scientist's merits (inventor of solar cells!) and completely unaware of his demerits (without Einstein's signature on a crucial document the eternal shame of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not have happened). In general, the further an author is removed from natural science (and since 16 years with one of Holland's then few woman physicists I am not all that remote from it; cf. van Binsbergen 2003, 2021c and chs 15 and 16 of the present book), the more she or he may be inclined to consider the name of a scientific genius as sacrosanct and not to be used idly – in other words, *taboo*, and raised to a priestly status to which scientists should lay no claim. But one might as well have cited Hermes Trismegistus who, one and a half millennia before Newton, in the *Tabula Smaragdina* attributed to Hermes (Ruska 1926) (although probably a mere pseudoepigraphic author without real existence), already proclaimed: 'So above, so below' – the very principle of all divinatory attempts throughout cultural history, to read the appearances on Earth as manifestations of the will of the gods in Heaven. Look at a globe as representation of the world map, realise that conventionally North is put on top, South at the bottom, and realise how Witzel's Gondwana / Laurasian dichotomy sins against the principle so succinctly evoked by Hermes Trismegistus. Do I need to be accused of megalomania (even though the reproach may have a point on other counts) and of spurious identification with Newton, only to be allowed to make this point?

³²⁴ In addition to the fairly consensual view of eastbound trans-Beringian migration into the New World mainly during the Upper Palaeolithic as the main or only source of human population in the Americas, recent genetic research has brought to light evidence for the complementary, opposite movement (Tamm *et al.* 2007). In my multivariate analysis of Flood myths world-wide (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008), I also pointed out mythemes that might have a New-World origin and that subsequently spread to the Old World. The long-range linguistic closeness of the African, Amerind and Austric macrophyla casts an interesting light on these suggestions: while typologically 'New-World' in view of data collected in historical times, they may yet originate in Asia, at a time

and almost universal, yet in so far as the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth is involved, the transmission structure is primarily Pelasgian. The Spider mytheme appears to belong to Pandora's Box, and from there to have been largely transmitted, also to West Asia and the Mediterranean, via the 'Peripheral' Branch of *Borean, consisting of African languages, Amerind and Austric; more recently this mytheme was redefined towards female domesticity in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age West Asia, and despite much older antecedents largely transmitted on the wings of Pelasgian expansion. The fact that so many Nkoya motifs have North American counterparts, may also be attributed (see previous footnote) to the communality of Amerind, African languages, and Austric in Upper Palaeolithic times, and reminds us that the Pelasgian Hypothesis, referring to a much more recent period, can scarcely be invoked to explain African / New World parallels.³²⁵ Also the Snake / Drought motif belongs to Pandora's Box, and cannot be subsumed under the Pelasgian Hypothesis.³²⁶ The myth of Matriarchy is highly contested; on this controversial point, no suggestion as to the transmission mechanism can be made without further study of the details; *matri-lyny*, however, (as distinct from matriarchy) qualifies as a Pelasgian trait.

The systemic 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 discussed elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2003c; in press (b)) as if these were two complementary modalities within the same culture (*cf.* Leach 1954), regardless of their apparently very different historical antecedents:

- the villagers have been pacifist, productive in many ways, and largely stationary (displaying a regional continuity going back at least two millennia, as the archaeology of Western Zambian pottery suggests),
- whereas the royal capitals have been centres of organised violence directed both at strangers and at the local population, have been non-productive and parasitical, and have been nodes through which foreign artefacts, people and cultural forms have passed for centuries.

As the extensive non-Nkoya African references in Section 8.5 suggest, there is – perhaps with the exception of their rare musical talents (which I consider to derive from South and South East Asia; van Binsbergen 2020: Prologue, and 2015: 159 *f.*) – little to make the Nkoya exceptional among their neighbours. In some respects, however, the Nkoya case, and the South Central African case in general, seem to occupy a special place in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

when the 'Peripheral' macrophyla had not yet separated. The North-South dichotomy as perceived by Witzel, and the Sunda origin of major mythemes percolating in West Eurasia (like the Flood) as perceived by Oppenheimer / Dick-Read / Tauchmann, may yet turn out to have a genuine, though relative, basis (although very different from what these authors envisaged) in the distinctiveness of the Peripheral branch of *Borean since c. 20 ka BP. However, a *caveat* is in order here. Modern research on transcontinental connections (*e.g.* Jett 2002) shows that also in the most recent millennia, from widely divergent ethnic and language groups, a constant trickle of eastbound trans-Bering migrations has continued to contribute to the population of North America; so that North American mythological parallels, especially when sporadic, might sometimes be considered to be, in fact, Asian ones.

³²⁵ Although little noticed by comparative mythologists (however, *cf.* Berezkin 2008, 2009), these parallels are extensive, including, in addition to mythology: female puberty rites, divination and gaming, basketry, hunting and fishing methods.

³²⁶ Meanwhile it is remarkable that the Indo-European roots for 'Earth' (**dghem-*) and 'Snake' (**g(h)em-*, **g(h)mēy-*) are, according to specialist opinion, hardly distinguishable (Starostin & Starostin 1998–2008 'Indo-European etymology'; Pokorný 1959–69: I, 662 *f.*, 790; Buck *n.d.*: 16). I shall come back to this point below, at the end of ch. 11.

1. In the first place, we are reminded of Willis' (1994: 265) distinction of mythological zones in sub-Saharan Africa according to linguistic (macro)phylum, where especially the mythologically elaborate, non-Bantu Nigercongo speaking West African region (with the Dogon as a typical, though ethnographically highly contested case; cf. van Beek 2010) is contrasted with the Bantu-speaking South Central and Southern region possessing relatively rudimentary and implicit mythologies – of which the Nkoya are a typical case. As Victor Turner's famous studies (Turner 1967, 1968) of the Ndembu Lunda (quite close to the Nkoya in culture and language) indicate, the central locus of cultural memory in the societies of South Central Africa is ritual *action*, to which mythical and religious *texts* are a diffuse, oblique, multi-layered, fragmented, unstable and situational, occasional commentary.
2. In the second place, kingship-related themes are so dominant in South Central Africa (due to the excessively violent grasp in which kingships have held this region during the centuries of long-distance trade especially in slaves) that, in this part of Africa, 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, on the Rainbow Snake, the Rain Bird,³²⁷ the Origin of Death, animal stories featuring Tricksters such as Hare, *etc.* Only a few fragments of these presumably Palaeo-African mythologies (as well-known from other parts of Africa) became visible to me in the Nkoya case – such Narrative Complexes (NarCom, cf. Table 9.1.) as the Moon (NarCom9), Spider (NarCom15), and Cosmogonic Rainbow Snake (NarCom13); for instance, the standard African myth of the Origin of Death through Contradictory Messengers (NarCom20), which Yuri Berezkin 2009 considers to go back to Pandora's Box (*pace* Oppenheimer 1998) does not feature in my Nkoya mythological corpus, although it does in texts collected by missionaries in Western Zambia around 1900. This state of affairs suggests that, while in the Nkoya case the element of Eurasian-African continuity is extensive and undeniable, this may be less so for some other parts of sub-Saharan Africa – and that in the latter regions, the Palaeo-African mythological element harking back to the Pre-Exodus times, is rather more conspicuous.^{328 329}

³²⁷ *E.g.* Jacottet 1899-1901: II, 152.

³²⁸ By a different route, Michael Witzel has arrived (2010: 232 n. 14) at a similar conclusion in his contribution to the collective work (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010) where the present chapter was first published. I have no quarrel with his attempt to identify a very old mythological layer in global cultural history – my concept of 'Pandora's Box' does exactly the same, and was inspired by his work in the first place. Where we part is when Witzel, with his strict distinction between Laurasian and Gondwana mythologies, suggests that the former, more developed, type should be exclusive to Northern regions, the latter, more 'primitive', type exclusive to the Southern regions, – instead of recognising that, since all mythologies ultimately derive from Pre-Exodus Africa, there is an implied 'Pandora's Box' / 'Gondwana' substrate in every mythology recorded in historical times, whenever and wherever.

³²⁹ In his flatteringly extensive review of our 2010 collection (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010, the review Belcher (2014: 285f)) believes to identify important problem areas in the present chapter's argument:

'The last essay to be considered from the African section, 'The Continuities of African and Eurasian Mythologies' (chapter 9) by Wim van Binsbergen, is the most massive. He presents it apparently as a *summa* of his distinguished and solid career in the study of African religions, and in some ways it might

deserve to stand alone. He offers some review of past scholarship before moving on to a problematic two-step dance. On the one hand, he wishes to reconsider some of his past work: he may have failed to account for the diffusion of external influences in his description of what he took to be an autonomous complex; on the other, he wishes to advance evidence that links the African cultural sphere to the wider world beyond. This he attempts through a listing of some 30 themes in Nkoya mythology that have resonance outside Africa.

What is needed in this volume – and, in general, for the study of African mythology – is a great deal of supporting drudge work, comparable to the work performed through the nineteenth century by folklorists and archivists across the various countries of Europe who collected and documented traditional narratives, thus providing a database, *avant la lettre*, for the invaluable tale-type index. The issue is not whether Nkoya mythology can be linked with elements in the world outside Africa—of course it can, insofar as mythology grows from common human experience and concerns—but rather whether one can identify regional or historical themes and linkages within Africa that then might be matched with complexes outside Africa. For example, it would seem a question worth pursuing to ask whether the mythologies of the Bantu language area of Africa looking out to the Indian Ocean might differ in substantive ways from the mythologies of western Africa along the Niger branch of the Nigercongo linguistic divide, and possibly oriented more toward the Mediterranean. Another problem is that of filtering out (or interpreting) the intrusions of imported religions such as Islam and Christianity. This question is particularly acute because of the recency of collections of African myths. Outside its north-east corner, Africa offers nothing of verifiable antiquity comparable to the Vedas. Oral tradition is demonstrably mutable: consider the 'Myth of the Bagre' of which Jack Goody collected versions in the 1950s in Ghana; when he returned ten years later the myth had changed completely.

These challenges highlight the need for comparative work *within* the continent. The work contained in this volume is suggestive, but does not address the central problems.'

It is an old sleight-of-hand of the clever reviewer pressed for time: rapidly scanning what the authors under review seem have been doing, then thinking on along those inspiring lines, then facetiously claiming that they did not go all the way and suggesting improvement – without stopping to ascertain whether the improvement suggested is not already there in the book under review, and whether it is within the boundaries of the task which the authors under review have set themselves. Belcher missed what I consider three principal points:

- (a) As convenors / editors, Venbrux and I bent our conference and our book to what were, at the time, two concrete concerns of ours: the mythology of death and dying; and the mythology of Africa – finding both topics relatively understudied; most of our contributors were not Africanists, and most were not focussed on death mythology; under the circumstances only a fool would expect or demand a full account of African mythology;
- (b) My original piece specifically addressed, as does the present chapter 8, the erroneous claim of total discontinuity between African mythology and that of the rest of the world; internal African comparison is not a bad idea, but it is not in the least going to offer a way out of (b);
- (c) And this is a lesson that ought to be learned from the present book as a whole): As long as the methodology and theory of comparative mythology remains naïve and implicit, we will continue to fall into the pitfall of the textual reification of African mythology (as essentially an oral product) and we will not be ready yet for far-internal African comparison.

Chapter 9. Ideas that are in the air, and an idea that cries to Heaven (2010)

The 2010 Radcliffe Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology at Harvard University

9.1. Introduction

Air³³⁰ plays an interesting role in comparative mythology.³³¹ The space in between Heaven and Earth is an obvious theme in a worldview (which has been argued to have been dominant throughout Eurasia since the Neolithic or earlier, with extensions into Africa, Oceania and the Americas) hinging on the Separation of Heaven and Earth (and their subsequent Re-connection), and major deities such as Enlil (Sumer) Shu (Ancient Egypt), Vayu (South Asia), Hera (Late Graeco-Roman), the Unilateral Mythical Being Luwe (sub-Saharan Africa), perhaps Heimdall (Northern Europe), have been interpreted as personifications of air. In African mythology, air often appears as thongs or poles connecting Heaven and Earth, along which seeds, domestic animals, a Demiurge, descend from Heaven in order to compensate humans for the traumatic effects of the Separation of Heaven and Earth. Widespread as an evocation of air is also the Tower into Heaven, allowing humans to ascend to the Sky to pur-

³³⁰ #9.1. ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF 'AIR'. No convincing etymology beyond Greek *aēr* (Chantraine 1968-80). Meillet 1925: 7f., reads its meaning as 'suspension'. Perhaps we might distantly connect this root with Kartvelian *čver-, 'to sink (also of the Sun)' (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 'Kartvelian etymology'). This Kartvelian word is semantically akin not only to 'suspension' but also to Hera – the mythical adversary (as setting Sun?) of protagonists projected, by the Ancient Greeks, into the South Caucasian context and having strong Solar connotations (Aëtes, Medeia – as rising or midday Sun?). For an extensive semantic study of the Greek, Latin and French uses of the root *aēr* etc., cf. Mudimbe 1979.

³³¹ For an interesting selection cf. Clarke 1913: 269-335.

sue and pillage the divine. Air also features in various versions of the elemental transformative system throughout Eurasia (with extensions to the other continents) since the Upper Palaeolithic, and there may be personified again into a mythical character.³³²

In the history of science it is a common expression to claim that certain ideas were 'in the air', so as to surface almost simultaneously in the work of several individual scholars who were not in direct contact with each other. In close-knit academic communities such as disciplinary associations this effect may be enhanced. Under recent conditions of the incessant and instant flow of information via new media (specially the Internet), and the greatly enhanced availability of stored information worldwide, even more favourable conditions are being created for ideas being 'in the air' and materialising simultaneously in multiple explicit statements.³³³ Here as elsewhere, air may stand for that aspect of our reality with which we are implicitly so familiar that we no longer perceive it consciously – 'like the very *air* that we are breathing' (cf. Irigaray 1999 / 1983). Air has become an increasingly powerful symbol of the inchoate, unbounded, fluid forms of concepts and relationships associated with (Post-)Modernity (Berman 1982).

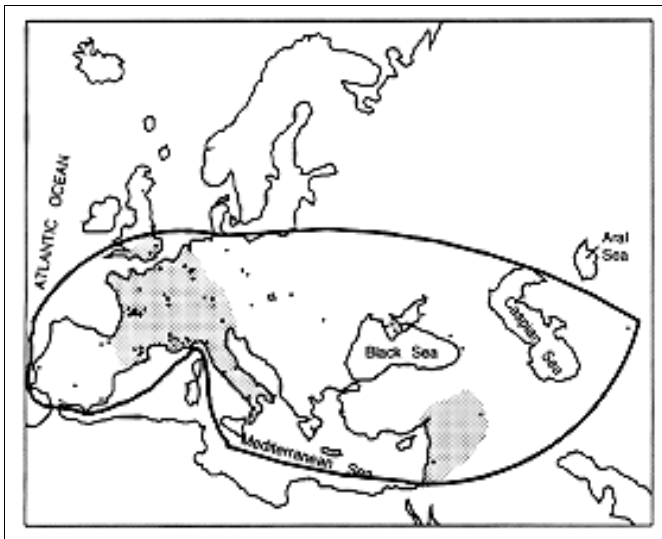


Fig. 9.1. Neanderthal distribution in Europe

³³² Cf. Bachelard 1948 / 1943; van Binsbergen 2012a.

³³³ #9.2. SOME DISCOVERIES THAT APPARENTLY WERE 'IN THE AIR' IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS. Cf. Goldstein & Goldstein 1981: 255; Peters 1999. A useful list of simultaneous discoveries is offered by: Pullikattil, *n.d.*; it includes such items as Newton's Law, Boyle's Law, the jet plane, electrons, the anthrax bacilla, malaria, the Periodic System of Elements, calculus (priority contested between Newton and Leibniz), the theory of evolution (contested between Darwin and Wallace), etc.

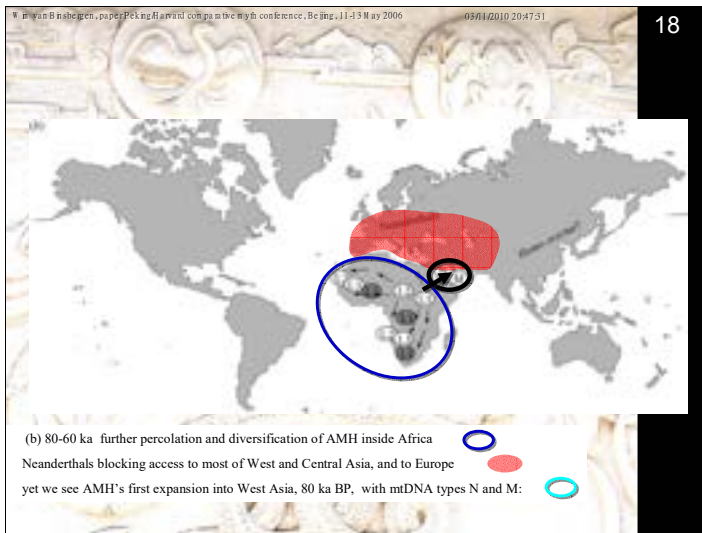
9.2. Three ideas ‘in the air’

The ‘Radcliffe Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA (6-7 October 2010) offered a number of instances of important ideas in Comparative Mythology being ‘in the air’.

9.2.1. ‘It was probably geographic blockage by Neanderthals which prevented Anatomically Modern Humans to leave Africa (c. 80-60 ka BP) and to diffuse into Eurasia beyond the Levant’

This excellent point, made by the palaeoanthropologist David Pilbeam (2010) at the Radcliffe seminar, reiterated an idea long in the air – already driven home in representations of Middle Palaeolithic Neanderthal geographic distribution in the literature of several decades ago.³³⁴

It was also argued by me in my Beijing elaboration of the Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology;³³⁵ cf. there, slide 18:



source: van Binsbergen 2006a

Fig. 9.2. Slide 18 from my PowerPoint presentation at Kyoto, Japan, 2005

³³⁴ Giacobini & Mallegni 1989, whence the distribution map shown here derives originally; cf. Vandermeersch 1989a. The distribution map reproduced via: Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: Fig. 2.1.2. The well-known evidence for a much earlier penetration of Anatomically Modern Humans into the Neanderthaloid Levant (cf. Stringer & Gamble 1993: ch. 5, and references cited there) was acknowledged repeatedly by Pilbeam and others (Blažek, Harrod) during the 2010 Radcliffe seminar.

³³⁵ Cf. van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, chs 5 and 6, below; when the present chapter was first written, in 2010, my 2006b title was still considered to be in the press under the editorship of Duan Qing, Witzel and Gu Zhenkun, but that publication project aborted. The original slide show is to be found at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/further_steps_beijing/index.htm .

9.2.2. 'It was primarily in Asia that the crucial transformations and innovations took place producing the main mythologies attested in historical times on the basis of the Pre-Out-of-Africa mythological inheritance of Anatomically Modern Humans'

This statement, now made in passing as a commonly accepted point during the Radcliffe seminar,³³⁶ has constituted a central claim of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology (2006a, 2006b). At the time, this was welcomed as a new and illuminating insight, which it well may have been – although chances are that, rather, it too had already been 'in the air'.



Fig. 9.3. Affluent elegance: The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA (2010)

³³⁶ In: Berezkin 2010. Incidentally, Berezkin's paper, based on a perceptive (if entirely *etic*, i.e. based on the outsider analyst's imposed concepts and categories which may well differ greatly from those of the (pre-)historical actors involved) analysis of that researcher's massive, and enormously detailed, global comparative mythological database, constitutes one of the major advances in archaeoastronomy in recent years – consolidating, far beyond conjecture and merely regional analysis, the common claim of Upper Palaeolithic knowledge of constellations, and the transcontinental convergence of such knowledge; cf. Rappenglück 1999; Gurshtein 1993; and very extensive references there.

9.2.3. 'Once we have a theoretical model of the development of global mythology in prehistory, we can use it to systematically read / interpret prehistoric iconography, while the latter, in turn, can be used to corroborate our theoretical model'

This point, made by Witzel (2010) in his 2010 Radcliffe presentation, was taken up by archaeologist James Harrod, who used Witzel's theory of long-range mythological development in order to find additional support his own fascinating and visionary (though still insufficiently conceptualised and operationalised) efforts over the decades, persuading Harrod (2010) to read very specific structure and meaning in even Lower Palaeolithic artefacts. Again it is an idea 'in the air': for instance, it was earlier applied at length in my statements at Kyoto (2005), Leiden (2005) and especially Beijing (2006), on the basis of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology, initially inspired by but (cf. Fig. 9.4, below) substantially departing from, Witzel's.³³⁷

Having previously attended, on Harvard-paid tickets, earlier annual conferences of the Harvard Round Table / Comparative Mythology conferences in 2004 (Cambridge MA, USA), 2005 (Kyoto, Japan), 2006 (Beijing, People's Republic of China) and 2009 (Tokyo, Japan), and having convened and published, with my dear colleague Eric Venbrux, the 2008 event (Ravenstein, the Netherlands; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010), I was (I suppose, for reasons of historical justice; and also because of the Radcliffe Institute's blatantly manifest critical scarcity of funds and of accommodation) one of the very few participants to be allowed to attend this conference only informally, to pay his own way, to be excluded from the after-hours social events, and not invited to give a paper. That somewhat unsettling state of affairs made it all the more gratifying to note that at least the air at the Radcliffe seminar was full of ideas with which I could identify, for the best of reasons: they had been my own.

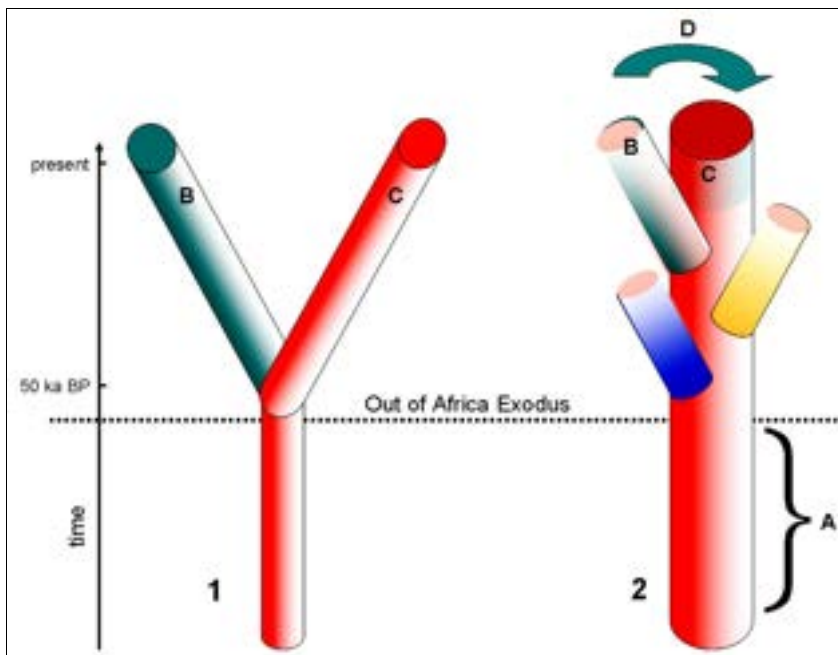
So much for ideas circulating freely and beginning to be taken for granted within a dedicated community of scholars. The opposite would be ideas that are systematically ignored to the detriment of scholarly debate as a truth-finding strategy. Also of this the Radcliffe seminar offered an interesting example.

9.3. An idea that cries to Heaven: The precarious distinction between Northern and Southern mythologies, and their true relationship

Michael Witzel opened the Radcliffe seminar with a full statement (based on his *magnum opus* *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, then in the press with Oxford University Press) on his own theory of the earliest developments of human mythology. In his paper, Witzel explicitly and graciously adopted my 2009 definition of myth (cf. van Binsbergen 2009; this

³³⁷ van Binsbergen 2005, 2006a, 2006b, o.c. Of these, however, only the Kyoto paper had by 2010 (when this chapter was written) reached the point of formal publication – the Leiden paper was a very short oral presentation confided to the Internet; the Beijing paper was elaborately prepared for publication by the Beijing convenors (Duan Qing, Witzel and Gu Zhenkun), but – as happens often, and as stated above – that publication aborted (beyond a small collection of papers with direct Chinese relevance). Only at the 2010 Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology it was announced informally in Witzel's presidential address that the Beijing proceedings had now been given up as a project.

book, ch. 3, above). However, not for the first time Witzel ignored the fundamental theoretical and knowledge-political debate he and I have had since 2005³³⁸ about the merits and demerits of his radical absolute distinction, in the classification and historical development of global mythology, between 'Gondwana' (Southern, 'primitive': Africa, Andaman, Australia, New Guinea) and 'Laurasian' (Northern, 'advanced': Eurasia, Oceania and North America) mythologies. At the Radcliffe seminar, during the discussion, I expressed the view that rather than looking at Witzel's distinction as a historic split into two cladistic branches of world mythology, it should be seen as a processual development.



A. Pandora's Box; B. Eurasian *etc.* mythologies (Witzel: 'Laurasian') C: African *etc.* mythologies (Witzel: 'Gondwana'); D. feedback from B to C in the context of the 'Back-into-Africa' movement.
 In (1), note the absence of the A (red) substrate in B, and in general the absolute difference between B and C.
 In (2), note the presence of the A (red) substrate in all later developments including B; the branching of B from C; as well as the feedback D (green) from B to C; hence the overall approachment between B and C.

Fig. 9.4. Diagrammatic comparison of the Witzel's (1) and van Binsbergen's (2) models of global mythological history

Fig. 9.4 brings out what this means:

- (a) the Southern variety would correspond more closely with the common mythologi-

³³⁸ This started with: van Binsbergen 2006a (my Kyoto 2005 paper), in response to Witzel 2001, o.c. For a subsequent instalment in this debate, giving both theoretical models and extensive detailed empirical description for African-Eurasian continuities in myth, see: van Binsbergen 2010, being pp. 143-225 of van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010, re-printed here as ch. 8.

cal package (in my terms: 'Pandora's Box') with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa c. 80-60 ka BP;

- (b) subsequently, the Northern variety was to develop out of the Southern one, *largely inside Asia*, but with two major qualifications:
- the Southern variety would continue to constitute a mythological *substrate* globally, also in the regions now marked by a Northern mythology;
 - the 'Back-into-Africa' movement from Eurasia c. 15 ka BP³³⁹ would mean that Northern mythologies would be taken into sub-Saharan Africa, where they have been largely dominant in historical times.³⁴⁰

In the subsequent discussion, Witzel continued to reject my view and to stick to his equal-level bifurcation. However, my view was supported (albeit with a genetic argument that alarms me, as a moderate Afrocentrist) by geneticist Nick Patterson (MIT / Broad Institute, Cambridge MA, USA) on genetic grounds: whereas the population cluster owning the Northern mythologies might be considered a true clade (a clearly defined branch sprung from the population tree), the African genes associated with the Southern mythologies have been demonstrated to be equidistant from all other non-African genes, and can be therefore considered, in fact, a *substrate*.

Apparently, Michael Witzel has invested so much time and energy into his absolute Laurasian / Gondwana classification that he finds it difficult to see it reinterpreted towards greater overlap and historical connectivity of the Southern and Northern varieties of humankind. *Yet it will be the sustained and global awareness of such overlap and connectivity, rather than the analytical mind's brilliant absolute distinctions, that will save humankind from internal warfare and extinction in the foreseeable future.* I am rejecting Witzel's view on this point, on two counts.

- In the first place on empirical grounds within comparative mythology and its ancillary sciences, especially population genetics and long-range linguistics (see especially my 2010 article, reprinted in the present book als chapter 8).
- But in the second place on intercultural-philosophical and knowledge-political grounds.³⁴¹ Dualist views of the nature and composition of humankind, claiming an absolute difference to divide Anatomically Modern Humans up into Blacks and Whites, Civilized and Barbarians, Women and Men, Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Aryans, Muslims and Infidels, Christians and Pagans, Capitalists and Socialists, *etc. etc.*, not only have done great injustice to historical fact and to the situational and fluid nature of human distinctions – they also create a justification for negative stereotyping, exclusion, hatred, slavery, war, and genocide. If one does not wish to extend to other people the benefits, rights and dignity one cherishes as one's own, the most effective strategy is to deny these others membership of the community of humankind; this is the road that has led to concentration camps, for Jews, Gypsies, political dissidents, sexual minorities, etc. Bracketing – even for the sake of a strict

³³⁹ As identified by molecular genetics in the last 15 years; for discussion and references see van Binsbergen 2010, = ch. 8 above.

³⁴⁰ This point is argued in great detail in van Binsbergen 2010, = ch. 8 above.

³⁴¹ van Binsbergen 2003.

application of what seems to be historical logic and method – the others in a category defined as absolutely different from one's own, is still an effective step in the same regrettable direction. Philologists, of all people, should be much more aware of the pitfalls, political and moral, of textuality.

Witzel and his associate / lieutenant, my good friend the 'comparative historian' (by his own usual identification) Steve Farmer, have been involved for years in a tough and courageous battle with Hindu fundamentalists, about the region (inside or outside the Indian subcontinent) of origin of the Vedic scriptures (eminently constitutive of the Hindu civilisation), and about the alleged literate nature of the Indus Valley civilisation (3300–1300 BCE). In the process, many members of Witzel's and Farmer's academic network (including myself) have been rallied to loyal partisanship. A great deal of verbal, digital and juridical violence has been exchanged between the protagonists in this battle (which amounts to a battle of the claims of regional identity with its distorted views of reality, versus the claims of state-of-the-art universalising science),³⁴² in ways little conducive to intercultural, respectful subtlety; and rather conducive to a resolute casting overboard of all considerations of Political Correctness, let alone intercultural empathy. I was initially trained as an anthropologist, among other fields, and humble (even if sometimes performative) yielding to the others' culture is part of anthropologists' professional stance, with an inveterate tendency towards what has been called, ever since the 1980s, *PC / Political Correctness*. Admittedly, such a meek response has its limitations in an age of ever more sinister and violent, even cruel, identity struggles, continually fuelled and rekindled by a media-driven identity industry that appears to be the inevitable complement of globalisation. However, also the combination of scientific universalising truth claims with intercultural callousness has its limits, may border on another kind of immaterial violence, and hopefully can count on wider loyalty only up to a limit.

Witzel's absolute distinction between 'Laurasian' and 'Gondwana' (geological terms conjuring up a primal separation of the continents going back not just a handful of millennia, but hundreds of millions of years) risks to be a recent manifestation of the extreme 'othering' / alterisation Africa and Africans have been subjected in the North Atlantic intellectual tradition since the trans-Atlantic slave trade of Early Modern times, and since the reach for simple geopolitical global models during and after the Enlightenment (Kant, Hegel).³⁴³ This potentially pernicious and factually wrong approach must not be allowed to get a grip on comparative mythology as a field, in these years of its splendid rebirth.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Albeit in this case somewhat obsolescent, as pursuant of a *non-relativist* science that does not realise that the main purpose of scientific research is not to proclaim immutable universal and absolute truths, but for alternative results still unpredictable today.

³⁴³ As exposed in: Bernal 1987; Eze 1997, 1996.

³⁴⁴ *The times they are a-changing...* (Bob Dylan), indeed. Heedful of the signs of the times, and of my incessant criticism ever since 2005, Witzel ensured that the 4th Annual Meeting of the IACM, at Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, was opened by a vocal and conspicuous African American brilliant young intellectual, and a woman to boot. The Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the IACM (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010) had the Continuity between African and Eurasian Mythologies as either of its two pivotal subject, the other being the Mythology of Death and Dying. However, within the IACM, the African / South focus has unfortunately subsided again in the course of the next decade.



Note the elegant roses as an element of decoy.

Fig. 9.5. The 4th Annual Conference of the IACM is brilliantly (and strategically!) opened by, what from Witzel's ill-taken perspective, would yet have to be considered as a representative of the historically and culturally challenged Gondwana half of humankind

9.4. Conclusion

It has been largely (though not exclusively)³⁴⁵ due to the inspiration of Michael Witzel that comparative mythology is losing its earlier trappings of abstruse and irrelevant scholarship, is becoming an exciting crossroads of disciplines, and now boasts a thriving international scholarly association.³⁴⁶ In such a seething intellectual context, it is only to be expected that ideas circulate diffusely without strict emphasis on original and unique authorship. However, there is little point in systematically and academically studying mythology, if our own personal myths have to go unnoticed like the very air that we are breathing; or have to be over-protected by ignoring even very vocal alternatives. The Radcliffe Institute is to be congratulated for having helped us to bring these dilemmas into the open.

P.S. 2022. The predictable response to my argument in this chapter would, of course, be to demonstrate how it, in turn, is informed by personal myths of my own. No doubt it is, in line with a theoretical approach to myth which I developed in my 2009 paper on 'Rupture and Fusion in the Study of Myth' (reprinted in the present book as chapter 3). The point is not the

³⁴⁵ The International Association for Comparative Mythology, founded at the Beijing 2006 conference on comparative mythology, has been presided over since by Michael Witzel, with a board of ca. ten directors, which until 2020 included myself – in that year I stepped down for health reasons.

³⁴⁶ It is for this reason that we as editors of van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010 have dedicated that volume to Michael Witzel.

mixture of myth and scholarship – without such mixture the study of myth remains uninteresting, barren and superficial. Even one of the most abstruse formal approaches to myth, Lévi-Strauss's structuralist method, is ultimately based on two powerful myths: that of man as a rational animal,³⁴⁷ and of binary distinctions as the hallmark of adequate thought (van Binsbergen 2021). The point is to compensate for myth's seductive tendency to pose as absolute truth. Open debate; democratic, accountable and egalitarian forms of social engagement; and methodological empirical investigation,³⁴⁸ are among the standard remedies against such a tendency. Comparative mythologists should be aware that they, of all people, are particularly prone to succumb to the deceptive seductions of myth.

³⁴⁷ Aristotle 1926: *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Habermas 1981; Popper 1959.

Chapter 10. Extensive table of Old-World mythological continuities (2007)

Classified on the basis of 20 Narrative Complexes (NarComs) 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.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, Extensive table of Old World mythological continuities, classified on the basis of 20 Narrative Complexes (NarComs) 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. at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/Mythological%20continuities%20def.pdf

No. as entered on continuity table from web-addresses which are identified as such	C.I.I.I.	Mesopotamian Egypt	Biblical	Celtic-Bretonic mythology	selected other early literary continuities of the Old World, outside web-addresses of authors, and web-addresses which
A. The Sphinx	II	one of the Ancient Egyptian Sphinxes's head	Sphinxes in Egypt, Asia and from the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient, Asia and from the Orient
A. Boreas from the Ocean	V	The Frenetic Boreas The early wind-gods and gods of the Orient	The wind and earth gods of the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient, Asia and from the Orient
Z. From the Ocean	VI	The wind-gods of the Orient	The wind and earth gods of the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient	Sphinxes in the Orient, Asia and from the Orient

<p>NC, as presented on contemporary maps of the East and Sub-Saharan Africa is identifiable</p>	<p>18. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>CITI</p>	<p>19. The Primordial Waters and the Flood</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>
<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>19. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>
<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>20. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>
<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>21. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>
<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>	<p>22. The Earth as Primordial Matter</p>

MS: 2 Could we subsume Ispikald (aka Eluoyon) here from his father (Igh), where he had been placed, authors after his mother Semide had been born to solve under the right of her subjects (divine love) under "yge"? Or does the Ispikald (Ispikald) come from the earth and after have much to continue

The concepts of NS (Narrative Complex) and CTT (Context of Transformed Transformation and Innovation) are explained in:

van Zinsbergen, W.M.J., 2006. 'Mythological archaeology: Shunting sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Onda, Toshiaki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds., *Proceedings of the 15th Symposium of EASIS and '5th ISE-Japan-Korea Roundtable*, Kyoto: Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), pp. 219-249. Also at: http://www.ahf.rihn.kyushu-u.ac.jp/~seisaku/kyotei2005/2005_219-249.pdf

The following diagram summarizes the overall theory:

Selected further references:

Schölk, B. H., 1962-1989. *Die germanen vor Rom*, 1.1. Lütken 1962 für D's Germania
Wilks, Roy, 1984, ed., *Myths and its meanings*, (Barns, Andrew, *Daughters of World mythology*, 1991), London: New York: Dutton; Berlin, German edition: 1994, *Berichtsbücher Handbuch Mythologie: Ursprung und Verbreitung der Mythen der Früh Moderne, Figuren und Stoffe von der Antike bis Australien*, Österreich, München: Beckmanns Leizler Verlag.
Conrard, Arthur, 1989. *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Myths and Legends*, London etc.: Guild.

Table 10.1. Extensive table of Old-World mythological continuities

PART III. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF SPECIFIC GLOBAL MYTHOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTIONS

Throughout this book an appeal will be made to various detailed analyses of the geographic distribution of specific mythemes as a clue – under specific rules of thumb and against the background of my general Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology – to that mytheme’s historical development. The method by which such reconstructions are arrived at, has been set out in detail in my analysis, not of myth but of the historic institution of head-hunting, in ch. 12 of my recent book on Sunda (2020). In the next handful of chapters of the present book, I shall process a number of specific mythemes along these lines. There will be some overlap with the partial and more cursory discussion of the same mythemes in the other chapters of this book, and I apologise if not all details in both approaches have been completely reconciled with one another – there is a human limit to which one can edit and rewrite one’s earlier texts.

Chapter 11. The Ogre in global cultural history (2020)³⁵⁰

11.1. *The Ogre*³⁵¹

In the early stage of my engagement with the New Comparative Mythology, around 2005, I worked through the data on cosmogonic myths attested in sub-Saharan Africa in historical times. I was then impressed by what seemed a NarCom (an elementary *Narrative Complex*) in its own right: 'the Rescue from the Ogre'. In its essential form,

1. a protagonist
2. is swallowed
3. by a much larger and more powerful adversary,
4. and subsequently the protagonist is rescued from inside that adversary.

Often the protagonist effects the rescue, not only of himself, but also of others similarly imprisoned, especially his mother. He is often a young hero (a conspicuous theme in New Guinean mythology, cf. Chakrabarti 1974), accompanied by his mother whose lover he may turn out to be. The protagonist may originally not be imprisoned himself but he may voluntarily accept that condition so as to liberate others.

Already in 2006 did I realise that the Ogre narrative could be considered a sophisticated metaphor of all cosmogony, if *cosmogony is conceived as the liberation of Being from the state of Non-Being* (cf. the Graeco-Roman myth of how the Moon's (Gr. Selene) lover, Endymion, eternally sleeps in a cave).³⁵² An initial 'chaos' invoked in many cosmogonies

³⁵⁰ -van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2020, The Ogre in global cultural history: A distributional exercise in comparative mythology, at: <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/ogre.pdf>

³⁵¹ This chapter, for reasons of space and complexity of the overall argument, had to be removed from van Binsbergen 2020c. There also a number of basic concepts are defined and developed which have to be taken for granted in the present shorter piece, such as NarCom, CITI, Pandora's Box, Out of Africa Exodus, Back-into-Africa Movement, MtDNA Type – all of which, however, receive ample attention in the other chapters of the present book.

³⁵² Cotterell 1989; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 271; Ovid, *Heroides*, 15.89 f., 18.59 f.; Seneca, *Phaedra*, 309 f., 422 f., 786 f.;

all over the world (e.g. Greek Χάος Chaos; Nordic Ginnungagap, etc.). The initial chaos often appears as ‘the Primal Waters’, and is then hardly distinguishable from the Ogre in a concrete, personified sense. By the same token, the *Annihilation of Being* (through a Flood / Deluge, or some other cosmic disaster) seems equivalent to being swallowed by the Ogre, and may take the following forms:

- a cave (like the one where 天照大神 Amaterasu the hidden Sun goddess was hiding – Japan; or the one where Proteus hid Helena, sending a substitute to Troy...; or the cave from which the Zuni Pueblo culture hero Kanahuhu ushered his people to the surface of the Earth),
- a house (like, among the Navajo, the liberation of the game animals from the house of Crow, the black god)
- a prison (like Minos’s labyrinth, from which Daedalus and Icarus rescue themselves),
- the Underworld,
- a grave,
- a mother’s womb;
- the womb of the cosmogonic primal goddess such as Graeco-Roman Rhea, or Oceanian Papa
- the Pre-cosmogonic Chaos in other words the Pre-cosmogonic phase of Non-Being or Not-Yet-Being;
- Death.

The equation of the Ogre with the Primal Waters brings us back to another fundamental cosmogonic mytheme, that of the Separation of Land and Water – which seems to have been the dominant cosmogonic theme in the Upper Palaeolithic, until it was replaced, c. 20 ka BP, by another cosmogonic theme: that of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, which has remained dominant world-wide ever since.

One of the most formative narratives of the philosophical tradition of Western Eurasia has been Plato’s Myth of the Cave (*De Re Publica*, VII; Plato 1975). The image of humanity confined to a cave, against whose walls the secondarily derived projections of the real events out in the open may be made out, has much to remind us – not only of Kant’s (1983) questionable³⁵³ central thesis that all we can know is merely the image we form of reality in our minds, not reality itself – but also of the Ogre mytheme. But let us remember that until the end of the Upper Palaeolithic, c. 12 ka BP, the

Anonymous, ‘Selene’.

³⁵³ #11.1. IMMANUEL KANT’S WORK CONVENTIONALLY TAKEN TO MARK THE BEGINNING OF MODERN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY. When we realise that for many (Western) philosophers today, Kant’s insight marks the birth of Modern philosophy, it should be clear that we cannot do justice to the vast literature on this point. An haphazard selection, with a certain mix of feminist and postmodern approaches, would include: Batra 2010; Bennet 1985; Brown 2009; Bryant 2011; Cassirer 1963; de Man 1990; Guyer 2006; Heidegger 1962; Kerslake 2009; MacDonald 2006; Mikkelsen 2013; Ross 2000; Schott 1988; Shell 1980; Simons 2003; Strawson [year]; Watson 1987. I have recently contributed to this discussion (after an earlier contribution on Kant’s aesthetics, 2000c / 2003a: ch. 9), in my book *Sangoma Science* (2021c), on several counts (a) by questioning the notion of reality (if I am right with my trivialist position, and the oscillation between Being and Non-Being is the basic feature of reality, then Kant’s claim becomes inherently futile); (b) by exploring forms of experience (admittedly totally beyond the solitary and robot-like personal life in Enlightenment times, as Kant prided himself in as the opposite of a *Geisterseher*), such as mysticism, possession and mediumship, but also giving birth, near-death experiences, extreme torture, total and redeeming love for another person, shattering (possibly paranormal) experiences of truth and of beauty in art and nature, which as forms of knowing or paths to knowing are so directly overwhelming that it becomes irrelevant, not to say irreverent, to speak of ‘images formed in the mind’.

cave was the standard dwelling of Anatomically Modern Humans and their human predecessors (cf. Fester 1980) – although already in the Ice Ages alternative dwellings e.g. tents extended over large mammal bones have been attested. Again there is a hint here of possible Neanderthal implications of the Ogre mytheme.


Ogre stories show a great variety, ranging from miraculous birth stories (any birth in the animal kingdom upward from viviparous fishes to humans, is in principle a rescue from a confined space; and *a fortiori* births like those of the Graeco Roman goddess Athena / Minerva from her father's head, or the 'leg child' which we shall consider separately (van Binsbergen 2020e, 'leg child'; and ch 13 below), or the birth of the twins Helena and Clytaemnestra, and their brothers the Dioscuri Castor and Pollux, from an egg laid by Leda after mating with Zeus, the latter both in the disguise of a swan)³⁵⁴ to the Orpheus motif (where the theme of the Descent Into The Underworld is by no means confined to Orpheus: Odysseus, Theseus, Inanna, Dumuzi / Thammuz, Canaanitic Anat rescuing Ba'al from the hands of Mot / Death, Jesus of Nazareth after dying on the cross, all reputedly made the same journey, albeit for different reasons). As a place of confinement, the reduced space may even be a labyrinth, like the one of Minos in Crete – with Ariadne (and her thread)³⁵⁵ as liberator. Or the place of confinement may be the leather bag where the Graeco-Roman wind god Aeolus keeps the winds until they are released to blow forth. As we have seen, there is a variant of the Trojan War narrative (cf. Homer, *Ilias*, *Odyssea*; Virgil, *Aeneid*), where Helena herself never actually reached Troy, but remained confined to the isle of Pharos in front of the later Alexandria, Egypt, in the custody of the shape-shifting maritime god Proteus, while instead an artificial dummy Helena was brought to Troy; one could hardly think of a better yarn to safeguard Helena's [overweeg ipv Helen] moral integrity and chastity.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ In this form, the narrative is clearly a rationalising transformation of a presumably more original cosmogonic myth centring on the Cosmic Egg to which we shall return below – another form of confinement of Pre- cosmogonic Not-Yet-Being, with Leda as echo of the Primal Mother of the Waters, inevitably associated with white aquatic birds such as the swan.

³⁵⁵ Interestingly, the thread motif returns in the same mythical cycle (Virgil, *Aeneid*) in a different form when, after fleeing Minos and Crete, Daedalus has arrived at Sicily and there puts king Cocalus ('Shell') to the test of winding a thread inside a spiral shell.

³⁵⁶ #11.2. THE SECRET LIFE OF ANCIENT HEROINES. Cotterell 1989: 232, after the Ancient source of Euripides's *Helena*. Such a generous rationalisation protecting a prominent woman's reputation of chastity are widespread as a narrative theme. Many Graeco-Roman myths seem to attribute illegitimate pregnancies of princesses and queens to the enviable visit of a god or hero. Mary's Annunciation, leading to the birth of Christ, may fall in the same category: according to a slanderous Talmudic source Christ was simple the illegitimate son of a Greek soldier, Pandera (van Nes 1933: 387f.; Vergeer 2000. Somewhat similar (in the involvement of an unreal woman, and shunning the topic of sibling incest), in Nkoya mythology, the sorceress Likambi Mange is the royal sister of the male King Shihoka Nalinanga; when the latter appears to have usurped her kingship and royal possessions, with the aid of a diviner-priest she constructs an artificial woman in order to seduce (and, apparently through a sexually transmitted disease, kill) her brother. As so much in Nkoya mythology, the story has a Celtic ring about it, and reminds us of crucial episodes in the Arthurian circle involving Ygraine or Morgana. There is also an Ancient Egyptian pendant, situated on the Levantine coast

cf. Willis 1994: 53: Bata, Anubis' brother, flees after a Potifar-like incident (cf. *Genesis* 39 – the theme of the servant punished for rejecting his mistress's sexual advances), to Syria, where the Ennead [Ancient Egypt's nine principal

gods – WvB] have a wife for him made by the creation god  Hnum. This wife is almost violated by Sea. Bata has emasculated himself and has hidden his heart in a pine tree. Etc. Bata becomes a bull, then an avocado tree, then a piece of furniture, whose plinter kills the bad woman. Bata ends up as king. But in these variants, the Ogre motif is not conspicuous, apart from the hidden heart in the pine tree.

It is difficult and risky to structure that variety through rigid categorisation. Strictly speaking, the Ogre's act of actually consuming, cannibalistically, the confined victims is relatively rarely narrated.

If the emergence of Land is the fundamental event of Creation, then, of course, the Ogre is equivalent to the Primal Waters, from which protagonists (like Thor and Hymir in Nordic European myth; or Maui in Maori myth (New Zealand) and elsewhere in Polynesia, rescue the land by fishing it up. Cf. The Polynesian myth of Tangaroa and Turi-a-faumea, who fished the sea monster Rogo-tumu-here up and hacked it to pieces, after it had swallowed Tangaroa's daughter-in-law (elsewhere named as Hina-a-rauriki) (Cotterell 1989: 244).


What Thor and Hymir actually bring up is not so much Land, but the World Snake, – but that is not so very different, once we remember that – at leasts in Indo-European etymology – ,the protoform for 'Earth'can scarcely be distinguished from that for 'Snake' (see Appendix 11.1, below). By the same token, in many myths, with wide global distribution, the world is made from the fragmented body of an initial Water Monster (which is really a personification of the Primal Waters): Tiamat (Babylonia), Leviathan (Ancient Israel), Ymir (Nordic Europe), Vrtra (South Asia) Pan Ku 盤古 (Southern China) – or the South Asian Maruts मरुत (CloudRiders), the latter considered to be the fragments of an embryo that was initially meant to remain long enough in his mother's womb (a hundred years) so as to become greater than Indra (Cotterell 1989: 219).

The cosmogonic connotations of the Primal Waters may doubly combine with the Ogre theme, in that a box-like vessel is imagined in which (like from an artificial, secondary Cosmic Egg, to which we shall return in ch. 14 below), the Flood Hero is enclosed and thus is enabled to rescue himself and others from the Flood (as another Ogre of Annihilation): the Ark, the Pumpkin (in the Southern Chinese version of Nu Wa and Fu Xi as Flood Heroes). The Primal Waters, Giants and Flood mythemes further proliferate in a Talmudic story, where, during the Flood, the giant Og rides on the Ark and is fed by Noah; Og was ultimately slain by Moses (Cotterell 1989: 143)

In addition to these cosmogonic / cosmoclastic conditions, other important associations come to mind in connection with the 'Rescue from the Ogre' motif. Any normal birth from a parental body is a delivery similar to 'being rescued from the Ogre' – as infantile and pathological adult fantasies often indicate. Thwarted or delayed birth is then another application of the 'rescue from the Ogre' theme. Cosmogonic myths from Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Nigeria, and from Oceania sketch the initial state of constant copulation between Heaven and Earth, – the moment of Creation consists in the two lovers being prised apart or the male partner emasculated, which (in the Greek and Oceanian versions) finally also allows the second generation of deities, sired by Heaven, to leave their imprisonment in Earth's womb. Miraculous births, e.g. the 'Leg Child' (ch. 13 below) variant, e.g. Dionysus or Athena's, inevitably combine initial imprisonment in a body with subsequent rescue – very similar to the Ogre scheme, especially in that Zeus in both cases (Athena and Dionysus) first swallows the mother – in counter-imitation of his own father, Cronus, who used to swallow his offspring until Zeus escaped that fate by his mother's ruse (cf. the Ancient Egyptian sky goddess Nut daily swallowing her child, the Sun): feeding the voracious father stones instead of children.

The Underworld as the dwelling of the deceased is similar to the Ogre's belly, and very rarely does a protagonist effect a rescue from this place – the motif of Orpheus', Inanna's, Jesus's, and Izanami's Descent into the Underworld, etc.

In the two cases involving Zeus swallowing his pregnant mistress (Metis, 'Mind', and Semele (which is often interpreted as 'Moon' but by a Phrygian etymology means 'Earth' – which makes the affair of Zeus and Metis another version of the mating of Heaven and Earth) there is only virtual or symbolic eating, and the emphasis is on confinement and liberation; however, the latter notions may give way to a cannibalistic motif stressing true anthropophagy.

The imprisonment may be merely spatial, no longer corporal, so that it becomes imprisonment in a room (e.g. Ancient Egyptian  Isis's weaving chamber, cf. Greek Penelope's in the *Odyssey* and Amaterasu's in *Kojiki*; Barbe Bleu's / Bluebeard's room – Perrault 1697).

Close to the cosmogonic notion of the liberation of Being implied in the Ogre motif, is that of the Cosmic Egg (see ch. 14, below), in which all potentialities are contained, only to be released at Creation; and the Egg may be replaced by other sealed carriers of generation, such as a seed, a nut, etc. In fact, the Modern dominant scientific cosmogony, that of the Big Bang, is from one point of view to be considered a rationalised version of the Cosmic Egg myth, complete with all potentialities particularly those of space and time, abiding the moment of their release (Berger 1984; Hawking 1988).

In some narrative versions, The Cosmic Egg theme may have shed its cosmogonic connotations, merely retaining the idea of contained potentialities – and then it becomes the magic box locked with unrevealed contents (Pandora's Box – her container was initially a vase), or a coffer or coffin like the one Seth tricked his hated brother Osiris into (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, cf. Richer 2001; St Patrick who lures a snake (perhaps the Rainbow Snake, the Supreme Being – believe in which has indications in even remotest prehistory) into a box and drowns it, or the wind god's Aeolus's bag full of winds (Homer, *Odyssey*, 10.2; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.163f., 9.774, 12.542).

The cosmogonic aspects of the Ogre motif may merge with the idea that it is from inside the Earth, from the Underworld, that all being originates, and then we have arrived at the cosmogonic motif 'From the Earth' (NarComio). Clearly, the Ogre motif is very complex. It can be said to form a 'poor men's' or bowdlerised version of several of the most fundamental myths of humankind.

Ideally we would prefer to classify these various implied myths under a number of clearly distinct NarComs, but under the Ogre narrative they turn out to intersect and proliferate in ways that bring out the limitations of all classification, especially in comparative mythology.

Considering the complexity and the implication of so many interacting different NarComs, we must expect to encounter great difficulties and inconsistencies when we try and map out the distribution of the Ogre motif: we never know which aspect is stressed, and which underlying NarComs may be implied.

The unsatisfactory nature of an earlier attempt of mine to map out the distribution of the Ogre NarCom (at the 2006 Beijing Round Table for Comparative Mythology; van Binsbergen 2006b, ch. 6 above, and Fig. 11.1 below) is probably due, not so much to a deficient data base (although there is that problem, too), but to the multidimensionality and secondary nature of the Ogre NarCom. After discarding those cases where the 'Ogre' motif is merely implied (see the legend accompanying the distribution map), and after lumping the remaining cases in one single category (admittedly, this kind of comparative mythology thrives on simplification, which is also its greatest defect), we are ready to try and reconstruct the historical pattern, if possible in association with a genetic type.

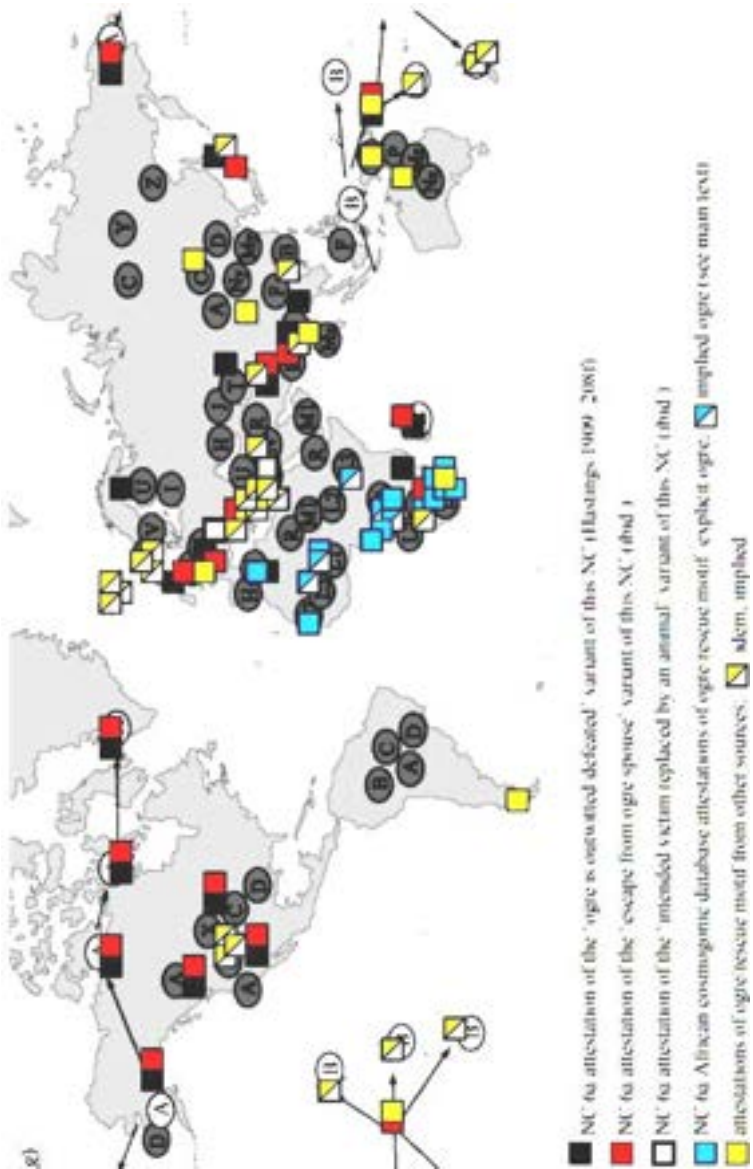


Fig.11.1. Distribution of various types of NarCom6: 'Rescue from the Ogre' (identical to Fig. 6.27, now discarded)

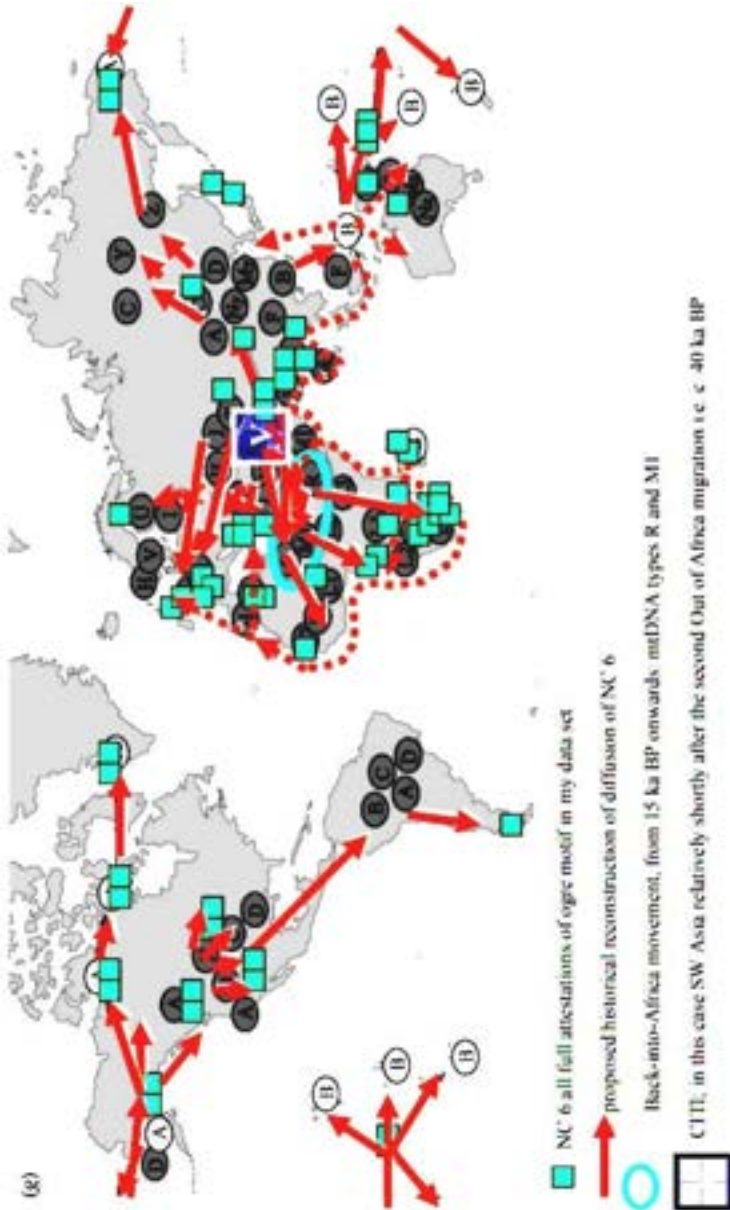


Fig.11.2. Historical reconstruction of NarCom5: Rescue from the Ogre (now discarded)

The result was Fig. 11.2: NarCom6 seems to have been transmitted, in N.E. Asia, Oceania, and N/S America, in combination with mtDNA Types A and B (both!). These two types only emerge in Central Asia c. 40 kaBP, both from the pre-existing mtDNA Type N. That both types A and B seems to have been capable of transmitting NarCom6 into NE Asia, Oceania, and N/S America suggests that in fact NarCom6 was already present in the common ancestor of types A and B, notably N. It is MtDNA Types N and M that carried the contents of Pandora's Box out of Africa. Subsequently, types M and N were widely distributed in E and SE Asia (including the Andaman Islands), New Guinea and Australia.

The Khoisan attestations have been claimed (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994; today this claim is rather obsolete) to have a Central Asian as well as an African (in the sense of Pre-Out-of-Africa) background; but even so they may echo very ancient motifs carried out of Africa by N – so in principle they may still reflect Pre-Out-of-Africa motifs, *i.e.* the contents of Pandora's Box. NarCom6, however heterogeneous in its manifestations in historical times, appears to be very old (at least 40 ka, which is when we believe we can trace it to Central Asia); yet I would not go as far as to include this NarCom in Pandora's Box.

To these contradictory implications in the sub-Saharan African attestations we must add the possible influence of the Back-into-Africa migration, of which the Khoisan case may offer an example; but so do the Maasai. Moreover, nearly all other African attestations are in the Nigercongo realm, which I consider permeated with Back-into-Africa (and potentially Sunda!) elements.

The Dogon attestation of NarCom6 is interesting. Willis has identified that particular (mainly northern) section of the Nigercongo speaking area which does not belong to the Bantu-speaking sub-family, as especially rich in elaborate and sophisticated mythologies that, he says, rival those of West Asia and Ancient Europe. The Dogon are a case in point, and remain so, even when we compensate for the scholarly critique that Griaule and Dieterlen's accounts of the Dogon have elicited (van Beek 1992). I am inclined to see this section of non-Bantu Nigercongo speakers as largely a manifestation of 'Back into Africa' effects, and do not consider the Ogre element here as a genuine and reliable indication of Pre-Out-of-Africa mythology.

By the same token, the many attestations of NarCom6 from among Bantu speakers I would consider a Back-into-Africa effect rather than a revelation of Pre-Out-of-Africa mythology. All attestations, even those in the interior, are conveniently situated on the hypothetical routes of Sunda expansion.

An important consideration in my decision to deny NarCom6 inclusion in Pandora's Box is contained in the above introduction to this NarCom. Clearly, the Ogre theme is complex, contradictory, multidimensional, and secondary rather than original. It is probably not a NarCom in its own right, but the simplified, bowdlerised, 'poor man's' echo of simpler and more original NarComs. One could imagine that this is the form in which cosmogonic myths, featuring the Primal Waters or the origin of Being from inside the Earth, were cast in a simplified form considered suitable for the consumption by non-initiates or neophytes.

Overlooking the evidence and the above chain of considerations, I propose to situate the origin of NarCom6 in West to Central Asia, c. 40 ka BP, in the context of MtDNA Type N, where it was a derivative from more fundamental NarComs, notably those of 'the Primal Waters' (= NarComu) and of 'the Earth' (= NarComio), both in Pandora's Box. With this considerable antiquity, and its close affinity with fundamental NarComs which themselves did

originate from Pandora's Box, it stands to reason the NarCom6 followed the subsequent expansion of Anatomically Modern Humans. Thus this NarCom6 ramified all of Eurasia, where it can be found either as implied or in full form featuring a literal Ogre. Expansion into NE and SE Asia, the Americas, and finally Oceania was largely due to the spread of Anatomically Modern Humans specifically carrying MtDNA Types A and B. Spread into Northern and sub-Saharan Africa was partly (perhaps largely) due to the Back-into-Africa migration from Central and West Asia; but, throughout Africa, also with the added effect of the Sunda migration.

The latter may also have helped, to some extent, to disseminate NarCom6 in North Africa, Western Europe (especially Nordic Europe), and the Eastern Mediterranean especially the Aegean.

That the theme of the Ogre is complex and widespread is also clear from the fact that it seems to underlie a great many of *Grimm's Tales* when considered in terms of the types of fairy tales classified by Aarne and Thompson, even though distributed over a considerable number of different categories:

Grimm No.	German Title	Aarne-Thompson Type (type titles not given do resemble the tales' titles)
5	<i>Der Wolf und die sieben jungen Geißlein</i>	Type 123
15	<i>Hänsel und Gretel</i>	Type 327A. Includes an episode of type 1121, Burning the Witch in Her Own Oven
21	<i>Aschenputtel</i>	Type 510A
26	<i>Rotkäppchen</i>	Type 333, Red Riding Hood
27	<i>Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten</i>	Type 130, Outcast Animals Find a New Home
37	<i>Daumesdick</i>	Type 700, Tom Thumb. Includes an episode of type 41, Overeating in the Pantry
46	<i>Fitchers Vogel</i>	Type 311, The Heroine Rescues Herself and Her Sisters. Similar to type 312, Bluebeard
47	<i>Von dem Machandelboom</i>	Type 720, My Mother Killed Me; My Father Ate Me
50	<i>Dornröschen</i>	Type 410, Sleeping Beauty
56	<i>Der Liebste Roland</i>	Type 119, Ogres Kill Their Own Children, followed by type 313C, The Girl Helps the Hero Flee; the Forgotten Fiancée
60	<i>Die zwei Brüder</i>	Type 567A, The Magic Bird Heart; followed by type 303, The Blood Brothers. Includes an episode of type 300, The Dragon Slayer
65	<i>Allerleirauh</i>	Type 510B, A King Tries to Marry His Daughter
66	<i>Häsichenbraut</i>	Type 311, The Heroine Rescues Herself and Her Sisters
73	<i>Der Wolf und der Fuchs</i>	Type 41, Overeating in the Pantry
79	<i>Die Wassernixe</i>	Type 313A, The Girl Helps the Hero Flee
81	<i>Bruder Lustig</i>	Includes episodes of type 785, Who Ate the Lamb's Heart?; type 753A, The Unsuccessful Resuscitation; type 330B, The Devil in the Sack; type 330*, Entering Heaven by a Trick;
88	<i>Das singende springende Löweneckerchen</i>	Type 425C, Beauty and the Beast

89	<i>Die Gänsemagd</i>	Type 533
90	<i>Der junge Riese</i>	Type 650A. Introduced with an episode of type 700, Tom Thumb
110	<i>Der Jude im Dorn</i>	Type 592, Dancing in Thorns
113	<i>De beiden Künigeskinner</i>	Type 313C, The Girl Helps the Hero Flee; the Forgotten Fiancée
121	<i>Der Königssohn, der sich vor nichts fürchtet</i>	Type 590, The Magic Belt; and type 401A, The Enchanted Princess in Her Castle
122	<i>Der Krautesel</i>	Type 567, The Magic Bird Heart. Similar to type 566, Fruit That Grows Horns (Fortunatus)
137	<i>De drei schwatten Prinzessinnen</i>	Similar to type 401A, The Enchanted Princess in Her Castle
138	<i>Knoist un sine dre Sühne</i>	Type 1965. Includes an episode of type 1963, Sailing in a Bottomless Boat
139	<i>Dat Mäken von Brakel</i>	Type 1476A, Praying to the Statue's Mother
141	<i>Das Lämmchen und Fischchen</i>	Type 450, Little Brother, Little Sister
142	<i>Simeliberg</i>	Type 676, Open Sesame
146	<i>Die Rübe</i>	Types 1960D, The Giant Vegetable; and 1689A, Two Presents for the King. Includes an episode of type 1737, Trading Places with the Trickster in a Sack
163	<i>Der gläserne Sarg</i>	Type 410, Sleeping Beauty
166	<i>Der starke Hans</i>	Type 650A, The Young Giant; and type 301A, The Quest for the Vanished Princesses
174	<i>Die Eule</i>	Type 1281, Burning the Barn to Destroy an Unknown Animal
183	<i>Der Riese und der Schneider</i>	Type 1049, The Heavy Ax; 1053, Shooting Wild Boars; and 1051, Springing with a Bent Tree
186	<i>Die wahre Braut</i>	Type 510, The Persecuted Heroine; followed by type 884, The Forsaken Fiancée
189	<i>Der Bauer und der Teufel</i>	Type 1030, Man and Ogre Share the Harvest
193	<i>Der Trommler</i>	Type 400, The Quest for a Lost Bride; and type 313C, The Girl Helps the Hero Flee; the Forgotten Fiancée. Includes an episode of type 518, Quarreling Giants Lose Their Magic Objects
196	<i>Oll Rinkrank</i>	Similar to type 311, The Heroine Rescues Herself and Her Sisters
197	<i>Die Kristallkugel</i>	Type 552A, The Girls Who Married Animals. Includes episodes of type 302, The Giant Whose Heart Was in an Egg, and type 518, Quarreling Giants Lose Their Magic Objects
198	<i>Jungfrau Maleen</i>	Type 870, The Entombed Princess

Table 11.1. The Ogre motif in the Grimm's tales

What we often see is that the protagonist is a young hero, and the main beneficiary of his rescuing action is his mother.³⁵⁷ There is an echo here of the standard (e.g. Pelasgian) cos-

³⁵⁷ #11.3. JUNG, CULTURAL / MYTHOLOGICAL INERTIA, AND PANDORA'S BOX. Jungian psychology (Jung

mogony in which the Mother of the Waters first give birth to a male child, Land, then mates with the latter in order to produce the entire world as their offspring.

Incarceration or enclosure in a box or coffin is a widespread form of confinement, so in principle when the Ancient Egyptian god Seth lures, and locks, his brother Osiris into a coffin this is another application of the Ogre theme. Also when the chaos-associated Seth locks Isis in the weaving room (the same story is told in Japan, with the weaving Sun-goddess Amaterasu and her tempestuous brother Susanoo), this is essentially an Ogre story. But by the same token, the confinement of the Flood Hero Noah (Utnapishtim), all of his family, and specimens of all animal species, in the Ark is a related theme. So is Jonah (in the Bible book of that name) being swallowed by the whale and subsequently spit out – and the same fate undergone by two Australian Aboriginal taboo-breaking women at the hands of the Rainbow Serpent (Cotterell 1989: 179). All forms of rescue and liberation, *e.g.* those associated with Redeemers such as Heracles, the Dioscuri, Jesus of Nazareth, the Buddhist conception of the Bodhisattva, and redeemer figures known from Native North American mythologies, may have some implied aspect of the Ogre mytheme in them. In order to reduce the available data, I have limited myself – admittedly in an artificial fashion, which may not do justice to the data set as a whole – to narratives in which the term ‘Ogre’ is explicitly being used by the narrator / translator.³⁵⁸ That term is often used in a non-mythological sense to denote villains, mass murderers, cannibals, and especially perpetrators of child abuse, *etc.* (*e.g.* Ealy 2012; Lévi-Strauss 1989; Howe *et al.* 2018; Tournier 1997 – where the Ogre in question is the pedophile and pedocide Medieval nobleman and comrade-in-arms of the French national heroine St Jeanne d’Arc, Gilles de Rais); and especially in a literary and scientific context add a pejorative dimension to any expression, and then becomes equivalent to ‘spectre, demon’. Ogre is also the name of a commonly used computer programme. All these non-mythological uses are outside our present scope.

It is remarkable that quite a few Ogre narratives derive from West Asia. Since this is also the region where, some 30 ka BP, Neanderthals had their last dealings with Anatomically Modern Humans (Anatomically Modern Humans) before the former became extinct, I have sometimes ventured to think that the Ogre (as a fundamentally alien and inimically form

1987a) suggests that the ‘Young Hero And His Mother’ theme is an archetype anchored, not so much in the historic ramifications of global comparative mythology, but in the universal subconscious of Anatomically Modern Humans, or perhaps of all humans, dictated by the universal workings of the human mind. A similar position is taken by Jobling 2001. The very spotted and uneven global distribution of the theme strongly suggests otherwise. Meanwhile Jung’s potentially racialist approach (suggestive of a separate and different ‘collective unconscious’ for every socially or somatically distinguished group identity – hence the implied hypothesis – anathema to most anthropologists – that cultural contents might be hereditary) ought not to be dismissed without further thought. *For it reminds us of an unsolved major problem in long-range mythical and cultural analysis: INERTIA.* In the face of the nearly universally attested tendency of cultural systems towards cultural drift and free variation, as a result of which most culture patterns scarcely outlast a few centuries, how is it possible that yet a large number of cultural universals can be listed (Brown 1992) that have apparently survived for many millennia, in other words have displayed incredible inertia? And how is it possible that Comparative Mythology could come up with a considerable number of mythemes to which such longevity is ascribed that they may be projected, by the specialists, into Pandora’s Box, at least 60 ka BP? Considering the present book’s title, this question lies at the heart of this book. Elsewhere (in my book on Durkheim, 2018) I have argued (in Durkheim’s footsteps, of course) that it is religion, by making items of culture *sacred*, that brings about such cultural and mythological *inertia* – but the case is still not very strong.

³⁵⁸ I have refrained from including in the data set: the Ogre cases listed in: MacCulloch 1915, but even so I am confident that I have captured the principal relevant cases.

of being) may have been a Neanderthal mytheme, or a mytheme keeping the memory of encounters with Neanderthaloids alive among Anatomically Modern Humans.

Among the many East-West parallels in mythology which I consider in Part II of my book *Sunda Pre and Protohistorical Continuity Between Asia and Africa* (2020; with extensive references), we have to consider the mytheme, already mentioned, of cosmogony being delayed because the relevant birth channel is perpetually obstructed by the incessant mating of Heaven and Earth – a narrative we find in Graeco-Roman mythology (Hesiod), among the Yoruba of Nigeria, and in Polynesia. As a metaphor of the state of Non-Being on the verge of cosmogony, also here the Ogre myth is implicitly manifest.

The following Table 11.2 presents the various attestations of the Ogre mytheme with their sources, as a basis for further distributional analysis.

no. (with lacunae)	reference ³⁵⁹	details	group and period	comments
70	Desparmet 1909-1910.		Algeria	
130	Anonymous, n.d., Tribal Folktales	yes, Ogretales	Andaman Islands	
98	van der Sluijs, n.d.	Kalunga-Ngombe (male Ogre, king of the Underworld; Angola); Sudika-Mbambi demands from Kalunga-Ngombe, the king of the Underworld, his daughter. This daughter was kidnapped by Kinioka kia Tumba.	Angola	in regional Bantu languages, <i>kalunga</i> = grave and <i>ngombe</i> = cattle; so, interestingly, we have the same association between the Underworld and cattle which we also find in Graeco-Roman / Etruscan mythology concerning Cacus, Hades, Plutus. In Nkoya mythology, Tumba is the ancient Plain of Kings
43	Cotterell 1989	Ogre: Aboriginal: Rainbow Serpent Yurlunyer swallows two female taboo breakers but later spits them out after council with other snakes; this is a much represented motif in Aboriginal art	Australia	
71	Eickelkamp 2004		Australia, Central	
85a	Lacoste-Dujardin 1983 1986		Berber	
85b	Lacoste-Dujardin 1983 1986		Corsica	

³⁵⁹ I will succinctly mention only the most obvious classical references. This book is not a compendium of Graeco-Roman mythology, of which there are many excellent ones, including the monumental *Pauly-Wissowa Realencyclopädie der klassische Altertumswissenschaft*, with many revisions and additions, and a recent new edition as *Der Neue Pauly*, Cancik & Schneider 2002). Also see encyclopaedic collections specifically on classical mythology, e.g. Grimal 1990; Smith 1878; Atsma 2000-2008; Bell 1982; Bullfinch 1881; March 1998; Moncrieff & Moncrieff 1912; Feder 1970; Grant & Hazel 1973; Tripp 1974; Zimmerman 1966,

124	Werner 1933	Jonah and the Whale (Bible)	Bible World	
125	Werner 1933	Ogre story	Cameroon: Duala	
57	Cotterell 1989: 223	Mot ('Death') ³⁶⁰ lord of death, born from the Primal Egg from Air and Chaos; Ba'al is invited by Mot, dies in the Underworld; Anat brings him back, killing Mot	Canaan	
40	Cotterell 1989	Nu Wa is the heroine of the (South) Chinese Flood myth. The story as told is reminiscent of the Grimm story of the wolf and these seven kids: the thunder god is captured in a cave by father, but father goes to market, and children are persuaded to release thunder god, who then asks for a sip of water, bursts out of cage, returns to Heaven, gives the children a tooth from which an enormous gourd will grow [stalk into heaven, as bridge / Tower theme; also cf. the sowing of teeth by Graeco-Roman Cadmus], and father builds an iron boat in anticipation of disaster – that boat and gourd with children are floating on Flood, but when Flood suddenly recedes, the father crashes in the boat to his death, but children survive	China	
95	Ting 1978		China	
34	Cotterell 1989	p. 113: Jesus's descent into hell = Ogre motif	Christianity: Early	
82	Hulstaert 1971		Congo: Mongo,	
109	Willis 1994	Nut swallows her child the Sun [Ogre motif]	Egypt, Ancient	
111	Willis 1994	p. 49 also Isis is a divine weaver: Seth has locked her into the weaving room in order to weave a shroud for Osiris, but Isis escapes – Ogre motif	Egypt, Ancient	

³⁶⁰ In passing we detect here a possible ancient and transcontinental echo in Nkoya mythology, among many others (van Binsbergen 2010, 2020; this book ch. 8): Mwaat Yamvo ('Lord Death') had imposed his domination of the earliest Nkoya kings, and had confined them to a humiliating dwelling at the capital, near the pig sties. From here the kings allegedly broke away to escape from male genital mutilation and to establish their own kingdoms. In the process they were pursued by Mwaat Yamvo's warriors of the Humbu ethnicity, who sought to re-impose circumcision – allegedly in vain, as the narrative claims, but in actual fact the custom was still followed in Nkoya royal circles right up to 1900 CE. Cf. van Binsbergen 1992, 1993. However, several layers of historical and mythological provenance are superimposed in Nkoya mythology (as in most other mythologies, I submit), and by alternative reading the story of the Humbu War is a reminiscence of Proto-Nkoya kings, with their orchestras (or while being prominent South Asian musicians themselves) fleeing South Asia and the threatening forced circumcision at the advance of the Muslim Moghul rulers in the first half of the 2nd mill. CE. Cf. van Binsbergen 2010a, 2015b, 2020c.

42	Cotterell 1989	Ogre: the vessel from which things are released (cf. Ark, Osiris) is related to Ogre theme – but that vessel often turns out to be the Earth ³⁶¹	Egypt, Ancient	
115	Hoffman 1986	'In addition to the central adulterous loves of Lancelot and Guinevere and Tristram and Isolde, Malory's <i>Morte Darthur</i> includes, at least implicitly, a variety of sexual experiences including cannibalism, castration, intercourse with demons, incest, lesbianism, matricide...'	England : Medieval	
53	Cotterell 1989	Ginnungagap: 'wild and empty' Pre-cosmogonic chaos as Ogre	Europe : Nordic	cf. <i>Genesis</i> 1:2 'And the Earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'
67	Cotterell 1989	p. 239: the Ogre: Loki and his wife Sigun were locked in a cave until Ragnarok	Europe : Nordic	
37	Cotterell 1989	p. 121 New wall for Asgard (the realm of the Ases), the builder is a giant in disguise helped by a marvellous mare [= Poseidon?]; Loki becomes a stallion and thus begets Sleipnir. Loki is locked up in a cave	Europe : Nordic, Ancient	possible parallelism with the Hidden Sun theme of Amaterasu <i>etc.</i> , cf. Witzel 2005
5	Ashliman 1998-2005	The devil in the sack is transformation of Ogre	Europe, Early Modern	The theme of the Ogre is complex and widespread. For instance, it may be argued to underlie a great many of Grimm's Tales when considered in terms of the types of fairy tales classified by Aarne and Thompson, even though distributed over a considerable number of different categories
89	Lovell-Smith 2002	Bluebeard and other Ogre's housekeepers	Europe, Early Modern	
93	Tatar 2014	The Boy Steals the Ogre's Treasure	Europe, Early Modern	offers Aarne-Thompson numbers and references
6	Ashliman 1998-2005	no. 166 Strong Hans Der starke Hans Type 650A, The Young Giant; and type 301A, The Quest for the Vanished Princesses;	Europe, Early Modern	
7	Ashliman 1998-2005	The Giant Whose Heart Was in an Egg	Europe, Early Modern	interesting combination of giant / Ogre theme with Cosmic Bird and its Egg theme
77	Goldberg 2000	Gretel's duck: The escape from the Ogre in AaTh 327	Europe, Early Modern; and comparative	offers many Aarne-Thompson (AaTh) numbers

³⁶¹ We hit here upon the illuminating insight that the male child which the Mother of the Waters produces in the first place, *Land* – by the cosmology of the Separation of Water and Land which seems to have prevailed in the Upper Palaeolithic prior to the establishment of the even more successful and more permanent Cosmology of the Separation of Heaven and Earth.

73	Fester 1980	possibly Ogre	Europe, Upper Palaeolithic	
75	Jakobsson 2009		European Middle Ages	
48	Cotterell 1989: 189	Bluebeard	France, Early Modern	
90	McLoughlin 2006	the Ogre as depicted by Doré has an eyedisease	France, Early Modern literature	
81	Howe <i>et al.</i> 2018		general, psychology	
83	Jobling 2001	'Stories in which a hero defeats a semi-human Ogre occur much more frequently in unrelated cultures than chance alone can account for. This claim is supported by a discussion of folk-tales from 20 cultures and an examination of the folk-tales from a random sample of 44 cultures. The tendency to tell these stories must, therefore, have its source in the innate human nature discussed by evolutionary psychologists. This essay argues that these stories reinforce innate positive biases in the perception of self and ingroup and negative biases in the perception of outgroups'	general, psychology	such an appeal to innate hence universal human nature makes nonsense of a distribution analysis as basis for historical reconstruction
35	Cotterell 1989	p. 17: Ogre – all Uranus' children were imprisoned in Gaia's belly'	Graeco-Roman	non-being, but also: sub-terranean origin; this is an old theme, also in Kabylia, p. 109, and links up with the NarCom 'From the Earth, the Earth as primary
32	Cotterell 1989; Euripides 1949	p. 232: from the Ogre: Helena was hidden in a cave by Proteus, while he sends her substitute to Troy!	Graeco-Roman	
36	Cotterell 1989; Hesiod, <i>Theogonia</i>	also Cronus swallows his children at birth, in his turn – this is also Ogre motif	Graeco-Roman	
38	Cotterell 1989	Minotaur: this is not the bull sent by Poseidon, but a son of that bull by Minos's Queen Pasiphaë, 'the All-Shining', <i>i.e.</i> Sun or Moon	Graeco-Roman	
38a	Cotterell 1989	the Cretan labyrinth is another metaphor of the Ogre	Graeco-Roman	

41	Cotterell 1989; Hesiod, <i>Theogonia</i>	Gaia and Uranus: so much love-making that Gaia's children could not escape from her womb; Cronus emasculates his father, making room: escape from Ogre, separation of Heaven and Earth. Cronus pushes farther up to the sky, so that Cronus becomes equivalent to Ancient Egyptian Shu.	Graeco-Roman	
44	Cotterell 1989; Willis 1994; Hesiod, <i>Theogonia</i>	Ogre: Cronus swallows his own children; Zeus liberates himself and his brothers	Graeco-Roman	
46	Cotterell 1989; Diodorus Siculus 4.7.6, 4.8.3	p. 182: Ogre: Aeolus' bag of winds	Graeco-Roman	
47	Cotterell 1989	box, Ogre: Arsinoë was shut up in a chest by her brothers after the latter slayed Alkmaeon	Graeco-Roman	
51	Cotterell 1989; Hyginus, <i>Fabulae</i> 271; Ovid, <i>Heroides</i> 15.89 f., 18.59 f.; Seneca, <i>Phaedra</i> 309 f., 422 f., 786 f.; Anon., <i>Selene</i>	Ogre: Selene's (the Moon) mortal lover Endymion, brought to eternal sleep in a cave	Graeco-Roman	
52	Cotterell 1989; Hesiod <i>Theogonia</i> ; Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , 15	Ogre: = Chaos (Greek)	Graeco-Roman	
54	Cotterell 1989; Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , VIII: 183-235	p. 208: Ogre: Daedalus and Icarus escape from Minos' captivity	Graeco-Roman	
59	Cotterell 1989; Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> ; Euripides, <i>Cyclops</i>	p. 232: Polyphemus son of Poseidon, as Ogre; Odysseus effects the escape of his companions and himself	Graeco-Roman	
61	Cotterell 1989, Euripides, Helena; Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> iv.430 f.	p. 232: Proteus, 'son' of Poseidon: shapeshifter, replaced Helena by a dummy sent to Troy, keeping her safe at the isle of Pharos opposite the later Alexandria - an enigmatic turn; cf. Shihoka Nalinanga and his magical seductress (<i>Likota Lya Bankoya</i> - van Binsbergen 1988, 1992)	Graeco-Roman	
64	Cotterell 1989; Apollodorus, <i>Bibliotheca</i> , 1.1.5-7	Ogre motif: Zeus in the Dictaean Cave, Crete	Graeco-Roman	

92	Mondi1983	Homer's cyclopes	Graeco-Roman	
118	Plutarch, <i>Vitae parallellae</i> , Theseus	Theseus slays the Minotaur	Graeco-Roman	
17	Cotterell 1989; Hesiod, Theogonia	Zeus tricks his mistress Metis (pregnant with Athena) into becoming a fly, ³⁶² then swallows her, so that Athena has to be born (as a 'leg child') from her father's head	Graeco-Roman	double Ogre motif
18	Cotterell 1989	117 father eats child = Ogre theme, Cronus / children of Gaia [or Rhea]; Uranus and children of Gaia [or Rhea = Cybele]	Graeco-Roman	
20	Cotterell 1989; Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> III.308–312; Hyginus, <i>Fabulae</i> 179; Nonnus, <i>Dionysiaca</i> 8.178–406; Anonymous, <i>Semele</i>	Zeus swallows Semele, the pregnant mother of Dionysus, so that the latter must be born of his thigh as a leg child	Graeco-Roman	
24	Cotterell 1989; Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> , ...	Adonis delivered from a tree = wooden encasement: his mother Myrrha had become a tree	Graeco-Roman	there is close similarity with Osiris locked in a coffin by the latter's brother Seth
25	Cotterell 1989	Osiris, trying out a coffin, and imprisoned in it by Seth (Plutarch 1934–1935)	Graeco-Roman . Ancient Egyptian	although Plutarch's account of Isis and Osiris has met with much scepticism from scholars, yet many Egyptologists agree that it tallies with much older, authentically Egyptian sources (Richer 2001; Hopfner 1940–1941).
13	Conrad 1999	blinding the one-eyed Ogre in Western and Turkish traditions	Graeco-Roman	
14	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>	Polyphemus as Ogre	Graeco-Roman	
30c	Cotterell 1989	also Ogre theme is: descent into the Underworld of Odysseus (<i>Odyssey</i> , XI)	Graeco-Roman	
30d	Cotterell 1989	also Ogre theme is: descent into the Underworld of Heracles	Graeco-Roman	
74	Fontenrose 1980/1959	Syleus, a Lydian Ogre: pp. 110, 112f; compared with Mot, p. 137; with Antaeus, p. 331	Graeco-Roman: Lydia / N.W. Asia Minor	

³⁶² #11.4. THE COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY OF THE FLY is not extensive enough to readily explain this detail. In West Asia the fly with its shimmering reflections of the Sun light on its wings was a solar and cosmogonic evocation (Draffkorn Kilmer 1987; Richter 1979). In New-Kingdom Ancient Egypt a golden fly was a token of recognised great valour sporadically issued to soldiers. In the Syro-Palestinian Levant the fly was the familiar or alter-ego of Ba'al-zebub, 'Lord of Flies', with negative, satanical connotations in the Bible world (as would be expected with any actually or potentially dethroned god from the perspective of a later, victorious dispensation), but in fact a primal god.

56	Cotterell 1989	p. 219: Ogre: Maruts, born from shattered embryo, meant to remain in Didi's womb for a 100 years and become stronger than Indra	India	
68	Cotterell 1989	p. 246: Vrtra: huge Snake, Ogre motif, swallowed Indra, but the gods gagged Vrtra so that Indra could jump out and kill Vrtra with the thunderbolt	India	
88	Lorimer & Lorimer 1919; No. 51		Iran	
65	Cotterell 1989	p. 237: Ogre: St Patrick gets rid of a Snake by enticing it into a box and drowning it	Ireland	
3	Burton 1893: The Voyages of Sindbad the Seaman	this is clearly an extended Flood story. The hero is shipwrecked time and again, and is confronted with the destructive mythical force of the sea in very many different shapes, e.g. as the Old Man of the Sea, which constitutes illustrations of some of my principal NarComs including the Ogre. The pious Islamic dressing cannot take away the awareness of an very ancient Flood story. Includes many references to the Odyssey, e.g. Lotophagi and Polyphemus	Islam, early 2 nd mill.	
101	Warner 1997		Italy, Early Modern	
16	Cotterell 1989	66: Amaterasu Sun goddess, reversed Ogre motif: she does not want to come out of the cave = weaving room	Japan	
94	Thomson atal. 1885; Japanese fairy tale, no. 18: Ogre's arm.		Japan	
79	Gorfain & Glazier 1978		Kenya	
2	Willis 1994; Cotterell 1989	Trickster Heitsi-Eibib, in confrontation with Ga-gorib [= leopard] above a pit; the latter is apparently also some kind of Ogre	Khoi / San, Southern Africa	
78	Goldman 1998		Melanesia	
9	Cavendish c.s. 1991 / 1980	p. 278	Melanesia incl. Papua New Guinea	
62	Cotterell 1989	p. 232: Ogre: Qasavara, Banks Isl., Melanesia; Qasavara kills Qat's brothers; Qat kills Qasavara and revives the brothers from bones, invites the bones to laugh	Melanesia : Banks Isl	shamanistic motif; Banks Isl. has only been inhabited for c. 3,000 year

10	Chakrabarti-1974		Melanesia : Papua New Guinea	
30a	Cotterell 1989; Buccallati 1982	p.105: Inanna's descent into the Underworld	Mesopotamia;	Inanna's handmaiden (or vizir) effects her return, and then she appoints Dumuzi as substitute; cf. Odysseus, who also descended into Hades
11	Chen Gang- long 2006	Mangus must defeat the sor, an evil object, then becomes a white elephant	Mongolia and Tibet	
106	Junod 1897: 198, 200.		Mozambique: Baronga	
105	Werner 1933	p. 220: the giant Ngumbangumbais killed by the boy Bokenyane, who, like Kachirambe, is produced from an abscess on his mother's leg [again a leg child] (...) Bokenyane first hit the Ogre with an arrow, and the other two went on shooting at him till he died. It was the mother who cut the body open-in this case with an axe. The conclusion is somewhat unusual. After the people had begun rebuilding their villages they asked who was their deliverer; the mother answered, "It is Bokenyane." They gave the three brothers five wives apiece, and then chose Bokenyane for their chief, because it was he who had shot the first arrow.	Mozambique Baronga	
104	Werner 1933	In the Delagoa Bay region the 'Swallowing' (or 'Engulfing') Monster theme is represented, in a somewhat different form, by two tales [2]: in one a little herd-boy, swallowed by a cannibal Ogre, made him so uncomfortable that the Ogre's own companions, with his consent, cut him open and thus released-not only the boy, but all the people and cattle previously swallowed.	Mozambique coast	
104a	Grimm brothers, 1812-1815; Ashliman 1998-2005	Little Red Riding Hood: the hunter cuts open the wolf's belly and finds her alive and intact	Central Europe, Early Modern	
112	Willis 1994: 233	the Navajo myth of the liberation of the game animals from the house of Crow = the black God	North America: Navajo	
29	Cotterell 1989	Pueblo Indians, as no. 112, but rescue not from cave but from nut	North America: Pueblo	
28	Cotterell 1989	Zuñi Poshaiyankaya, first human to find an escape from the cave	North America: Zuni	
108	Willis 1994: 28	Ogre, two sisters were eaten, but with mussel shells they cut themselves free from the belly	Oceania	

50	Cotterell 1989	Patagonia: El-lal, hero; Ogre: father, wishing to eat El-lal, tore his from his mother's womb; saved by Rat in hole; inventor of bow and arrows, killed a giant by taking the form of a gadfly; rises to Heaven on the wings of a swan	Patagonia	gadfly as an Ogre-related theme also in Zeus's swallowing Athena's mother Metis; swan is reminiscent of the ancient Mother of the Waters Creator goddess
41a	Cotterell 1989; Willis 1994	incessant love-making of Heaven and Earth prevents the world to be born: Maori, Tuamotu Isl, Hawaii, Tahiti	Polynesia: Maori, Tuamotu Isl, Hawaii, Tahiti	
72	Fairbrother 1924	4 brothers and 4 ogres	Polynesia	
84	Karipa Te Whetu, 1897	Kame-Tara and his Ogre Wife	Polynesia : Maori, New Zealand	
102	Werner 1933		South Africa : Basutu= Sotho	
55	Cotterell 1989; Werner 1933	Cotterell p. 213 Ogre: Kholumulume / Khodumodumo, or Kammapa	South Africa: Sotho	
119	Theal 1886	Ogre story	South Africa: Xhosa	
120	Werner 1933	Untombinde Ogre story	South Africa: Zulu	
69	Cotterell 1989: 248	Kanahuhu was Zuñi Pueblo shaman and culture hero. Helped the first member of his tribe from underground caves to the surface	America, North: Zuni	
60	Cotterell 1989	p. 232: Ogre motif: Pueblo Zuñi indians: first man Poshaiyankayo: born from one of the four wombs created by god of Heaven and god of Earth; womb encased in slime. Poshaiyankayo requested the Creator god to release the creation	America, North: Zuni	Ogre = birth, coming into being
76	Geider 1992		Swahili	
122	Werner 1933	Ogre tree	Swahili	
123	Werner 1933	Ogre story	Tanganyika, C. District	
27	Cotterell 1989	ogress in story of Avalokitesvara in Tibet	Tibet	

Table 11.2. Referenced attestations of Ogre mythologies world-wide



Fig. 11.3. Attestations of *NarCom6* = *Ogre*, all categories lumped together

The paucity of attestations in the Americas, and even in most of Asia apart from the South East, confirms our idea that this mytheme did not find itself in Pandora's Box. I suggest we take CTII III to be its origin. Against the massive attestations in sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe, the relative paucity elsewhere suggests that the mytheme was not so much transmitted by the Pelasgian cross mechanism, but was subsequently redefined and started on a specific new transmission trajectory in South East Asia (CTII IX). From there the mytheme was spread, on the wings of Sunda expansion, all over Oceania (and perhaps, sporadically, further afield: to eastern North America and Patagonia, while also some of the attestations along the western Pacific (Japan) and the African coasts of the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, perhaps even all the way up North, once more into the Mediterranean, and to the British Isles and Scandinavia, may also be due to Sunda expansion.



Legend:
 1 *NarCom6* all attestations of *Ogre* motif in my data set
 2 proposed historical reconstruction of diffusion of *NarCom6*
 3, as (2) but even more conjectural
 4 CTII III: WAsia c. 40 ka BP mtDNA Type N; and IX, Sunda, c. 7 ka BP.

Fig. 11.4. Proposed historical reconstruction of the spread of *NarCom6*, 'Rescue from the Ogre'

This concludes our analysis of the Ogre mytheme. Our immensely time-consuming efforts have led to a meagre result: we may conclude that in the case of this one mytheme, a moderate Sunda effect cannot be ruled out.

Appendix 11.A. Digression from the Ogre discussion: The lexical near-equivalence of 'Earth' and 'Snake' in Indo-European as listed in the Tower of Babel etymological database

Above I hinted at the remarkable Indo-European etymology linking 'Snake' and 'Earth', clearly detectable in the Genesis myth of the Fall of Man, although that came to us in Hebrew and not in an Indo-European language.

<p>*Borean (approx.) : TVKV, 'Earth' Eurasianic : *DVG-, 'Earth' Proto-Indo-European : *dhǵhem-, 'Earth'</p> <p>Hittite: tekan n., gen. taknas 'Erde', dagan, tagan 'nieder, zu Boden'; Hittite-Luwian takamia 'Erde', Luwian tijammi id. (Friedrich 1932: 204, 220)</p> <p>Tocharian: A tkam, B kem 'Erde' (Adams 1999: 192)</p> <p>Old Indian: kṣāh, gen. jmāh, gmāh, kṣmāh, acc. kṣām, instr. jmā, kṣamā, loc. kṣāmi 'ground, Earth', kṣāmya- 'terrestrial'</p> <p>Avestan: zō, en. zamo, acc. zām, loc. zemi 'Erde, Erdboden'</p> <p>Old Greek: khthōn, -onós f. 'Erde, Erdboden, Land', khthamaló- 'niedrig', neo-khmó- 'neu, ungewöhnlich, fremdartig'</p> <p>Slavic: *zemljā; *zemb</p> <p>Baltic: *žem-i f., *žem-iā f., *žam-iā f.</p> <p>Latin: humus, -i/-ūs f. 'm.' 'Erde, Erdboden', humilis 'niedrig' Other Italic: Osk hu(n)truis 'inferis', huntrus 'inferos', Umbr. hondomū 'infimo'</p> <p>References: Pokorny 1959-69: I.662 f; Buck n.d.: 16. Comments : Hard to distinguish from the reflexes of *g'hem- #3258. All Italic forms (Lat humus, etc.) may in fact belong there.</p> <p>Afroasiatic : daḳ^w-, 'clay' Sinocaucasian : *[t]VQV'</p> <p>Austic : Proto-Austronesian' *bitak, *-tak, *litek 'mud; Earth, round', ?Proto-Austroasiatic *tʷk 'sticky' Amerind (misc.) : tʷk- 'dirt' (Benison & Ruhlen 1994: 42)</p> <p>African (misc.) : Bantu *-tākà 'soil'. Reference: Illich-Svitych 1967 / 1965; Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994: 42 *tīka (+ NorthCaucasian) (...)</p>

Source: based on © Tower of Babel, Starostin Starostin 1998-2008; The above comment concerning *g'hem- #3258 refers to (Tower of Babel, Indo-European etymology)

Table 11.3. Long-range etymology of the reflexes of *Borean TVKV, 'Earth'

<p>Proto-IE : *g'(h)em-, *g'(h)mēy-, 'snake, worm' Slavic: *zmbjā, *zmbjъ, *změjъ Baltic: *žema- Albanian: dhémje 'caterpillar'</p>
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Source: based on © Tower of Babel, Starostin Starostin 1998-2008

Table 11.4. Semantics 'Snake, worm' in Indo-European

Clearly the ‘Snake’/ ‘Earth’ equivalence does not occur in the other phyla within Eurasiatic (Tower of Babel, ‘[Eurasiatic /] Nostratic etymology’):

Eurasiatic

Altaic: *t̥ā’go [+ Tungus-Manchu *tukaŋla’?]

Kartvelian: *diq-

Dravidian: *Tūk-

Eskimo-Aleut: *təyŋə- (~ -ŋɣ-)?

References: Illich-Svitych 1967: 342, Illich-Svitych 1971-1984: 1, 220; Dolgopolski, *n.d.*: 551 *dEqV ‘earth’ compares Georg[ian] with quite dubious Afroasiatic forms; Dolgopolski *n.d.*: 233: 1 *togE ‘dust, Earth (substance)’ (Indo-European + somewhat different Altaic. + quite dubious Afroasiatic; 2347 *t̥uK[a] ‘Earth, mud, dust’ (Tungus-Manchu + Drav[idian] + Afroasiatic.

Source: © based on Tower of Babel, Starostin Starostin 1998-2008. Afroasiatic appears in some of the relevant sections of the Tower of Babel as SH = Semito-Hamitic. The Tower-of-Babel comments slightly edited in the light of the present book’s conventions.

*Table 11.5. Long-range etymology of the reflexes of *Borean TVKV, ‘Earth’, continued*

So the etymological equivalence of ‘Snake’ and ‘Earth’ must be considered to be peculiar to Indo-European only.

There seems to be a certain Indo-European element in the data and phenomena we are investigating here and in the Ogre context in general, but it is hard to put one’s finger on it. But for instance, Blažek 2010 considers the Pan-Ku myth to be of Indo-European origin.

Chapter 12. Spider mythology world-wide as a window on possible Sunda effects, resulting in East-West parallels (2020)³⁶³

12.1. Introduction

Spiders speak to our imagination, not only because of their miraculous capability of spinning thread issuing from their own body (a standard illustration of the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* – the greatest cosmogonic puzzle; cf. Weigle 1987) and the construction, with that material, of their glorious webs – but also because (like the mantis) their females tend to consume their male sexual partner after the act. In many cultures, the Spider's act of spinning and tying has constituted a metaphor not only of creation, but particularly of occult powers, of sorcery, *par excellence*. Among the Ancient Egyptians, the Spider, the Mantis and the Midge were the three principal animal familiars (helping spirits) of the sorcerer (Helck 1987). Spider mythology occurs world-wide (Hogue 1987; Isbister 2001; Kritsky & Cherry 2000; Little 1966; Melic 2002). One might consider this a cultural expression of an allegedly universal, hereditary and genetically anchored fear of spiders (*arachnophobia*) among humans – but such a claim turns out to be contentious, for the universality which it entails is incompatible with the considerable variation in intensity of the phobia, and with the fact that in some human communities spiders are actually eaten (Anonymous, *Arachnophobia*, with references). From our inspection, below, of global distributions we shall conclude that Spider mythology, although quite old, is probably not older than the Upper Palaeolithic. We will find evidence of a very old cosmological substrate, identifiable in several continents, in which the Spider, visibly engaged in spinning, weaving and tying, is venerated as the Supreme Creation Deity – from which later weaving and spinning goddesses, in several continents, appear to be derived in Neolithic and later times. Since Spider mythologies occur in both in the East and in the West of the Old World (and also in the New World), and since my current work is among other concerns focus-sing on East-West parallels, our principal aim in the

³⁶³ This is a greatly revised and expanded version of: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2020, Spider mythology world-wide as a window on possible Sunda effects resulting in East-West parallels, at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/spider_DEFDEF4.pdf

present chapter is to ascertain whether this parallelism is conducive to interpretation in *Sunda* terms (cf. Oppenheimer 1998; Dick-Read 2005; van Binsbergen 2019b, 2020c) – *i.e.* the postulated spread, mainly through demic diffusion (*i.e.* cultural contents spreads geographically because their human owners spread geographically), of cultural elements from South East Asia / the Indo-Pacific region in all directions, also westward on to the Indian Ocean and its distant shores (the Indus Valley, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, Africa), in response to the world-wide rising of the ocean level by 200 m. at the onset of the Holocene (10 ka BP), when at the end of the Ice Ages the polar caps melted rapidly. In the past I have repeatedly engaged in the analysis of the same Spider mate- rial (*e.g.* van Binsbergen 2010: 185 *f.* and *passim*, this book ch. 8, 2012: 50, 181) but in the light of the present analysis these earlier attempts must be discarded as preliminary and, on closer scrutiny, partly wrong.



Fig. 12.1. A spider's web in a summer's garden



Fig. 12.2. Some of the rare prehistoric depictions of the Spider from three continents

12.2. Available data on Spider mythemes world-wide

To prepare for our analysis, I present, in Table 12.1, the referenced data in time and place.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ In that table, reference will be made to 'Borean' – as elsewhere throughout this book. 'Borean' is a hypothetical language form, reconstructed from the systematically and intersubjectively reconstructed proto-forms of all linguistic macrophylys (highest-level linguistic clusters) currently spoken in the world, and supposed to have been spoken in Central to Eastern Asia in the Upper Paleolithic. I performed a cluster analysis (a form of multivariate statistics) on the 192 reconstructed 'Borean' roots. I found that 'Borean' disintegrated, well over 20 ka BP, at first into two branches:

1. a Peripheral Branch, comprising Austroic (a. Austronesian e.g. Thai, Munda and b. Austronesian, e.g. Malay, Maori), Amerind, and African languages (Khoisan, Nigercong and Nilosaharan – with the exception of Afroasiatic); and
2. a Continental or Central Branch, comprising Eurasitic (e.g. Indo-European, Dravidian, Uralic, Altaic, Kartvelian, etc.), Afroasiatic (Semitic, Old Egyptian, Berber, Omotic, Chadic, etc.) and Sinoaucasian (Sinothetan, Northern Caucasian, Yeniseian, Burushaski, Basque, probably Na-Dené). Cf. Table 8.1, above.

The further disintegration of these branches need not concern us here. The methodology and its results are provisionally described in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 73 f.; cf. Table 8.1, above; and will be treated in full in van Binsbergen, in press (d).

Such linguistic, i.e. glottochronological, dating is a welcome addition to the astronomical, archaeological and especially genetic dating proposed in other approaches in the New Comparative Mythology (especially Witzel's). Association between mythemes, on the one hand, and genetic clades / haplogroups / MtDNA Types, on the other, is resorted to in the other relevant chapters in this book (5, 6, 11–14), but it has two great disadvantages. (a) A practical one, in that the reconstruction of genetic types by state-of-the-art molecular biology is subject to error functions in the order of magnitude of 20 ka, which is hopelessly imprecise. And (b) a theoretical disadvantage: languages, like mythologies, are items of culture, to be produced, managed and transmitted by a social process of communicative interaction, which is scarcely different for languages and for mythologies; genes, however, are biologically anchored and transmitted, blindly, automatically, and without a determining social component; one of the functions of culture (including language and mythology) may be to demarcate a viable gene pool, but the automation with which, in current approaches including Witzel's, gene pool and mythology are practically equated, is potentially offensive to any social scientist.

30	Starostin & Starostin 1998: 2008, Long range etymology	global distribution of spider mythologies, now largely obsolete	general: no spider in *Borean	1	On the basis of the Tower of Babel etymologies I have made a world map of varieties of the sun cult, in preparation for my book in press (e). It is remarkable that, although the sun has implied spider connotations in some African contexts (e.g. Nyambi, among the Nkoya and in West Africa), none of the many relevant higher-level etymologies of words with solar semantics display conspicuous spider elements. Even so *Borean has proto-roots for spider / spinning / twisting: PVSV (-> spin), and MVRV (cf. Marawa, my entry 136, below)
31	Anonymous, Anansi	jaguar related	Africa West / New World	5	
33	Gebauer 1964		Africa West : Cameroon	2	
38		Neith	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3 / 1	Neith is one of the most supreme Ancient Egyptian deities, retains an echo of spider supreme
39	Fontenrose 1980: 139, 244, 253 n. 48; Bomset 1971: 37f.	Anat	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3	
100	Cotterell 1989	Isis is also a weaving and spinning goddess	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3	
121	Helck 1984d	the shaman's familiars are spider, midge / gnat, and locust / mantis .	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	2	In my opinion, such familiars are unlikely to have come from sub-Saharan Africa, even though in the late 2 nd mill CE the mantis appears as the Khoi trickster hero: in the Early Bronze Age, Khoisan speakers (identified by their ostrich-shell beads) were not yet confined to Southern Africa but lived throughout Africa and in the arid

34	Werner 1933	p. 121 'The animals figuring most prominently in African folk-lore are the Hare, the Tortoise, the Spider, the little Dorcotherium antelope, the Jackal, the Chameleon, the Elephant, the Lion and the Hyena, with many others which are either less frequently met with or play less conspicuous parts'	Africa, Bantu-speaking	5	zones of West Asia, Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994: Fig. 3-2 gives a distribution map. I take it that such familiar indicate very old layers of cosmological material, supplanted by younger layers, e.g. Horus and other celestial gods) and then totally decontextualised
36	Le Scouévec et al. 1965, based on Fourché & Morlichem 1939	p. 89: 11 different 'methods of divination', among the inhabitants of the Kasai valley, including the water spider	Africa, Central; Congo: Kasai	3	
34a	Lhote 1979	p. 92 Antinea	Africa, North	3	
34b	Benoit 1920	Antinea	Africa, North	3	
38	Cleemann 1931.		Africa, NW ; Morocco	2	
39	Jalla 1993: 39f	after persecution by humans, Nyambi ascends to heavens with the aid of a spider and a wagtail	Africa, South Central ; Zambia	4	
40	Cotterell 1989,	Isio Leza (the High God) departs to heaven on a spider's web	Africa, South Central ; Zambia	4	spider being instrument in supreme god's departure to heaven, is a hybrid transition between spider supreme and spider connection
41	Hastings, I, s.v. 'animals'; p. 5a8 'spider'	In a myth of the Kayrove myth (Barotseland, and closely related to the Nkoya) 'Old Spider' is the only creature to escape the Flood	Africa, South Central ; Zambia	3	spider escaping from flood implies a socio-political confrontation, e.g. supporters of Spider Supreme vs. Flood as menacing instance; Old Spider also suggests an

						ancient deity
44	Mackintosh 1922	pp. 367f. tells the story of the first human, Kamsu, based on Jalla; evidence of a solar cult	Africa, South Central; Zambia	4		
45	Werner 1933	p. 124: Nyambi fetched to heaven by spider's thread	Africa, South Central; Zambia	4		
46		Anansi	Africa, West	5		
47		Nyambi	Africa, West	1		
48	Cronise & Ward 1903	Mr Spider	Africa, West	5		
49	Zethlyn 1993	spider divination	Africa, West	2		
50	Jeffreys 1953	only the chief / king is entitled to a spider oracle, used to detect witches, and giving him power over life and death	Africa, West ; Cameroon ; Bamenda	2		
51		pp. 61f.: spider divination, * photographs, Bamenda				
52	Le Scouézer et al. 1965	pp. 155f.: Among the Bassa of Cameroon, Ngambi is the spider, and Ngambi-sa is the spider oracle; link with West-Bantu; Nzambi/Nyambi is obvious	Africa, West ; Cameroon ; Bassa	2		
53	McDermott 1972	Anansi	Africa, West ; Ghana	5		
54	Giddens & Gadden 2006	a bracelet from Benin. Carved on the bracelet is a spider	Africa, West; Benin	2		
55	Northern 1984	the spider is often paired with the frog (heaven and earth ?	Africa, West; Cameroon	2		
56	La Roche 1997	pp. 101-104: Bassa spider divination	Africa, West; Cameroon ; [Bassa]	2		
57	Le Scouézer et al. 1965	p. 198: Bafias divination with the spider called Ngambi (cf. Nyambi)	Africa, West; Cameroon; Bafia	2		
58	Pare 1996	Basson spider divination, multiple symbolic elements	Africa, West; Cameroon;	2		

56	Labouret 1934-35	p. 140 spider divination	Burman		
57	Cotterell 1989,	p. 143: Ogun (war god Yoruba) climbs down from heaven on a spider's web before creation	Africa, West: Côte d'Ivoire Africa, West: Yoruba	2 4	
58	Chamberlain 1897	spider as creator god [= Nyambi, WvB]	Africa, West, various groups	1	
59	Kalberry 1966,	spider divination	Africa: Cameroon	2	
60	van Blinsbergen 2006	the abundance of spider themes -- now attenuated so as to become a symbol of zealous human work, but (as its use in divination, cosmogonic and state legitimization still indicates, often in the presence of other symbols of the primal and cosmogonic divinity) originally as an evocation of a maternal cosmogonic deity associated with weaving, initiation and often also warfare -- incidentally, an entity which may also be invoked, in the Grassfields and elsewhere in West Africa and far beyond, in the Janus-like combination of beginning and end	Africa: Cameroon: Bamileke	2	
61	Bredil 1949	'At Yochmann (...) on the flank of a vast animal there are signs, so far unique, set side by side. They each have two appendages above, diverging like the horns of cattle, and they may well be derived from a stylisation of these. A similar head occurs to the right, in a style with	Africa: Namibia rock art	2	

62	Bouchet 1922	completely distorted perspective, with horns and ears set frontwise on a profile. The ear-hair is very exaggerated, formed by bundles of radiating strokes. Probably at least two of these signs are derived from this; but if the third has this origin as well it would seem to have undergone a reinterpretation and to have changed to the figure of a large tarantula or other spider. I am led to see in these symbols tribal marks, put up on the occasion of some ceremonial, temporarily reuniting various families'	Africa: South Central ; Zambia	4	
63	Feldman 1963	p. 26 f.: again the story of Kamumu, apparently copied from the earlier missionary accounts by Coillard, Jacotet (1899-1900), etc. ... pp. 36 f.: again the story of Kamumu and Nyambi but erroneously attributed to Mozambique instead of Western Zambia	Africa: South Central ; Zambia	4	
64	van Binsbergen 2010	including provisional (now obsolete) distribution diagram spider mythology world-wide	Africa: South Central ; Zambia; and comparative	7 / a	
65	Wisler & Davall 1909	spiders play a very small role here ,only some mentions deep in vol II	America North ; Blackfoot	2	
66	Bogoras 1913		Asia, North East; Beringia; Chukchee people	3 / 5	
68	Leeming & Page 2000	Coyote, Spider Woman, Glooscap ...	America, North		

69	Cotterell 1989.	pp. 134, 240. Spider woman	America, North	1	
70	Sherman 2003	p. 614 Spider Woman	America, North	1	
71	Fewkes 1895	Spider in Sia cosmogony that they were "Two women," Utset and Nowaitset	America, North : Arizona	1	
72	Anonymous, Iltonni	spider trickster woman of the Lakota	America, North : Lakota [Lakota]	5	
73	Chamberlain 1897		America, North : Blackfoot; invention of snares through spider example	2	
74	Cotterell 1989,	214 Spider woman Naste Eitsam [a palindrome!] was the benevolent god of the Navaho	America, North : Navaho	1	
75	Cotterell, Arthur., 1989.	134 Spider woman among the Navaho for spider, also see <i>baastings</i> : de spider hier is niet de zonnegod maar maakt voor twee heldenronen de toegang tot deze zonnegod mogelijk	America, North : Navaho	1	
76	Chamberlain 1897	The Mythology and Folk-Lore of Invention, spider is more than once referred to. In a myth of the Awik-y'eng, Masmasalainiq [one of the creators], in answer to (...) prayer (...) tried to make a net so that men might catch fish ... more than a dozen refs to spider as inventor	America, North : North West Coast; Awik-y'eng people	2	
77	Chamberlain 1897 based on F. Boas (cf. Ballard 1982)		America, North : North West Coast	2	

79	Ballard 1982	Essentially Boas arrived at the conclusion that this mythology of the Northwest had no systematic order and that it must be understood simply as a ... which can be reduced to eight different types: the Earth-diver myth, the World Parent, the Emergence myth, the Spider myth...	Susisistainako, spider as creator deity(....) in the cosmogony of the Sia Pueblo Indians (...) who by singing called forth, first, two women, Ut'set (mother of all Indians) and Now-it-set (mother of all other nations), and afterwards animals, birds, etc., till the creation was complete. The first cult-society of these Indians was the Kipisa, which included only the spider people, its ho-na-ai-te, or thesurpat, being Susisistainako himself; and the members of this society were directly associated with [Susisistainako] -they know his medicine secrets" (Mrs. Stevenson, "Rep. Bur. of Ethn." 1889-90, pp. 26, 69).]	spider as inventor of nets and needles America, North, Northwest-Coast			
80	Chamberlain 1897			America, North, Sia Pueblo			
81	Russell 1898		does mention spider extensively	America, North, Apache			
82	Kritsky & Cherry 2000		The monolith, Spider Rock, at the Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona, was named	America, North, Arizona, Navaho people			

83	Cherry 2006	by the Navaho for Spider Woman' — The actions of the Spider Grandmother (Fig. 2) are important in the origin of the world in Hopi mythology (Hogue 1987) — Associated with the Choctaw emergence mythology is another interesting story explaining how Grandmother Spider first obtained fire for the Choctaw —	America, North Choctaw		
84	Beckwith 1930	Beliefs about Itkomi (Spider), from various sources'	America, North Dakota		
85	Winstler 1905	spider	America, North Dakota (trickster)		
86	Radin et al. 1972	spider only implied as trickster]	America, North Dakota		
87	Voth 1995	Spider Woman! wanderings of the spider clan	America, North Hopi		
88	Boas 1897	— On their way they meet the Spider Woman, who advises them in regard to a number of dangers	America, North Navaho		
89	Reichard 1997	Spider Woman: A Story of Navajo Weavers and Chariters	America, North Navaho		
90	Willis 1994	p. 227: the Spider Itkomi appears as a culture hero and trickster in parts of the N. American prairie	America, North Prairie		
91	Dorsey 1892	p. 9 — A Santee myth tells how in his rage at having been robbed of his dinner, Ufikomi committed suicide in such a manner that only a small and charred part of him remained, and this resembled the form of a spider	America, North Santee Sioux		

92	Farabee 1944	Twenty string figures and tricks from Western Guiana. Makusi and Wapishana people, include Morot or Spider's web aka Spider's nest; Maynoi or Spider	America, South Guiana not myth but cat's cradle	
93	Cherry 1993	[spider references] ... numerous and widespread. In South America, the Nazca made an enormous figure of a spider on the desert plains of Peru (Reiche 1949).	America, South Peru	
94	Forté & Silottis 1997 / 1996	p. 279 spider in Peruvian geoglyphs	America, South Peru	
95	Farabee 1948	Description of thirteen figures and tricks from the Wapishana tribe of Guiana, with instructions, and line drawings of two figures. Most of the figures are identical with those known in other parts of the world, but methods of construction are different. Contains geographical references and references to other sources; includes: Sucinik [cf. Pueblo: Sussitainako - WvAB] or Spider's nest	America, South: Guiana not myth but cat's cradle	
96	Meletinskii 1975	— Among the Chukchi, "raven" mythology has been partially displaced by the influence of Eskimo folklore, but the Chukchi have retained genuine myths -- miraculous helper (even though such a helper is sometimes found, for example, in the form of a little old spider-woman; this	Asia : East : Beringia : Chukchi	p / 5
97	Forté & Silottis 1997 / 1996	p. 099 Ahyu Tepe; goddess with	Asia, Central :	p / 1 / 3

98	Anonymous, Joregama	what appears to be a spider's body perhaps to be identified with Anahita	Turkmenistan archaeological find	Asia, East : Japan	1		
99	Anonymous Tsuchigumo	a spider woman mythical figure, Tsuchigumo earth spider = Japanese clans that reject the sovereignty of the emperor	Asia, East : Japan	2			
101	Cotterell 1989	Amaterasu the sun goddess is another weaving goddess	Asia, East : Japan	2			In the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu, we have a link with another major mythological theme we shall investigate with a view on Sunda related East West parallels: it is a reversed ogre story, after her brother the storm god's violence she locks herself in a cave. The ramifications of this theme in space and time are interesting, e.g. Witzel 2005. Another ogre parallel we find under our nos. 102 and 103 in the Table.
102	Jons 1980	p. 22: giant spider is destroyed by Japanese equivalent of Western European Jan Pikkedan	Asia, East : Japan	1/5 / a			
103	Jons 1980	p. 246: same theme as 103, a great Japanese hero is threatened by the Earth Spider.	Asia, East : Japan	1/5 / a			Apparently in East Asia the spider has developed from a positive solar symbol and even Supreme God, to a chthonic demon. Perhaps the reference to Heaven (the sun's proper location) and Earth was a later development (which we may situate in the Upper Palaeolithic, when the separation of Heaven and Earth became the dominant mythical theme worldwide). Was the spider originally a chthonic Earth deity, probably female, and as such heading the first trinity (Earth / Sky / Underworld)? In fact, the spider is a liminal being, in principle terrestrial but capable of ascending to the

304		woven, spider goddesses; Amaterasu Japan	Asia, East : Japan	3		sky through its web – hence its capability of transforming into the connection between Heaven and Earth in later mythological dispensations
304	Thomson et al. 1885	A collection of eighteen Japanese traditional tales and folklore retold in English, including (but not prominently) Goblin spider	Asia, East : JAPAN	3		
307	Cotterell 1985,	p. 86 Enki (water god, pursues his daughters incestuously), and his wife Ninhursage retrieves Enki's semen from the body of Utu the spider goddess of weaving, 'whom the god had used and left'. Fox persuades Ninkhursagto put the wounded Enki in her womb, from which he is reborn. This makes Enki another leg child, of a mythical category we shall shortly discuss separately in another study. He came from sea, was part man / fish or part man/goat cf. Cummes His Babylonian equivalent is Ea.	Asia, West : Mesopotamia, Ancient	3		It is noteworthy that Enki's mythical action is based on the observation of actual practice among spiders: after mating the females store sperm in their bodies so as to fertilise all their future egg with it.
308	Curmest 1911	Anahita	Asia, West : Syria, Ancient; Mesopotamia, Ancient	3		
309	Cotterell 1985,	The spider is an ancient Australian icon	Australia	2		
310	Stubbs 1978/ 1974-	an Australian Aboriginal art knows a pattern of concentric circles with radial lines; it is often conceived as a solar motif but looks even more	Australia	2		

311							
312	Venbrux 2003 McCarthy 1966	like a spider nest	Australia, N Australia: Arnhem Land (string figures)	2 / 3 2			
313	Furness & Greenidge 2009	An excellent record and analysis of an assemblage of string figures, collected, mounted and preserved by the author, during an expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948, including an no. 4: St. Andrew's Cross spider making web between trees or Garr.	Caribbean	5			
315	Koetting & DePrince 2009	spider references in Voodoo	Caribbean / Africa, West	5 / 1			
316	Cotterell 1986,	p. 185 Spider Anansi / Anancy oak in VS / Caribbean	Caribbean / Southern VS / West Africa	5			
317		weaving girl, spider goddesses: nu as lunar mansion spider web and loom	China	3 / a			
322	Stow 2002		Europe / China	3			
323	Caisson 1985		Europe : Corsica				
324	Graves 1954	Numerous seals with a spider emblem which have been found at Cretan Miletus-the mother city of Carian Miletus and the largest exporter of dyed woolsens in the ancient world-suggest a public textile industry'	Europe : Crete, Early Iron Age	2			
325		Athens	Europe :	3			
348	miscell	Normes, goddesses of fate, spinning and cutting a person's life thread	Græco-Roman Europe : Græco-Roman etc.	3 / 1			
326	Bandi & Maringer 1951	p. 191: here also the spider of Cingle de la Mola Benisuga, Casulla carbon, Castellon, Spain, Levant art	Europe : Spain, Mesolithic	2			

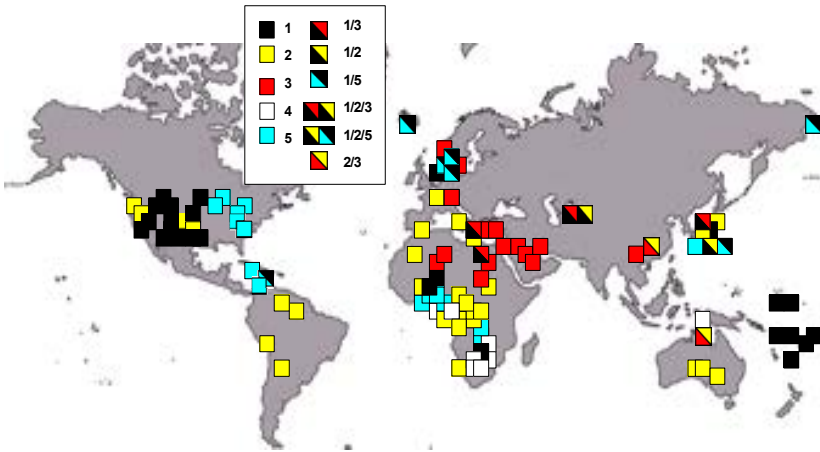
127	Heide 2011	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
128	Rooth 1961	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
129	Anonymous, Loki	Loki as shapeshifter (occasionally transgender) and trickster	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
130	Bruusvand 1962	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
131		weaving, spider goddesses; also frigg	Europe, Nordic	3	
145	Anonymous, Arachne		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	
146	Anonymous, 'Athena'		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	Sarostin & Sarostin 1998-2008, show that proto-IE, proto-Altaic and proto-Uralic as far as the semantics 'spider' is concerned have much in common, which suggests that the myth of Arachne may have a Central Asian origin
147	Dvid, Metamorphoses 6. 1 - 148		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	
133	Cotterell 1989	pp. 19 f.: a spider at the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil	Europe: Nordic	1	this suggest the confrontation between two world views, one featuring the spider as Supreme god, the other a later dispensation featuring the celestial gods / Aesir; or between Spider and Earth as rival primal deities
132a	Cotterell 1989	pp. 19 f. Wyrð is another weaving goddess	Europe: Nordic	3	
133	Goldsmid et al. 1886 / #64-1669		European Early Modern	2	
135	Cotterell 1989	Melanesian spider spirit 151:	Oceania : Melanesia	1	
136	Cotterell 1989	p. 202: Marawa: Melanesian spider spirit	Oceania : Melanesia	1	
137	Cotterell 1989,	p. 151: Banks Is., Melanesia: death was introduced by the Spiderreterre spirit, Marawa	Oceania : Melanesia : Banks Isd	1	

138	Anonymous, Aerop-Erap				Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert Isl
139	Cotterell 1989,		p. 133 Gilbert Isl: Nareau – spider lord, creator deity		Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert Isl
140	Cotterell 1989,		p. 224: Gilbert Isl: spider creation god Nareau; made Na Atihou, from his spin grew the sacred tree where all mankind came from the people scattered falling from this tree (CONFUSSION OF NATIONS - tower motif) luminaries, sky etc. was made from Na Atihou's body parts		Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert Isl
141	Cotterell 1989,		p. 242: Nareau the elder (the spider spirit) and also Nareau the younger		Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert Isl
142	Willis 1994		p. 294: Nauru (west of Gilbert Islands): the primal spider Aresp- esap, creates heaven and earth from shell with the assistance of insects		Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert
143	Little 1966		In the Mythology of Oceania, Larousse – see my entry 144 below – reports that on the island of Nauru, a spider was considered to be involved in the origin of life and the world		Oceania : Micronesia : Nauru
144	Larousse 1975		as my entry 144		Oceania : Micronesia : Nauru
145	Tassili frescoes, see Fig. 2		spider prominently depicted		Africa, Sahara

Table 12.1. Attestations of Spider mythemes worldwide, with references

12.3. Mapping

The following diagram maps the cases listed in Table 12.1:



LEGEND. NarCom =Narrative Complex

1. NarCom15a: Spider Supreme
2. NarCom15c: oblique, non-mythical, e.g. divinatory or decorative
3. NarCom15b: spinning and weaving goddesses, with explicit or implicit Spider connotations
4. NarCom15: connection between Heaven and Earth
5. NarCom15: Trickster

Fig. 12.3. Global distribution of the mytheme NarCom 15: The Spider

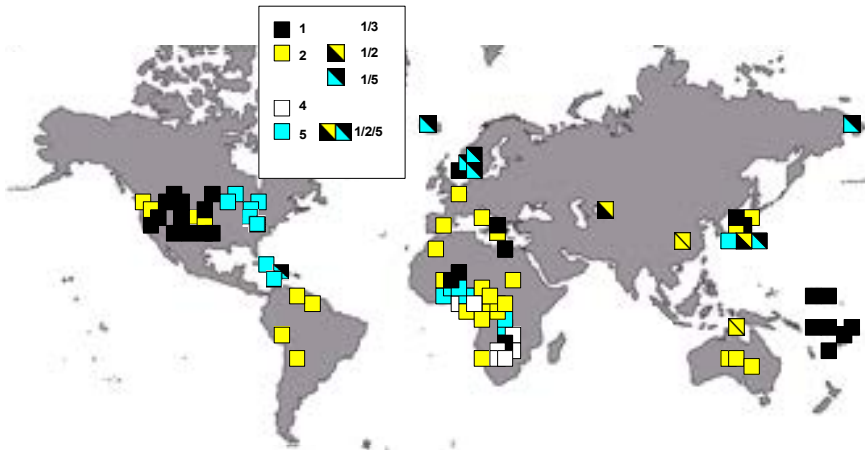
12.4. Discussion

When we look at this distribution, we note a number of peculiarities.

Not in Pandora's Box. For over a decade I have assumed, in earlier analyses of this mytheme, that Spider mythology belongs to *Pandora's Box* (the term I have coined for the package of cultural including mythological traits that were developed among Anatomically Modern Humans in Africa prior to their global dispersal in the Out-of-Africa migration c. 80-60 ka BP) as NarCom15, The Spider, subsequently transformed into 'the feminine arts' in CITI [Context of Intensified Transformation and Innovation] VI; cf. van Binsbergen 2006a, this book ch 5 above. On recent closer examination, however, the distribution does not meet the general rules of thumb (van Binsbergen 2014) which I have formulated criteria for such an historical assertion. These criteria include: *if a trait has been attested in historical times in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea and Australia we take it that that trait already found itself in Pandora's Box at the beginning of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80 ka BP).* Now the trait is attested all right for Africa and Australia, but much as I sought I could not find Spider mythology for the Andaman Islands and for New Guinea

(which however is often counted as a part of Melanesia – in other parts of which the trait is attested).

My claims as to the transformation of this trait into ‘the feminine arts’ under CITI VI, implies that after the Neolithic pre-existing Spider mythology was re-defined so as to reflect the general subjugation of women and their works under newly emerging, male-dominated modes of production – a transformation which I have tried to capture several times in tables listing the supplanting of female by male deities in the Old World in the course of the Bronze Age (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4). That means that *for the periods preceding the Bronze Age*, the global distribution is easier to interpret if we temporarily leave out all cases of category 3 (‘weaving goddesses’). This gives us the following distribution:



Legend as previous figure

Fig. 12.4. Spider mythemes : The global distribution of Fig. 3 reconsidered while omitting femaledeities of spinning and weaving

We can attempt yet another simplification to our distribution: category 2 brings out those cases where no Spider mythology proper is attested, but where the Spider appears in a non-mythological capacity e.g. as an element in divination or decoration. What happens if we leave out those cases? The following diagram gives the result. In order to assist the interpretation, I identify more or less contiguous distribution areas, by ellipses.

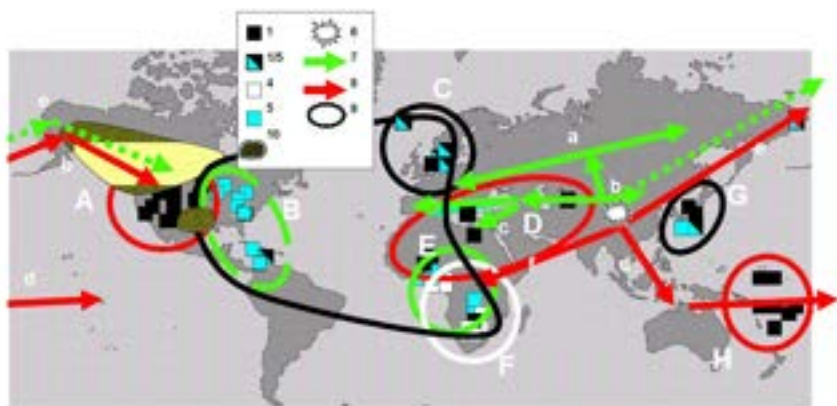


Legend as previous figure

Fig. 12.5. Spider mythology before the Bronze Age ; secondary applications (divination, decoration, etc.) omitted

After these reductions, it becomes clear that the data may be neatly clustered into clusters A through H.

The following, concluding diagram summarises my analysis of Spider mythologies in terms of East-West parallels:



LEGEND

1. NaCom15a: Spider Supreme
2. NaCom15c: oblique, non-mythical, e.g. divinatory or decorative
3. NaCom15b: spinning and weaving goddesses, with explicit or implicit Spider connotations
4. NaCom15g: connection between Heaven and Earth
5. NaCom15: Trickster
6. proposed origin of *Borean
7. Continental Branch of desintegrating *Borean: Eurasiatic (a), Sinocorean (b) and Afroasiatic (c)
8. Peripheral Branch of desintegrating *Borean: Austric (d), Amerind (e), and African languages

- (f) (Khoisan, Nigercongo, Nilosaharan)
- 9. trans-Atlantic distribution area Spider as Trickster
- 10. present-day geographic distribution Dene speakers

broken line = merely conjectural

Fig. 12.6. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme narCom 15: The Spider, taking into account the reconstructed history of the desintegration of *Borean, from c. 25 ka BP

Now it becomes possible to interpret the distribution in the preceding diagrams somewhat more specifically.

What we see in Africa, Oceania and the Americas we may associate with the spread of the Peripheral Branch of disintegrating *Borean. That is why I have given the enclosing ellipses in question the same colour as the Peripheral Branch. This means that with considerable certainty we may pose that the mytheme of Spider Supreme emerged and was spread within the Peripheral Branch of disintegrating *Borean, c. 20 ka BP. We forever leave behind us the conception of Spider Supreme as a part of Pandora's Box. The attestations of Spider Supreme in the heart of the Old World (West Asia, Northern Africa) may then be attributed to the passing, through this region, of speakers of Proto-African languages on their way to their definitive place of residence in Africa. There are indications (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 170, 405; Cavalli-Sforza *et al* 1994) that particularly the distribution area of Bantu- (< Nigercongo) -speakers and of Khoisan-speakers ranged far outside sub-Saharan Africa during the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic.

It is tempting to follow the same logic in regard of the mytheme of Spider as Trickster.³⁶⁵ This mytheme then would have to be associated with the Central / Continental Branch of disintegrating Borean, especially with Afroasiatic in the Old World (Africa, Middle East). For North America this would imply that Spider as Trickster would have to be associated with the spread of Na-Dené languages, which an authoritative minority of present-day long-range linguists (notably the Starostins) is reckoning to belong to Sinocaucasian. However, such a proposition (Dene as carrier of Spider as Trickster) would run in the face of the fact that Dene languages are currently concentrated in the western part of North America, and not in the eastern part, which is where we predominantly seem to find the Spider as Trickster myths. Further research and reflection is needed on this point.

Now that we have failed, so far, to explain the distribution of Spider as Trickster through an argument based on the disintegration of *Borean, we may try to press the trans-Atlantic distribution into service on this point. At face value the clusters B and E (Fig. 12.5) on either side of the Atlantic Ocean do constitute a contiguous area, but that is about all we can say for now. Any further interpretation of such contiguity would run into the difficulty that mainstream scholar-

³⁶⁵ Although I did not come 'round to devoting a separate chapter to the Trickster mytheme yet it is extremely important in older layers of global mythology (Radin *et al* 1972). The Khoi figure Heitsi-Eibib (the praying mantis, *Mantodea*) is a Trickster, and so is Anansi the Spider (*Araneae*)— and the Trickster motif is also very prominent in Native North American myth; in Western Eurasia, Odin, Loki, Hermes / Mercury, Seth and Thot, are also forms of the Divine Trickster — and some of these appear under the guise of the Leopard. The image of the Spider as cunningly awaiting its prey at the centre of its web has important political implications (Doniger 1998).

ship has been very strongly opposed (e.g. Ortiz de Montellano 2000) to the idea of trans-Atlantic cultural continuities ever since the Upper Palaeolithic (let alone earlier).³⁶⁶ The distribution in South Central Africa, in its turn, seems merely an extension of the distribution in West Africa (cf. Arkhurst & Pinkney 1964; Cronise & Ward 1903; Dunbar 1985; Kropp Dakubu 1990; McDermott 1972). But for the time being there is no attested link between Eastern North America, on the one hand, and West Africa (and Scandinavia!) on the other! – or we should invoke the Viking temporary colonisation of Vinland, NE America, around the turn of the second millennium CE. Oppenheimer (1994) sees a – in my opinion spurious – Sunda link with Scandinavia (mainly on the basis of circular axe blades), and Sunda elements are conspicuous in West Africa, but the evidence is too flimsy to account for an imaginable extension to the trans-Atlantic New World. Much would depend on the status we are prepared to accord to the Trickster figure in comparison with Spider Supreme:

- Is the Trickster (who is particularly conspicuous in North American Flood stories) derived from the Supreme variety, a degeneration of a more exalted image of the deity? (this does not sound convincing to me for the Trickster figure seems to be an adequate representation of how nature makes itself be felt at a low level of the development of modes of production – in other words, especially in the periods of the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic – : as capricious, uncontrollable, aggressive.
- Or is the immanent Trickster rather an older form out of which the transcendent Supreme variety has emerged? This would seem more obvious, as a further progress in human thought (whose relevant phases I have cursorily investigated e.g. in 2012, 2018). A broad and extended belt of both the Old World and the New World (notably Meso America) has seen the development of the logocentric package (comprising writing, the state, organised religion, and proto-science), and I would be surprised if the Spider Supreme variety would not be at home in such a context – but it is not.

Maybe we should consider the Spider Supreme variety in connection with the Solar cult – where the Trickster may not be at home but the est and South Central African god Nyambi certainly is.

³⁶⁶ #12.1. IS THERE A CASE FOR TRANS-ATLANTIC EXCHANGES IN CULTURAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL HISTORY? Needless to say that, as an Africanist and Afrocentrist turned globalist, I am not to be deterred by such conventional wisdom. In terms of agricultural cults, their gods and myths, and the distribution of food crops, there is considerable reason to take the possibility of trans-Atlantic exchanges very seriously; I have set out the reasons in my recent book *Sangoma Science* (2020c: ch. 3), in a discussion of possible New World antecedents of selected sub-Saharan agricultural cults, and their Mediterranean parallels. Sub-Saharan African and Phoenician impact on the New World has been a topic of passionate debate (van Sertima 1977; Gordon 1971) which however need not directly concern us here. In general such discussions are fed by scholars's prejudiced *a priori* rejection of humans's time-honoured capability of seafaring, even though the demonstration of that capability ever since the Middle Palaeolithic (when seafaring Anatomically Modern Humans arrived in New Guinea and Australia) has been a recurrent theme in the work of the prominent archaeologist Bednarik; cf. van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c.



Fig. 12.7. A royal spider pot for divination, from Western Cameroon, now at the Tandeng Muna Museum, Yaounde, Cameroon, 2015

My recent research (2015: 18 *f.*; 2020c: see Index of that book) suggests the name Nyambi – although its name variants such as Nzambi, Zamb, are at home in West Africa, and although its Nkoya name may be given a folk etymology (possibly modern and Bible-inspired) deriving from *ku amba*, 'to speak, apparently referring to a Creator deity who create through the spoken world – like the Biblical Elohim – yet is connected with yams and with yams's global spread along Sunda lines. This may help to explain the distribution of the Nyambi theonym in West and South Central Africa – but it does not illuminate the apparent continuity with the eastern part of the New World, let alone with Scandinavia. In the latter region, the Trickster connotations of Loki (again with Spider connotations) seem

to me to be too old to be due to Sunda impact (which cannot predate the mid-Holocene)– also because the Trickster figure with Spider connotations does not seem to play a role in South East Asia / Oceania (where the Trickster tends to be a small mammal such as the dwarf deer *kantjil*, *Tragulus kanchil*).

While many details remain, inviting further analysis and reflection, what emerges clearly from the present analysis so far is the connection between Spider mythology and the two branches into which Borean can be demonstrated to have desintegrated ca. 20 ka BP.

Finally we should consider the theme of the Spider as connection between Heaven and Earth. Let us remember that, from the Late Palaeolithic on, the horizontal cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land seems to have been supplanted by the Separation of Heaven and Earth, including the attempts to remedy – through various ways of Re-connection: mountains, altars, priests, shamans, kings, twins – the painful consequences of that Separation. This theme has installed itself as the key mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans – and such it has remained right until Modern times. In our distribution analysis, the theme of Spider as Connection is limited to cluster F, *i.e.* West and South Central Africa. I take it that this is a degradation or subjugation of Spider Supreme, the latter being found in adjacent geographic areas. With the establishment of Solar religion and other transcendence-based religious systems (as another expression of the shift towards the logocentric package – transcendence is both an effect and a precondition *par excellence* of writing, the state, organised religion and protoscience – *cf.* van Binsbergen 2012, 2018, 2015) Spider can no longer serve as Supreme Deity, but only a derivative of his capability of spinning is emphasised: the Connection Between Heaven and Earth. The subjugation perspective (which also suggests specific population groups in conflict, each associated with the rival cosmology and cult) may also be discerned in the stories where Nyambi flees to Heaven along a Spider's thread because humans make Nyambi's life on Earth into a hell. One would tend to analyse such a shift in perspective in cosmology as resulting from a power struggle between two conflicting socio-political human groups – *e.g.* immigrants *versus* locals, or a pre-existing mode of production about to be supplanted by a new mode of production. The same question must of course be considered when we try to analyse (*cf.* van Binsbergen *in press* (e)), in space and time, the installation of a solar religion in Old World prehistory, at the expense ultimately of, *e.g.*, the cult of the Mother of the Waters, the Great Mother Goddess, the Earth, or chthonic spirits. However, such a socio-political historical interpretation is outside our present scope.

12.5. Conclusion

While many details remain unclear and many loose ends remain, we can derive from this analysis of Spider mythology the concluding insight that *Spider myths constitute a case of East West parallels in comparative mythology*³⁶⁷, which however seem to have a time depth of *c.* 20 ka, and therefore cannot by any stretch of the imagination be attributed to the – relatively recent, < 10 ka BP – Sunda effect – for which there are no distributional indica-

³⁶⁷ An entire Part of my 2020 book on *Sunda* is taken up with the identification and explanation of such East-West parallels, which offer a view of the amazing continuities between Oceanian mythologies, on the one hand, and those of Western Eurasia especially the Graeco-Roman and Germanic Ancient world, on the other hand.

tions anyway. My initial impression of a clearcut Sunda effect was based on a confusion of categories. In Africa most Spider-associated attestations are situated in a potential Sunda path (South Central Africa, Cameroon – where spider representations constitute a dominant art expression – , Bight of Benin) but they are not of the Spider Supreme variety which reigns in the Indo-Pacific / Oceania. It is possible that the African decorative and divinatory Spider attestations (as in Cameroon) are in fact due to a Sunda impact, *but in that case we have failed so far to identify some original application of precisely such divinatory / decorative Spider themes in South East Asia / Indo-Pacific*. Plausibly the decorative / divinatory use is a local, African transformation of a more central cosmological role for the Spider (divination derives its authority from the divine associations of the divinatory procedure, even if this is merely the locomotion patterns of a spider; and in many cultures the spider is intimately associated with human fate), but given the Spider Supreme mytheme which appears to have been around in Africa, Oceania and the NewWorld for about twenty millennia, an appeal to direct Sunda impact to explain this pattern would appear to be anachronistic.

12.6. Afterthought: The enigmatic wagtail myths: Again no Sunda explanation to be preferred



a. *Motacilla capensis* (sub-Saharan Africa);



b. *Motacilla grandis* (Japan)

sources: a. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Cape_wagtail_\(Motacilla_capensis\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Cape_wagtail_(Motacilla_capensis).jpg); photo: Charles J. Sharp; b. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Motacilla_grandis_-_Japan-8.jpg

Fig. 12.8. The wagtail in sub-Saharan Africa and in Japan

In the mythical accounts, the West and South Central African theonym Nyambi is associated with the *wagtail* bird. In South Central Africa (Jacottet 1899-1901; van Binsbergen 2010d; = this book ch. 8) Nyambi is attended not only by a Spider but also by a wagtail bird (*Motacilla capensis*). This opens up an interesting comparative angle: in the main Japanese creation myth virtually the same bird (*Motacilla grandis*) showed the first creatures Izanami and Izanagi (*Kojiki*, cf. Philippi 1977; van Binsbergen 2009 / 2017) how to engage in sexual intercourse by the suggestive, incessant up and down movements of its tail, – movements after which the bird is named, at least in English, Dutch, and in the hybrid Latin of its scientific name. It may be relevant that the wagtail is an insectivore and presumably eats spiders. It is as if the wagtail in the Western Zambia story signals that, implicitly, we are in

the presence of a Flood caused by the discovery of sexuality. We hit here upon a controversial but logical and crucial *principle* of transcontinental continuities: if the latter can be taken for a fact, then in principle well-attested, well-studied and understood symbolic relationships in one location may be used to illuminate less explicit similar relationships in another location belonging to the same complex, even though in another continent – not just on the basis of a formal analysis and an appeal to inherent convergent properties of the mind of Anatomically Modern Humans, *but on the basis of real historical cognateship*. This methodological claim (which I already made in my earliest work on transcontinental continuities; van Binsbergen 1997b / 2011a) is basic to my work in the field of comparative mythology, geomantic divination, transformative cycles of elements, astronomical nomenclature *etc.*

The wagtail features in the mythologies of many peoples. In Ancient Greece it was associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love (Francis 2018) – initially probably because it represented the divine creative force, later under a cruder, adulterated, though still related interpretation, as in Japan: because its tail movements are suggestive of human (or in general: mammal) sexual intercourse. If the wagtail is supposed to be a harbinger of Rain, this may be for the, not unrelated, ancient cosmology (*cf.* Allegro 1970 / 1971) which sees rain as celestial emission / ejaculation. The 'hysterical' *transformation of sexual body fluids into tears* may also be noted in Ancient Egyptian mythology of the Late period, where humans (the results of the primal god's masturbation according to an earlier dispensation) became 'the Tears of Re^c' — a notion which apparently was ultimately transmitted to South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2010d, 2020d, this book ch. 8). Illuminating in this connection – if this Frazerian jump from Africa to East Asia could be forgiven on the basis of the above cited principle – is Ainu mythology (Northern Japan), which combines apparently West Eurasian traits with a manifest continuity with classic Japanese mythology. Here the wagtail assumes various roles, *e.g.* that of the Earth Diver.³⁶⁸ Presenting adequate references to well-known mythological collections, the anonymous author of the *Japanese Mythology & Folklore* website adduces parallel wagtail myths from India; Australia; Egypt (provided the Solar  or  *bennu* bird, *the self-creating being which alighted on the primal mount*,³⁶⁹ and behind which we suspect the Greek mythical bird Phoenix, often considered a heron may be identified as a mythical version of the wagtail); the Xhosa of South Africa (where the wagtail is merely a bird of cattle and good omen – perhaps a faint echo of more articulate wagtail mythologies from around the Mediterranean (where also remarkable spider myths occur, *cf.* Caisson 1983; Cleeman 1951), or more likely an adaptation of the far more specific

³⁶⁸ The Earth driver constitutes a widespread circumpolar mythological complex according to which a bird – usually an aquatic bird such as a coot; *cf.* Villems 2006; Weigle 1987 – brings up the first Land from the Pre-cosmogonic Primal Waters – or after the Flood; Anonymous, Wagtail tales; Leeming 1995. Aquatic birds signify, or are identical with, the primal Mother of the Waters, whose epiphany is the swan, the white duck, the white heron, *etc.* This form needed to be transformed when the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land was to be supplanted, in the Late Palaeolithic, by the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth. Then the bird could function as a straight-forward celestial symbol, and its aquatic connotations could be dropped.

³⁶⁹ One may even suspect a parallel here with *Genesis 1:2*, 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'. Also in Nkoya traditions (van Binsbergen 1988, 1992), the High God and the latter's Child are in the first place *birds* – and the royal clans bear bird names. *Although simplified and reified into a mere spectre of a cosmogonic entity, ultimately all these birds may be evocations of a transcendent, celestial Creator.*

role attributed to the wagtail in South Central African mythologies as related above); and the Kelabit of Borneo (where the wagtail marks a crucial point in the agricultural calendar).

In the case of *Motacilla*, the East-West parallel might also be attributed to accidental maritime contact, or to recent intellectual appropriation. In 1790 Count de Benyowsky, an Austrian / Hungarian high-ranking naval officer, reported on his sailing both to Japan and to Madagascar in the vicinity of South Central Africa – which is one conceivable (but extremely unlikely) external and recent way in which two such outlying points might have come to be connected. By the same token, the historian of Madagascar Françoise Raison-Jourde (1994) discusses how a myth or fantasy of Japanese-Malagasy relations gained some popularity among Malagasy intellectuals in the course of the 20th c. CE. For completeness's sake, let us admit that a mythological parallel surfacing in both Japan and South Central Africa might also be explained as an effect of relatively recent Sunda influence from a shared Sunda epicentre in insular South East Asia. This would also take care of the relatively isolated Borneo attestation, and of cases in Australia and India.

However, I believe we must, in this case, reject the somewhat facile and historically shallow Sunda explanation in favour of a long-range argument. Against the comparative background summarised above the coincidence between Japan and South Central Africa may not be so strange any more. The two attestations, although separated by the length and width of the two largest continents, are likely to share a remote common origin, of which the other attestations of wagtail mythology are further manifestations. If we may follow the suggestion made by the authoritative long-range linguists Kaiser & Shevoroshkin (1988) to the effect that Nigercongo (> Bantu) may be considered a form of 'Super-Nostratic' i.e. an extended version of Eurasiatic – one of the principal macrophyla into which *Borean disintegrated c. 25 ka BP – we would have a linguistic equivalent of such a transcontinental distribution with a common source in Central to East Asia, and probably with a similar time scale. Given the general westbound movement associated with the Back-into-Africa movement which has been a major feature of Old World population dynamics ever since 15 ka BP (Coia *et al.* 2005; Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Underhill 2004), and considering the special place which the Ainu people of Japan occupy in this context,³⁷⁰ *I am inclined to suggest that the myths highlighting the wagtail bird or its equivalents (myths that are remarkably absent from American mythologies which are embedded in Amerind – another Peripheral disintegration product of *Borean) originated in Central to East Asia at about the time of the disintegration of the Peripheral Branch of *Borean, and was thus taken westward to West Asia, North-eastern Africa, and further into sub-Saharan Africa.*

Further clues may be found when we look at the etymology of words with 'wagtail' semantics in various macrophyla. An indication for an ancient semantic / lexical / mythological complex focusing on the wagtail³⁷¹ – albeit situated in the Central or Continental Branch of

³⁷⁰ Watson *n.d.* / 1963; Batchelor 1889; Tajima *et al.* 2004; especially the Aino's affinity – Blažek 2000; Bengtson 1992; Bengtson & Blažek 2000 – to what I have called the Peripheral branch of disintegrating *Borean: Austric, Amerind and African macrophyla with the exception of Afroasiatic.

³⁷¹ Or any other similar small bird, e.g. the wren – it is abundantly clear that folk taxonomies of animal species, while rational and applying their own systematic categorisations, yet may differ greatly from Modern scientific nomenclature and the latter's distinctions based on morphology, genetics, evolution, etc.; e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1962; Douglas 1973; Marciniak 2011. If in the present book I often let the current English name for particular animals follow by the scientific taxonomic name, I am only submitting to a common affectation, rather than suggesting a one-to-one equivalence between the two genres of terms. English translations of the name for a particular

*Borean instead of in the Peripheral Branch with which Ainu is claimed to have affinity – may be found in the fact that already in *Borean a root *CVPV (where V indicates an unspecified vowel) may be identified, ‘small bird’ (also applied to the wagtail, in some of this root’s lower-level reflexes, *i.e.* among descending macrophyla and phyla), with reflexes in Eurasiatic (Indo-European, Altaic (including Japanese, Turkic, Tungus-Manchu, *etc.*), Kartvelian, Dravidian) and Afroasiatic.³⁷² In these macrophyla and their descendent phyla the rootin question generally takes the form of *-c[V]il- , *k[V]il- (where V is again an unspecified vowel). Semantically the complex is close to Proto-Sinocaucasian *ḪHwīlV (~ ḫ-, – ē-, -f), ‘small bird’; however, etymologically, the *Tower of Babel* invokes a different *Borean root *CVLV instead of *CVPV. Since these lexical items may have an onomatopaeic aspect, the difference between these two roots must not be exaggerated.

In other words, also the case of wagtail mythology worldwide cannot persuade us to a Sunda interpretation; instead, the apparent coincidences dissolve into systematic transcontinental connections, but not in the comparatively recent Sunda perspective, but in the long-range perspective of 20 ka or more.

12.7. Spider iconographies in present-day Cameroon

Let me conclude with a series of depictions of more or less recent Cameroonian art objects in which the Spider is a conspicuous theme (*cf.* Gebauer 1964; Northern 1984; Pare 1956).



small bird in Ancient Chinese texts, *e.g.* in the *Shi Jing* (Legge 1879: 220 *f.* and 1876) may oscillate between ‘wren’ and ‘wagtail’ even although Chinese does possess different names for both species.

³⁷² Starostin & Starostin, 1998-2008, Indo-European etymology, Altaic etymology, Nostratic etymology, Long-range etymology, Afroasiatic etymology, Sinocaucasian etymology.



The pictures are to be numbered 1-13, row after row and from left to right; a few comments must suffice here: (1) harp, Musée de la Blackitude, Yaounde, with on the top cover, left, the typical spider motif' also recognisable in several other items; (2) Bamileke pipe produced with the lost-wax method; (3) two humans arguing over a spider; (4) nursing mother on stool with spider motif; (5) mask with double spider motif; (6) detail of (2); (7, 8, 13) stools with spider motifs; (9) ivory carving with spider motif; (10, 11) wood carvings; (12) bronze spider figurine

Most pictures derive, with thanks, from: © Klaus Paysan, courtesy Galerie Hermann, Berlin, Germany, see: <http://galerie-hermann.com/arts/art3/> ; also cf. van Binsbergen 2006c, where under reference to Galestin 1941, Sunda influences in some of these artefacts are highlighted, especially (6)

Fig. 12.9. A selection of Spider motifs in the recent representative arts of Cameroon

Chapter 13. The leg child in global cultural history (2020)³⁷³

In this chapter we shall address an interesting and wide-spread mytheme that nonetheless is little known outside the circle of comparative mythologists: the *leg child*. In comparative mythology, the leg child is a mythical anthropomorphic figure born from a human body otherwise than via the normal birth channel; cf. van Binsbergen 2018: 417, where I wrote approximately (text considerably adapted):

#13.1. INTRODUCING THE LEG CHILD. the mytheme of the leg child (NarCom12b). This is a common motif, indicating a mythical figure who was born, not by passing through the normal birth channel, but through a thigh, armpit, waist, occiput or any other part of the human body except the birth channel. The type case is from Ancient Greek mythology, where Dionysus was sewn into his father Zeus's thigh, and born from there, after his mother Semele had been burned to death under the hot splendour of Zeus' lightning.(...) Quite a few mythical protagonists worldwide appear as leg children, including Ancient Egyptian Seth born from his mother's side, Thot[h] from his father's skull (Bonnet 1952: 702 f.), cf. Greek Athena from her father's skull (and when Hephaestus – who incidentally, as a smith was the very one to split Zeus's skull on that occasion – in sexual arousal ejaculated against Athena's thigh who in disgust wiped off the sperm with a handful of wool and cast it to the Earth, who immediately responded by producing Erichthonius [– by an ancient popular etymology, 'Wool-Earthy' – ,] this makes the latter also a leg child although he was reputedly borne by Gaia / Earth). Further: Tswana (Southern Africa): Tintibane (Brown 1926); Algonquin (orth-eastern North America): Malsum brother to Glooscap killed his mother by being born from her armpit. (...) Several culture heroes in Oceania / New Guinea are leg children. (...) The overarching Narrative Complex, 'From the Tree', appears to be an original cosmogonic / anthropogonic mytheme from Pandora's Box; it made it possible to imagine (not unlike immaculate, virgin birth, which has survived as a mytheme as is still a modern myth among Roman Catholic Christians) non-genital human conception and parturition, and apparently is revived in a narrative context when after the Flood the world needs repopulating but sexuality (which is considered, or implied, in many Flood myths to have been the occasion for the Flood in the first place) still has to be shunned. In such a context the leg child mytheme [– where offspring is produced in a plant-like fashion, as if from a seed, shoot, or pod – may be pressed into service, also because the alternative would be incestuous (hence the motif frequently occurs in Flood myths – Flood survivors are often very close kin: siblings of complementary genders), or because ordinary, genital reproduction would require two parents rather than the unique and dominant one (cf. Zeus, and the Christian God) favoured by myth. While covered under layers of 6th-7th c BCE Rabbinical male supremacy, Eve being born from Adam's rib (*Genesis* 2:21 f.) also makes even her a leg child.' In New Guinea, a famous 'leg child' has been Dudugera, appearing in tales from the Massom area in Papua New Guinea; and also mentioned by Oppenheimer 1998 – our point of departure in the consideration of Sunda effects. His name literally means 'leg child', and he was allegedly conceived when a divine

³⁷³ This chapter is a revised version of: van Binsbergen, Wim MJ., 2020, The leg child in global cultural history: A distributional exercise in comparative mythology, at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/leg_child.pdf.

dolphin brushed the thigh of his mortal mother when she went bathing in the sea. He grew up and rose into the sky to become the Sun, scorching the Earth with such fierceness that his mother had to create the first clouds to protect humanity (Cressey 1999; Cotterell 1989).





Apulian red-figure volute krater C4th B.C., National Archaeological Museum of Taranto; source: <https://www.theoi.com/Olympios/DionysosMyths.html>, with thanks

Fig. 13.1. The birth of Dionysus from his father's thigh

Table 13.1 offers a referenced list of attestation of the legchild that have come to my attention:

no.	location	name	reference and notes
1	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Semele's unborn child Dionysus sewn in and born from Zeus' thigh	According to the common tradition, Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Semele, the daughter of Cadmus of Thebes (Homeric <i>Hymns</i> . vi. 56; Euripides <i>Bacchantes</i> ; Apollodorus, <i>Bibliotheca</i> , iii. 4. 3
2	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Athena from Zeus's head	Tzetzes 1601, <i>ad Lycophronis</i> , 355; Philostratus 1893, <i>Imagines</i> ii. 27;


3	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Erichthonius born from Hephaestus's seed which was wiped off Athena's thigh, subsequently ³⁷⁴ fertilizing Earth	Apollodorus, <i>Bibliotheca</i> 3. 14. 6 (
4	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Attis as bursting from Myrrha's shrub	Frazer 1906; Pausanias, <i>Descriptio Graecae</i> ; Nonnus, <i>Dionysiaca</i> ; Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> ; Ovid, <i>Fasti</i> ; Statius, <i>Silvae</i> ; Suidas, <i>Lexicon</i> .
5	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Hephaestus as thigh offspring of Hera (Hesiod (Theogonia: 927-928)	note that a leg child (Hephaestus) engendred another leg child (Erichthonius)
6	Oceania, Micronesia, Marshall Isl	Edao (child of Creator god Loa	Edao's quest for immortality echoes the quests of Gilgamesh / Glaucus / Heracles'; Cotterell 1989
7	Oceania, Papua New Guinea, Massom area	Dudugera (cf. Oppenheimer 1998), the Sun god; allegedly, his name literally means 'leg child'	he was allegedly conceived when a divine dolphin brushed the thigh of his mortal mother when she went bathing in the sea. He grew up and rose into the sky to become the Sun, scorching the Earth with such fierceness that his mother had to create the first clouds to protect humanity (Cressey 1999; Cotterell 1989) ³⁷⁵
8	Africa, North East: Ancient Egypt	the god Thot	born from his father's skull; Bonnet 1952: 702 f.; also cf. Athena (Ancient Greece) (although it is remarkable that this striking instance of Egyptian-Greek continuity seems never to have entered the orbit of the <i>Black Athena</i> debate)

³⁷⁴ In the context of Ancient Egyptian mythology, the obvious parallel is with the primal god  Atum, who (according to some account: with the assistance of an *ad-hoc* goddess *drtor ydt*  'Hand' (Hannig 2000: 1688) – which makes us realise that the Greek god Hephaestus, although apparently demoted to become a mere crippled god of artistic handwork, as god of Fire may originally have been modelled after a primal god of creation (albeit not the Ancient Egyptian god Ptaḥ, as Blažek 2010 claims; van Binsbergen in press (g). There is probably also a link with the Biblical Onan (*Genesis* 38:9) who cast his sperm to the Earth rather than allowing it to impregnate his levirate partner, – and cf. Oan[nes], the primal god of Creation associated with Southern Mesopotamia but in fact mainly attested in a Syro-Palestinian Hellenistic environment (Cory 1828); referring to Temple 1976, Oppenheimer suggests that Oannes may be a symbolic of Sunda penetration.

³⁷⁵ Persistent claims insist on Ancient Egyptian influence upon New Guinea (Perry 1923; Anonymous, Kariong, with references), even to the extent of claiming the existence of recognisable hieroglyphic inscriptions. The latter are easy to fake and may be forgeries. There is a hint of the story of Phaeton (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II) in the New Guinea myth cited here., but as leg child (cf. Seth?) of a divine dolphin (Leviathan / Yam / Neith? or cf. Biblical Jonah in the book of that name?) he has no obvious Ancient Egyptian or Ancient Near Eastern avatar. There is also affinity with the myth of Zeus scorching his mistress Semele to death while she was pregnant with Dionysus, and of the Japanese primal goddess Izanami being scorched at the birth of Kagutsuchi / Fire (van Binsbergen 2009 / 2017, with references; and 2012, where such scorching is interpreted as one element producing the other within the widespread cosmology of the cyclical transformation of elements.

9	Africa, North East: Ancient Egypt	the god Seth / Sutekh ³⁷⁶	born from his mother's side; Bonnet 1952: 702 f. ; Plutarch, <i>De Iside</i> , 12; Seth is a god of the desert fringes, the wilderness, and foreign peoples ; from the treaty concluded between the Hittite king Hattusil and the Egyptian king Ramses II it is clear that Seth is also a Hittite god. From the Early Dynastic period he was already venerated in the Delta (Bonnet 1952: 705 – thus corroborating the continuity between the Delta and West Asia; cf. Pyramid texts , see Seawright n.d.; Mercer Pyramid Texts: Utterance 222 §205a-b
10	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Pegasus	Perseus decapitated Medusa and the winged horse Pegasus sprang forth, along with his brother Chrysaor, in human form, both sired by Poseidon; <i>Hesiod, Theogony 280 f.</i>
11	Africa, Southern: Tswana	Tintibane	Brown 1926; Brown describes for the Tswana a pantheon that I find to display extensive Pelasgian / Aegean affinities
12	America, North: Algonquins (Hurons, Seneca, Iroquois)	Malsum	Cotterell 1989: 219; brother to Glooscap killed his mother by being born from her armpit ³⁷⁷
13	Asia, West, Bible World	Eve	born from Adam's rib; <i>Genesis 2:21 f.</i>
14	Africa, Central	woman created from knee of man; cf. Adam and Eve !	Willis 1994: 22
15	Europe, South East: Ancient Greece	Pegasus	Perseus decapitated Medusa and Chrysaor sprang forth, along with his equine brother Pegasus , both sired by Poseidon; <i>Hesiod, Theogony 280 f.</i>
16	India	Indra	sprang from his mother's side in full armour (cf. Athena, from her father's head); Perry 1885; Gonda 1943: 312
17	Asia, West: Iran	hero bursting from his mother's side	Omidstalar 1984

Table 13.1. Referenced attestations of the leg-child mytheme

³⁷⁶ Another unusual birth is that of the Ancient Egyptian god  Thot, who allegedly was conceived when Sethanally raped Horus; not only is the insemination (and birth?) channel unusual here, the case also claims pregnancy in, and birth from, a male *body*; although by other accounts Thot was born from Seth's head (see above, footnote to ch. 3). Such 'hysterical' gender reversions are not uncommon in Ancient Egyptian mythology. Striking examples are when the male primal god Atum produces the first (divine) creatures through an act of masturbation (cf. previous footnote), or when humankind is considered to be 'the tears of the [male] Sun god Re^c – claiming a procreative function that in natural reality is reserved for women. I take it thatsuch a reversion is part of the gender reversion that, all over the Extended Fertile Crescent, takes place in the Bronze Age – when previously dominant goddesses are supplanted by male celestial gods, and banned to the women's quarters, the spinning room (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 6.4, p. 142). In Babylonia, the Sun god Marduk is a similar case: in order to prove his ability to lead the gods in battle against the destructive female water / chaos goddess Tiamat, Marduk is to produce a garment by the sheer power of his word – another appropriation of a female productive rerognative.

³⁷⁷ A similar case of a child killing his mother at birth is that the Japanese Fire god Kagutsuchi, who even though born along the normal passage, killed his mother Izanami by burning her genitals at birth (cf. van Binsbergen 2017; also cf. the Ancient Indian Fire god Agni (Gonda 1943: 312), while in Uralic mythology a similar role is reserved for Iron as a mythical being. (Holmberg 1927; Tamminen 1928). These are East-West transcontinental continuities for which however a Sunda interpretation seems anachronistic.

Not exactly a Leg Child, but another variation on the theme of an unusual relation between unborn child and its mother, we find in traditions about the Buddha (Beck 1961): the unborn Bodhisattva rests in the body of his mother Maya, or daily descends into that body, where (in exaggeration of the actual, biological separation of a foetus from its mother's body in mammals including humans) he is surrounded by a screen of beryl (a precious stone) in order to prevent all possible pollution; and denying the pivotal nurturative relationship between the mother and the foetus in the womb (the refusal to accept food from someone else is a major constitutive aspect of the high religious status of Brahminhood in Indian cultures), Brahma feeds him regularly one drop of honey, so powerful that no other person could taste from it without perishing.

The implausible claims of Egyptian presence in Oceania and in Australia would be one – albeit counter-paradigmatic! – way to account for East West parallels between the Indo-Pacific / Oceania on the one hand, and the western Old World on the other, without recourse to the Sunda Hypothesis.

Let us note that the Leg-Child mytheme is fairly heterogeneous: producing a child from the skull (Zeus/Athena) is quite different from producing one from the thigh (Zeus / Dionysus).

If we can resign ourselves to treat the attestations – despite their manifest heterogeneity – as constituting one consistent category, what strikes us in general is the *paucity* of attestations, making any interpretation hazardous³⁷⁸. With so few attestations, it is dangerous to propose a historical reconstruction. However, an historical reconstruction in Sunda terms would best fit both the paucity and the far-flung distribution – albeit that such an explanation forces us to consider, once more, *the possibility of trans-Atlantic myth diffusion*. Considering the time depth of attestation it is also possible to think of an Egyptocentric emergence and diffusion – however obsolete that is as a paradigm.

In principle, however, regardless of the actual geographic distribution, a Sunda effect may also be contemplated because of the fact that, with the possible exception of the N. American Algonquins, all attestations could be interpreted as lying on the path (*e.g.* the African cases), or rather at the far ends, (Marshall Islands; and Papua) of the hypothetical Sunda migration (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c). The mytheme of the leg child is best attested in Ancient Greece (birth of Athena, Dionysus, Erichthonius, Pegasus), which could be regarded as the far end of Sunda influence (either through the Persian Gulf, or up the Mediterranean eastward from the Pillars of Hercules / Gibraltar) – note the genealogical and topographic linkages between these


³⁷⁸ #13.2. TABOOED WORDS IN LONG-RANGE *BOREAN RECONSTRUCTION? In my recent book on Durkheim (2018) I have used the reconstructed *Borean linguistic material (*cf.* Starostin & Starostin 1998–2008) in order to access the oldest attainable layers of religious imagination. Here we have to reckon with the factor of *tabooed words and concepts*, which are the more likely to occur the more sacred the items in question were at the time. (Incidentally, the same argument would in principle fling in the face of my claim, repeatedly made also in the present book, as to the non-conceptualisation of Heaven in the Upper Palaeolithic on the grounds that the reconstructed *Borean lexicon barely contains one word for Heaven.) The relative paucity of Leg Child attestations may readily be interpreted in terms of the relative late appearance of this mytheme (hence my proposal to situate it in Neolithic or Bronze-Age times), but we may also suspect that the mytheme is in fact much older but that it was so tabooed that it could scarcely be transmitted to posterity – except in specific contexts such as a secret initiatory cult where it would be effectively shielded from transgenerational transmission, or in a secularising context such as that of classical Greece, where the rational deconstruction of religious beliefs reached relatively high levels.

mythical characters which are compatible with a common maritime connection: Athena as implied companion of the sea god Poseidon at Athens; Athena as a sea god in her own right (as argued in van Binsbergen 2011; Pegasus as son of Poseidon and Medusa; Erichthonius as virtual child of Athena at Athens; Dionysus with multiple maritime including pirate connotations. And even the Algonquins might be included here: the mighty St Laurence River connects them with the Atlantic Ocean. However, when below we turn to consider the actual global distribution of the Leg Child mytheme, we shall see that there are not enough East attestations to make a Sunda explanation very attractive. The Sunda-based reconstruction may be in line with Oppenheimer 1998 – yet the idea initially struck me as preposterous that, although totally unattested in Sundaland itself, the mytheme could have originated there and could have caused the numerous attestations at the other end of the globe in the Egyptian / Aegean region. On second thoughts the situation is not so preposterous as all that: if the Proto-Indonesians fled the flooding Sundaland at the beginning of the Holocene, c. 10 ka BP, and if this process continued for some millennia, the likelihood that their cultural, religious and mythological traits may still be detectable in recognisable form in modern Indonesia is as small as the likelihood that the inhabitants of North-western Europe still demonstrably speak the language and pursue the rituals of the megalith-builders that preceded them by several millennia, or that the language and culture of the Ancient Sumerians still demonstrably, strikingly, determine the present-day socio- cultural landscape of Southern Iraq. Remote and scattered echoes is the best we may expect in such situations, e.g in the form of a Pre-Indo-European substrate in North-western Europe. Sunda is a construct, and its specific traits cannot be readily reconstructed from a contemplation of present-day South East Asia (even though the latter assumption was Oppenheimer's 1998 leading thought, endearingly inspired by his love for his Indonesian partner).

Admittedly, it is a point that only late in my preoccupation with Sunda registered with me to its full extent, and that therefore could have received more explicit attention in this book's argument. Part of the Sunda Hypothesis is that the mariners carrying Proto-Sunda genes as well as Proto-Sunda linguistic and cultural traits, were on the run for the flood inundating their homeland in South East Asia. Over the past decade and a half I have usually assumed that Sunda traits would have remained more or less detectable in present-day South East Asia. However, this is a fairly naïve assumption. The Sunda outmigration is supposed to have taken place mainly before the emergence of the Indus Valley cultures, Sumer, Ancient Egypt – proposed plausible destinations of Sunda impact. However, whereas we can today rather fairly reliably reconstruct the languages spoken in Ancient Egypt, Sumer and the Indus by the Early and Middle Bronze Age, this knowledge is entirely due to scholarly research of the last two centuries, before which no reliable data were available to scholars for Egypt, and Sumer and the Indus were even totally forgotten. When the British held sway in India, less than two centuries ago, the existence of Buddhism on Indian soil, and the birth place of the Buddha (on the India-Nepal border) had likewise gone into oblivion, across a time interval of scarcely two millennia (Allen 2002). Minoan civilisation had to be rediscovered from scratch scarcely a century ago, across a time interval of barely three millennia (Evans 1921-1964). The largely Basque background of the North Sea populations of the British Isles and the Netherlands could only be reconstructed by state-of-the-art molecular genetics research (Oppenheimer 2006) – all that remained were slight differences in local dialect and folklore in separate fishing villages scattered along the Dutch North Sea coast and Zuiderzee / IJsselmeer coast. What I am saying is that, *precisely if the Sunda Hypothesis cuts wood (and with Oppenheimer 1998, Dick-Read 2005, and my 2019a and 2020c contributions we have considerable reason to assume*

that it does!), we must not cherish the illusion of finding recognisable, present-day Indonesian traits at postulated Sunda destinations in Western Eurasia; nor finding, in present-day South East Asia, identifiable and convincing West Eurasian traits plausibly attributable to Sunda impact upon West Eurasia. The Sunda people may have fled without leaving manifest genetic, cultural and linguistic traces in their former homeland – where after the dramatic rise of the sea level hence massive flooding of previously inhabited sites, and after half a dozen millennia, such traces would have become unrecognisable by cultural and linguistic drift, the arrival of dominant newcomers, etc. In this way the concept of *Phantom Voyagers* (Dick-Read 2005) becomes a true shibboleth of Sunda studies. We are beginning to understand why, whatever lists of genetic and cultural indicators of Sunda we may be tempted to draw up, in the last analysis our data will fit such systematics only very imperfectly.

The Leg Child motif may also be interpreted in a very different way. In reconstructed *Borean, there are two pairs of consonantal homonyms that refer to both ‘morning’ and ‘leg’ or ‘thigh’. This suggests the possibility that the Leg Child mytheme rests on a later misunderstanding of what originally was meant to be a ‘Child dedicated in the Morning’. Let me elaborate.

#13.3. A NEWBORN CHILD'S DEDICATION TO THE MORNING SUN. Although more direct indications in the form of rock art depictions are so far lacking,³⁷⁹ there are distributional indications that in the Central Asian Upper Palaeolithic (when and where African and Amerind cultural and linguistic strands had not yet separated) new-born children were dedicated to the early-morning Sun. Very much later, the custom is mentioned in the Hindu classic *Institutes of Vishnu* (1880-1910 / 1988, ed. Jolly, vol. VII, p. 114), as well as attested in Ancient Egypt (Stricker 1963-1989; Renggli 2000). It is also described for Bantu-speaking South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 1988, 1992: *Likota Lya Bankoya*, 25:1, where the Nkoya King Kayimbila (early 19th c. CE) thus dedicates his newborn child in the morning Sun; cf. Mutumba 1972). Here we hit upon another sub-Saharan African / North American parallel: also newborn babies among the Hopi people, South-western USA, North America (Niethammer 1995), and in general neophytes in the Dené-speaking Amerindian female puberty initiation (which ritually re-enacts birth) are thus dedicated. Among the North American Pawnee Indians (whose language belongs to the Caddoan language family of Amerind, far removed from the Dené family which specialists claim to link up with Sinocaucasian), a girl captured to be sacrificed to the Morning Star (Venus) is dedicated to this celestial body as soon as she is captured (Linton 1926). In *Borean times we are presumably still before the emergence of the ‘upward gaze’, and instead of dedication to the Sun, we may read ‘dedication to the Primal Waters in their ‘Above’ aspect, i.e. to the Sky’. With so few attestations so widely apart, it is virtually impossible to interpret the distribution historically. However, Sun cults (see my monograph in press; with illuminating (!) distribution maps) on this topic, revisiting the work of the arch-diffusionist Grafton Elliot Smith after over a century) were once major aspects of religious systems worldwide, they may be traceable back to Pandora’s Box (as NarCom3, ‘What Is In Heaven?’), and – at least in the Mediterranean region during the Bronze Age – it is only with the ascent of male celestial gods with other specialisations than the Sun (e.g. Lightning, Thunder, Rain) that sun gods came to be relegated to a secondary place in the pantheon – which is where Helios (Aegean), and Surya (South and South East Asia) find themselves in historical times – whereas the Egyptian Sun god  Amun Re^c continued to dominate the religious scene until well after the New Kingdom.

³⁷⁹ Solar elements are abundant in Central Asian rock art, for a few examples cf. van Binsbergen 2019: 348 f., but none have so far been interpreted, as far as I know, in terms of infants being dedicated to the morning Sun.

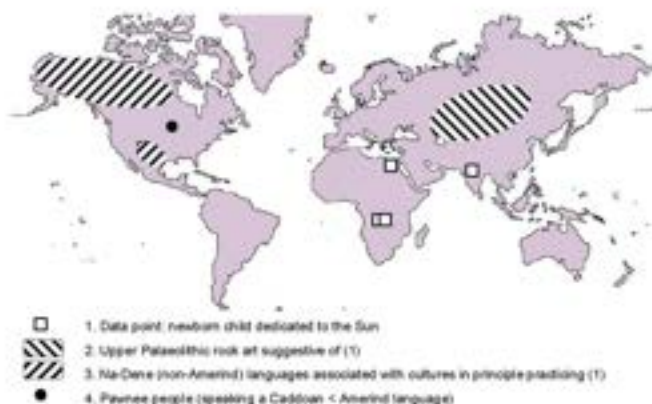


Fig. 13.2. Global distribution (insofar as known) of a newborn child's dedication to the morning Sun

The myth of the Leg Child might then have arisen because of deliberate punning, or accidental confusion, or the effects of a linguistic taboo, of the two meanings involved: 'morning' and 'leg'. Cf. *Borean:

*(CVKV) _n , with various meanings		*(PVKTV) _n , with various meanings	
*(CVKV) ₁	'arm, leg'	*(PVKTV) ₁	thigh
*(CVKV) ₂	'morning, evening'	*(PVKTV) ₂	morning
*(CVKV) ₃	'white'		
*(CVKV) ₄	'dirt, faeces' (possibly a paired opposite with (CVKV) ₃)		

Table 13.2. Possible *Borean background of the leg child concept

The distribution is very similar to that of NarCom12a (Fig. 12.1), and the same overall argument applies, including the suggestion that the origin may lie in the New World.



Fig. 13.3. Global distributions of the mytheme of the Leg Child (NarCom12b)

However, the limited number of attestations on a global scale, and their extreme concentration in the Egyptian / Aegean region, suggests the mytheme to be of fairly recent origin, i.e. belonging to the CTTs VII or VIII. Accepting the unmistakable affinities between the Tswana pantheon as described by Brown 1926, and the Egyptian / Aegean pantheons, and considering as remotely plausible the claims as to Egyptian / Phoenician impact upon the New World (Heyerdahl 1952; Gordon 1968) and upon the Indo Pacific and Oceanian regions (Perry 1923), we obtain as possible historical reconstruction:



LEGEND: 1. attestation of trait; 2. proposed diffusion; 3. as (2) but even more tentative; 4. CTT

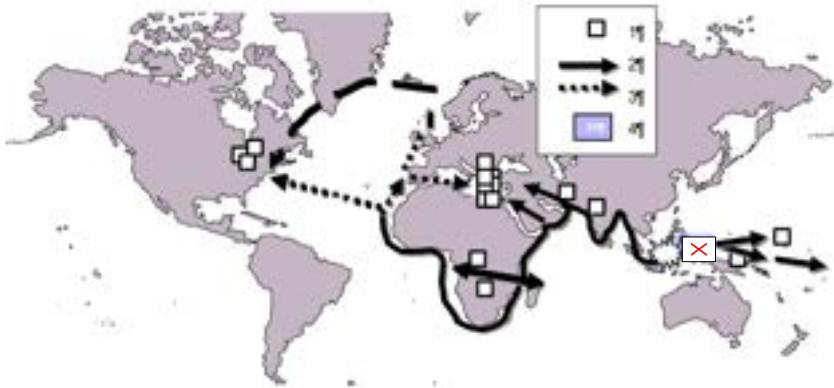
Fig. 13.4. Global distributions of the mytheme of the Leg Child (NarCom12b) from an epicentre situated at CTT VII or VIII.

The abundance of Egyptian / Aegean attestations, as against the paucity of Oceanian ones (and none from the Indo-Pacific region) should not deter us (for reasons given above: total outmigration from the homeland half a dozen millennia or longer ago does not necessarily leave detectable traces in the homeland!) to explain the global distribution of the Leg Child mytheme in Sunda terms; the following diagram is an attempt:



Fig. 13.5. Global distributions of the mytheme of the Leg Child (NarCom12b) from a Sunda epicentre

In conclusion, the global distribution of the Leg-Child mytheme to a limited extent warrants an interpretation in terms of Sunda transmission.



LEGEND: 1. attestation of trait; 2. proposed diffusion; 3. as (2) but even more putative; 4. CITI

Fig. 13.6. Explanation of the global distribution of the mytheme of the Leg Child (NarCom12b) in Sunda terms, as if emanating from CITI IX – despite the paucity of recent attestations of this NarCom in South East Asia / the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter 14. The Cosmic Egg in global cultural history (2011 / 2020)³⁸⁰

14.1. *The Cosmic Egg: Introduction*³⁸¹

The mytheme of the Cosmic Egg is a particular version of mythical cosmogony: it claims that initially, all of reality was packed into one concentrated restricted location (egg, ovoid, *etc.*), from which subsequently the world came into being. It presents a vision of cosmogony, in which the entire future world *in statu nascendi* is considered to be wrapped up in one self-contained unit, which unfolds at the moment of cosmogony. In fact, the hypothesis of the Big Bang (Berger 1984; Hawking 1988), today the dominant mainstream paradigm in natural-science cosmology, may be considered the most recent version of the mytheme under study. Its wide appeal and impact upon the collective imagination may have mythical proportions; still, it is not unchallenged, the main Modern natural-science alternative being the *Steady-State Theory* of Fred Hoyle c.s. (Hoyle 1948), according to which new matter constantly comes into being at all times and places.

Birds abound in the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans, and some of these bird-related mythemes may be reconstructed to go back all the way to Pandora's Box, *i.e.* the shared cultural including mythological heritage which Anatomically Modern Humans developed and circulated inside Africa ever since their emergence there c. 200 ka BP, and which subsequently was transmitted to the other continents (Asia, in the first instance) and there

³⁸⁰ Revised version of: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2020, 'The Cosmic Egg in global cultural history: A revised distributional exercise in comparative mythology', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/Cosmic_Egg_revised.pdf

³⁸¹ This argument was initially intended as a chapter in my book *Sunda Pre- and Proto-historical Continuity Between Asia and Africa* (2020c) but could not be accommodated there for reasons of space. The overall background of that book's argument is taken for granted here, and cannot be set out in detail here. The reader desiring clarification on specific theoretical and methodological points must be referred to the 2020 book.

was further transformed and innovated. Birds lay eggs, and with the prominence of mythical birds in early mythology it is conceivable that the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg also emerged early, and might have been counted as belonging to Pandora's Box. However, in the course of decades I have developed a rule of thumb for assigning a mytheme to Pandora's Box: *it may be considered to belong there if it is attested in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea, and Australia – for in an early phase of the Out-of-Africa Exodus, 80-60 ka BP, this is the route Anatomically Modern Humans are likely to have taken.* Assessed by this rule of thumb, the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg does not belong in Pandora's Box and must have had a rather later origin, for although it occurs widely in Africa, it is – to the best of my knowledge – not attested in the other three locations. It is however sporadically reported in India and even more sporadically in Indonesia (Chatterjee 2011), into which New Guinea has been incorporated since the 1960s CE.

In the version of my analysis of the Cosmic Egg which has circulated on the Internet for a decade (van Binsbergen 2011 m), I consider the possibility of a Sunda epicentre and transmission. Besides a number of attestations in Oceania, and in East and South Asia, the lack of attestations of this mytheme in the Americas suggests that this mytheme was not part (*cf.* Table 8.1, above) of the common cultural heritage of the speakers of the Peripheral Branch of disintegrating *Borean³⁸² the three linguistic macrophyla of Austric, Amerind, and the African language groups (Nigercongo, Nilosaharan and Khoisan) that continued, for millennia, to constitute a coherent, lexically identifiable cluster after *Borean had begun to disintegrate c. 25 ka BP. This suggests either of the following two possibilities:

1. The mytheme of the Cosmic Egg emerged in Asia (which I also consider – admittedly counter-paradigmatically and potentially hegemonically – the cradle of African languages) ca. 20 ka BP, before the hiving off of Amerind languages, but although initially taken to the New World was eclipsed or replaced there under the influence of other, more dominant mythemes. Or, alternatively,
2. The mytheme of the Cosmic Egg was never characteristic of the entire Peripheral Branch of disintegrating *Borean, and was not already taken to Africa by demic diffusion in the course of the initial phase of the Back-into-Africa migration,³⁸³ but was developed inside only one of these resulting macrophyla, notably Austric, and considerably later transmitted to Africa on the wings of Sunda expansion – even though formally we may consider the Sunda expansion another, relatively late, phase in the Back-into-Africa migration.

The distributional data favour interpretation (2). The mytheme of the Cosmic Egg is well attested in Africa, mainly in the coastal areas – which is compatible with a Sunda link. The series of attestations from South Asia, the Iranian Plateau, Ancient Mesopotamia and An-




³⁸² As repeatedly discussed in the present book, *Borean is the name which modern long-range historical linguists such as Starostin and Fleming gave to a hypothetical language construct, supposed to have been spoken in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic (ca. 25 ka BP), and available for reconstruction since numerous traces of its lexicon have been argued to have been retained among the systematically, intersubjectively reconstructed protoforms of several linguistic macrophyla (largest arguable linguistic groups. *e.g.* Eurasiatic, Sinocaucasian, Khoisan) spoken today. Over 1150 *Borean roots have now been identified. They may be gleaned from Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, and have been listed and discussed in van Binsbergen 2018: Appendix I, pp. 515 f.

³⁸³ *Cf.* Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004.

cient Egypt (as well as the Ancient Aegean, which was culturally dependent upon both Egypt and Mesopotamia) are again compatible with the idea of Sunda transmission – although there is also room for West Asia as an epicentre in its own right. Sufficient reason to include the Cosmic Egg as another mytheme inviting interpretation in terms of East-West parallels with a possible Sunda background – such an interpretation I have amply given in my 2020 book on *Sunda*.

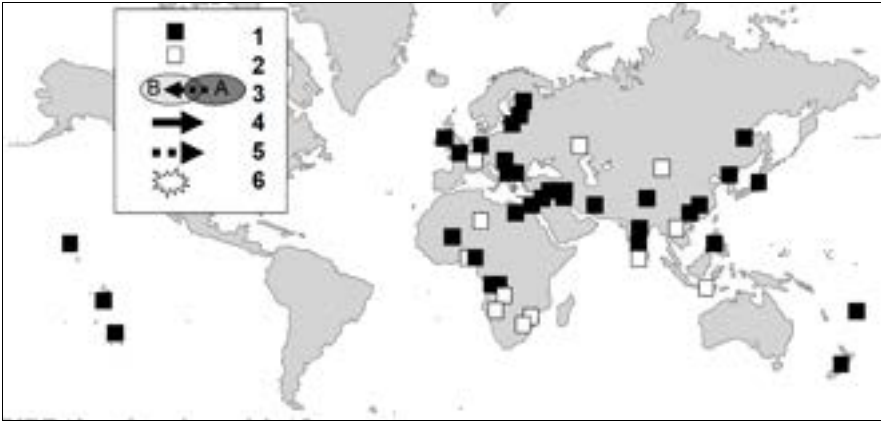
14.2. Referenced distributional data

The following Table 14.1 presents some of the more salient attestations of our mytheme world-wide:

No.	Location and period	Reference	Remarks
1	Dahomey (Benin)	Van der Sluijs 2004;	
2	NW Europe, Early Modern	Ashliman 1998-2005	Grimm / Aarne type 302, The Giant Whose Heart Was in an Egg.
3	Xhosa (Rep. South Africa)	Van der Sluijs 2004;	
4	Yaka , Congo	Devisch 1988	
5	Zulu (Rep. South Africa)	Van der Sluijs 2004	
6	Angola, Sub-Saharan Africa, modern	Rodrigues de Areia 1985	Egg in divinatory set represented
7	Bali, modern	Brinkgreve 1997	Implied in sacrifice
8	Buddhism	Newall 1967	
9	China, Ancient	Christie 1968; Cotterell 1989: 98; Willis 1994: 90; Girardot 1976, 1977, 1978; Yu 1981; Liu 1991; Neville 1985; Johnson 1981	Pan-ku 盘古 [cf: Tiamat, Leviathan] out of whose dead and fragmented body the world was formed , still venerated among the Chinese minorities Miao, Yao and Li; however, a rotting body is not exactly the same as a (cosmic)egg
10	Dogon, Mali	Griaule & Dieterlen 1965; van Beek 1992; Zuesse 1975; Horton 1967; Van der Sluijs 2004; Fernandez 1967;	
11	Druids, Ancient	Moorehead 1885	
12	Egypt, Ancient	Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994; Cotterell 1989: 168; Gardiner 1994; Devitt 2005,	Great Cackler; Thot hatching; 467: 'In Dyn XIX or before  Gardiner no. F51 [but 180 degrees rotated] changes into the egg  H8 and subsequently  $\text{Xoi}+\text{H8}$ becomes a generic determinant for goddesses; egg especially Hermopolis [= Thot, Ogdoad / Eightsome
13	Eurasia, Upper Palaeolithic	Rappenglueck 1999; Gimbutas 1982, 1991; Eliade 1976	shamanic connotations of wan, Egg, Dioscuri, Leda, Zeus
14	Fang (Gabon)	Van der Sluijs 2004;	
15	Finland, Ancient	Cotterell 1989: 217; Puhvel 1971; Abdurrezzak 2019	Cotterell 1989: 217: egg; also Finnish mythology: Luonnotar, daughter of the Creation god, mated with bird, produced egg ; from this egg emerged Heaven, Earth, Sun, and

			Moon
16	Ancient Aegean	Kerenyi 1945; Pollard 1948; Cornford 1934	Dioscuri, Helena, Hera [fertilised egg from Cronus] ; and from Presocratic philosophers onwards
17	Hawaii		The god Paka'a, inventor of the sail? Cf. Cretan Minos with Daedalus; however, the egg connection is merely implied here
18	India, Ancient	Cottrell 1989: 186 ; Penner 1966; Newall 1967	Newall 1967: 186: Vinata, mother of Aruna ('Dawn') lays two eggs, Aruna comes from the broken egg, hence is only half (cf. the widespread Luwe mytheme; and the Dioscuri / Leda
19	Iran, Ancient	Russell 1993; Zaehner 1940	Mithras, Zervan
20	Japan, modern		This is an uncertain attestation, however, often implied or mentioned in passing in literature on East Asia and Buddhism; also Bon continuity
21	Korea	Song 1974	
22	Lithuania	Strajlys & Klimka 1971	
23	Mandaeans, Ancient (Southern Iraq)	Kraeling 1933	
24	Nanai people, Amur, Eastern Siberia	Sem <i>n. d.</i>	
25	New Zealand		Uncertain attestation
26	NW Europe, Medieval and Early Modern	Bacon 1969; Jung 1987: 214, 291 n 25	
27	Zetterberg 1979	Philosopher's egg, alchemy	
28	Pangwe (Gabon),	Van der Sluijs 2004	
29	Philippines, modern	Demetrio 1968, 1969	
30	Post-Neolithic civilisations of the Mediterranean, South and East Asia, and Africa	Loeb 1956, Baumann 1955; von Sicard 1956	
31	Sahara, Neolithic, fertile	Lhote 1959: Fig. 47	Strong suggestion of Primordial Egg depicted
32	Sri Lanka, modern	Feddema 1995	Egg in sacrifice
33	Syro-Palestine, Ancient	Cotterell 1989: 223, 143; West 1994; Magness 2001; Schmidt 1921,	Mot (Canaan) Lord Death, born from primal egg from Air and Chaos; Ba'al is invited by Mot, dies in the Underworld; Anat brings him back, killing Mot; Ogre motif; [perhaps Og, riding the Ark, is a variant of the Cosmic Egg] ; Enoch text as mediated through Ancient Slavic
34	Tahiti, Oceania	Cottrell 1989: 164	Tāroa
35	Thailand	Heinze 1977	Implied in sacrifice
36	Tibet, Ancient	Richardson 1968, Snellgrove 1967	
37	Yoruba (Nigeria, Benin)	Lowie 1937	

Table 14.1. Attestations of the myth of the Cosmic Egg world-wide



LEGEND (also applies to the maps below)

1. mytheme of Cosmic Egg attested; 2. or merely implied, or uncertain; 6. proposed region of origin; 3. subsequent diffusion into the Eurasian Neolithic Proto-Pelasgian Realm' (A); the latter's subsequent transformation constitutes the Bronze Age 'Pelasgian Realm' (B); 4. proposed spread from Late Bronze Age onward; 5. broken line = putative; also cf. Witzel 2006

Fig. .14.1. Global distribution map of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg

14.3. Discussion of the global distribution of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg

The distribution shown here has much in common with that of the spiked-wheel trap, which I have elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2010; this book ch. 4) shown to be an 'index fossil' of transcontinental continuities within the 'Pelasgian Realm'³⁸⁴:

- Considerable incidence in sub-Saharan Africa
- In evidence in Egypt and Graeco-Roman Antiquity
- Sporadic in Asia
- Absent from the New World, Australia and New Guinea

The distribution of the Cosmic-Egg motif, however, differs from that of the spiked-wheel trap in the following respects:

- The Cosmic Egg has attestations in Oceania
- Half of the African attestations of the Cosmic Egg are only uncertain, partial or implied
- Attestations of the Cosmic Egg in Uralic and in Baltic < Indo-European speaking Scandinavia (Finland, Lithuania), where there are no attestations of the spiked-wheel trap
- Asian attestations of the Cosmic Egg are not in the far interior but rather in coastal regions; this may be due to chance but might also be due to overseas diffusion e.g.

³⁸⁴ Cf. van Binsbergen, 2010d, 2010e; For my 'Pelasgian Hypothesis', further see van Binsbergen 2010k, in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, and elsewhere in the present book.

along Sunda lines

- *Asian attestations are to some extent compatible with a distribution on the wings of the transmission and use of chariot technology, from 2000 BCE onward, although a coastal maritime spread also seems to have contributed*

The restricted distribution is indicative of this motif being relatively young, Neolithic or later (also the central Pacific was only populated a few ka BP, from East Asia –which in this case is the most likely path – or South East Asia)..

The African attestations are, in my opinion, not indicative of an African origin but, like the spiked-wheel trap, mankala, the Unilateral Mythical Figure, and the linguistic macrophyllum of Nigercongo (probably also that of Nilosaharan), are indicative of a rapid spread of a recently introduced feature over the culturally receptive African continent,³⁸⁵ in the context of the Back-into-Africa migration from Central to West Asia

The attestations in Uralic-speaking Northern Europe are in line with the considerable likelihood that *the proposed region of origin as reconstructed according to the Sunda Model (see below, Figs 14.3 and 14.4) was situated near the region where the Uralic linguistic family emerged and was spoken in its earliest handful of millennia* (Fortescue 1998; mapped in Fig. 4.2 of van Binsbergen 2020, also see this book, Fig. 8.2, above); the Uralic traits, though fragmented (e.g. the royal diadem, the skull complex, shamanism, and probably also the veneration of white aquatic birds as epiphanies of the Creator Goddess associated with the Primal Waters), can be argued to have percolated throughout the proposed region of origin of the Cosmic Egg motif, and from there to have sporadically reached the outlying parts of the distribution area shown above

However, if we wish to insist (which seems ill-advised) on an exclusively Pelasgian reading of the distribution pattern, the extensions of the distribution into the Altaic language

³⁸⁵ #14.1. 'CULTURALLY RECEPTIVE' A POTENTIALLY HEGEMONIC TERM, WHEN APPLIED TO AFRICA AND TO EUROPE? Why do I speak of 'culturally receptive'? Am I finally, after decades of effective mimicry, dropping the mask, and allowing a slip of the pen reveal my real nature as a hegemonically-orientated representative of the North Atlantic? Am I implying here that it is a congenital feature of Africans to be culturally receptive, in other words, to be on the passive side of global cultural initiative?! Far from it, as the case of Ancient Egypt (one of the world's most powerful, most impressive, and longest-lasting civilisations) may sufficiently demonstrate. The point lies in the prevalence of specific modes of production, and their succession. As the splendid civilisations of the Neolithic, still fertile and well-watered, Sahara indicate (e.g. Lhote 1959), and as is commonly acknowledged (e.g. Ehret 1993; Krzyzaniak & Kobusiewicz 1984), Africa did take active part in the Neolithic revolution towards food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; some domesticated animals (e.g. zebu cattle) and some food crops (e.g. sesame) have been agreed to derive from Africa. However, this does not take away the fact that until well into the 1st mill. BCE most (I am not saying: all) African societies were engaged in hunting and gathering as their principal mode of production, in the absence of extensive permanent settlement, of highly developed class distinctions, of statehood, and of elaborate traditions of the visual and performative arts that thrive under the complexification of society. The logocentric package of writing, the state, organised religion, and proto-science was the mainstay of Ancient Egypt and of the Ancient societies of the Ancient Near East, South Asia, East Asia and Meso America, but (largely because of the difficulty of realising surplus production on Africa's relatively depleted, old soils; and not because of any illusory deficiency of Africans as such) that package was slow to penetrate to the other parts of Africa, and to firmly and lastingly establish itself there. When it did so, it found socio-cultural niches not yet saturated with resistance-prone local equivalents, and could fill them. Hence my use of the term 'culturally receptive'. When the North Atlantic region became saturated with African dancing and musical rhythms in the course of the 20th c. CE, it was in same way being culturally receptive.

realm (the Nanai of extreme eastern Siberia; and Japan) might be in line with an eastbound diffusion from a Central to West Asian region – for, ever since the invention of horse riding, and especially since the invention of the spoked-wheel chariot (Kazakhstan, 4 ka BP) the Steppe region has been a fairly continuous culture region and linguistic area, with relatively easy and rapid communication East-West and *vice versa*. Needless to say that the same trans-Steppe line of transmission could have brought our mytheme from East Asia to West Asia, as a terrestrial rather than nautical Sunda connection.

The 盤古 Pan-Ku myth (which the prominent comparative linguist and comparative mythologist Václav Blažek 2010 considers to be of Indo-European origin) is alleged to be conceived by Taoist Chinese monks around the beginning of the Common Era, and, being relatively recent, can have accommodated influences from the above diffusion streams. If this were the case, there would be no reason to assume that the Pan-Ku myth belonged to the original heritage of Sino-Tibetan speakers in East Asia. However, that myth is to this day cherished by the Miao, Li and Yao minorities of South China – which might be indicative of a Sunda connection, or a Sunda epicentric origin. These minorities are also associated with Nu Wa 女媧 as a mythological Flood heroine.

Mithraic and Orphic cults in Graeco-Roman Antiquity, and their Iranian predecessors and sources, can be considered to have challenged the Cosmic-Egg motif that had taken shape probably under Sunda impact), presumably in Neolithic times, in West to Central Asia, and that also in more diffuse form (by demic diffusion) was spreading west (into West Asia, Egypt, and both sides of the Mediterranean) as part of the extension of the ‘Proto-Pelasgian’ Realm.

After these detached observations, let us proceed to try and interpret the global distribution of the Cosmic-Egg mytheme more systematically.

14.4. From distribution map to tentative historical reconstruction: Pelasgian and Sunda Model contrasted

The Sea Peoples constitute an enigmatic episode in the history of the Eastern and Central Mediterranean towards the Late Bronze Age (c. 1300 BCE); they destroyed the Hittite (Ḫatti) Empire and dealt a vicious blow to Egypt, yet – hailing from all over the Eastern and perhaps Central Mediterranean and with considerable differences in physical appearance, attire, weaponry – it is not immediately clear what was the basis on which they could effectively unite and mobilise into a formidable military force. Trying to find a cultural context in which the few puzzling detached fragments of evidence concerning Sea-Peoples culture, social organisation, and religion could find a meaningful place I proposed them to belong to what I called the Pelasgian Complex, a loose conglomerate of traits supposed to have emerged in West Asia during the Neolithic, and subsequently transformed and transmitted to the Mediterranean, from where it diffused on all directions of the compass by the Late Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011k, 2012, 2020, and in press (a)). Understandably, I immediately proceeded to interpret the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg as a Pelasgian trait (Fig. 14.2).

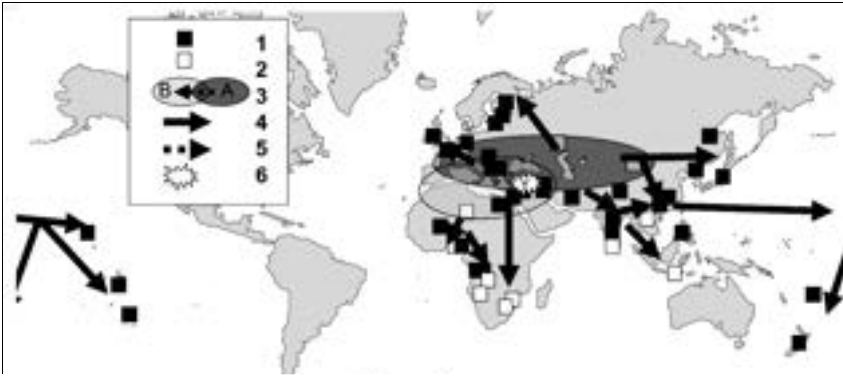


Fig. 14.2. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (Y) Pelasgian Model

While the Pelasgian interpretation certainly has its merits, the Sunda model leads to a totally different historical reconstruction, with an epicentre in continental South East Asia in the Early to Middle Holocene, and subsequent transmission to West Asia, Africa (especially the coastal regions), East Asia and Oceania, either overland, or by sea (Fig. 14.3). Most attestations of our mytheme, including the African ones, can be fairly well accounted for by this Sunda model. However, we are hard pressed to admit noticeable Sunda impact upon the North Sea, Scandinavia and Baltic regions of Europe – an idea that explicitly featured in Oppenheimer’s original Sunda argument (1998) with semi-circular axe blades invoked as – rather implausible – supportive evidence, but that must remain highly speculative.

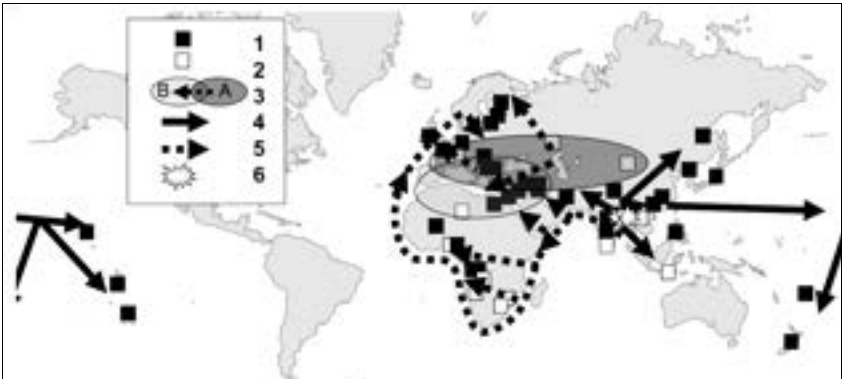


Fig. 14.3. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (X) Sunda Model

In the last analysis, therefore, it turns out that a combination of the Pelasgian and the Sunda model gives the best results for an historical reconstruction: after an origin in Sunda (X)

the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg is supposed to have landed in West Asia, and from both the original and the secondary epicentre it is supposed to have further diffused over Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania (Fig. 14.4).

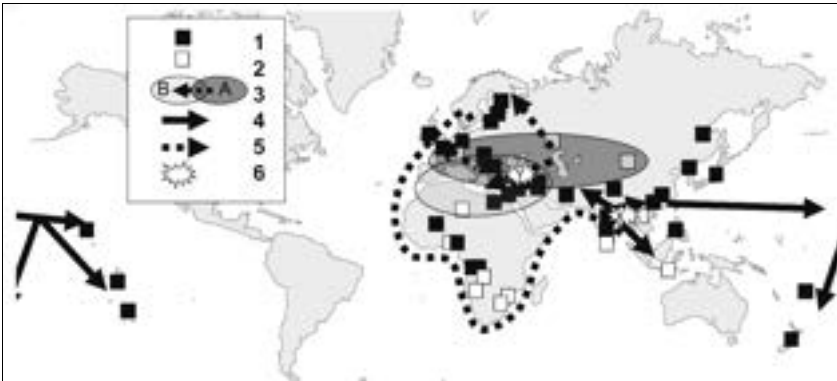


Fig. 14.4. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg: (X) Sunda Model as primary and subsequently (Y) Pelasgian model as secondary, with combined, intertwined diffusion effects

14.5. The Cosmic Egg mytheme: Conclusion

Despite the considerable merits of the Pelasgian Model as set out elsewhere, also in the present book, in the case of the mytheme of the Cosmic Egg I suggest that a combination of the Pelasgian model (as secondary) and a Sunda model (as primary) is the best fitting interpretation of the distributional evidence.

PART IV. A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH TO GLOBAL COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY

So far our approaches to comparative mythology in the chapters of this book have been fairly conventional and in line with the work of many of my colleagues. In the present section I propose to make a further step, and discuss what specifically *quantitative* approaches can do in this field – after already pioneering such approaches in an article with I published, with the collaboration of Mark Isaak, in 2008 in the journal; *Cosmos: Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society*.

Chapter 15. The heroes in Flood myths worldwide (2010)

Seeking to capture prehistoric modes of thought by means of quantitative contents analysis³⁸⁶

15.1. Introduction and main line of the argument

15.1.1. Flood and hero – an intersection of central themes

The Hero is a central theme in comparative mythology,³⁸⁷ and so are Flood myths – one of the few mythemes that can boast a near-global distribution (*cf.* Fig. 15.1).³⁸⁸ My aim in this chapter is to look at the intersection of these two themes, by considering the hero theme in Flood myths world-wide.

The comparative mythology of heroes was one of the set themes for the 4th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology. Such a theme fits well in Michael Witzel's overall, dichotomous perspective on long-range global mythological history: if the South / Gondwana mythologies *typically lack the Laurasian linear conception of history as well as the Lausian sustained story line*, by implication heroes would belong to the Laurasian realm and be absent from South / Gondwana mythologies. I happened to be among the IACM's Directors who endorsed the hero theme, but my intention, when contributing the following argument, was to explode the rigidity of Witzel's dichotomy by arguing that the heroes in Flood stories may not be epitomes of Laurasian (proto-transcendent) mythologising but simply expressions of the, immanent and (according to my reconstruc-

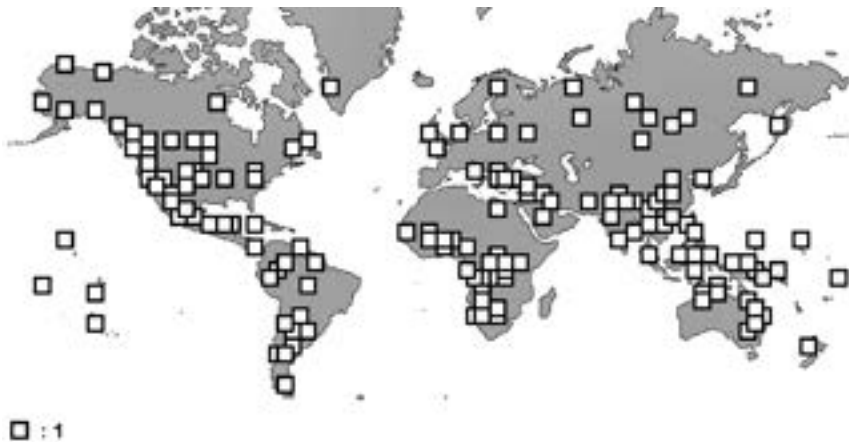
³⁸⁷ Dumézil 1965; de Vries 1978; Farnell 1921; Fontenrose 1980; Kerényi 1978; Jung 1991; Lévi-Strauss 1968; Tegnaeus 1950; Okpewho 1981; Ford 2000.

³⁸⁸ Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; Witzel 2010.

tions in *Before the Presocratics*, 2012) many millenia-old, worldview of the cyclical (as opposed to linear!) element transformation.

15.1.2. Via statistics to prehistory

My method will be somewhat unusual in the circle of comparative mythologists: rather than a close-reading of a limited set of primary mythical texts gleaned from ancient literatures or from ethnographic accounts, I will consider a worldwide corpus of Flood myths,³⁸⁹ standardised and summarised in a modern international language; the patterns I will discern in this material are informed not in the first place by an hermeneutical exercise based on extensive philological, literary-critical and ethnographic skills within a wider, intersubjective disciplinary domain – the method most of us used within the International Association for Comparative Mythology IACM – but they will be produced, blindly and indiscriminately, by statistical procedures, notably multivariate analysis and two-dimensional cross-tabulation.



sources include Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; Isaak 2006)

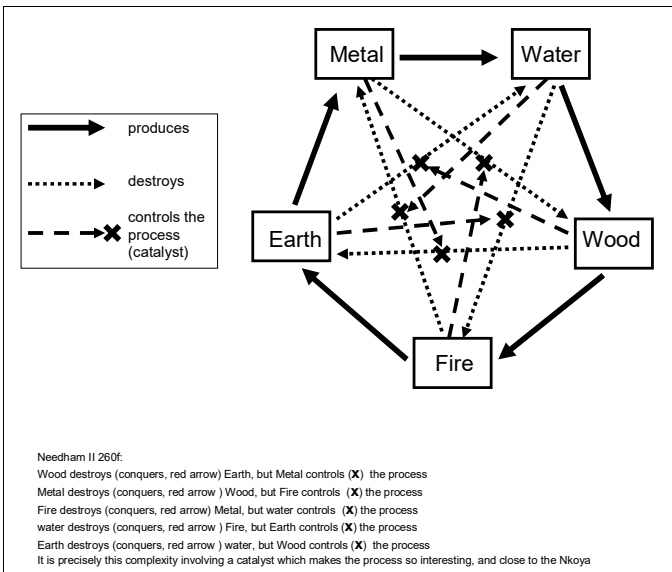
Fig. 15.1. Flood myth attested (=1) in historical times (all types and sources aggregated).

Yet my claim will be that these patterns – once they are subsequently subjected to hermeneutical interpretation – afford us considerable glimpses of insight into prehistoric modes of thought, and in the development of such patterns over time. Not only will this throw additional light on Flood myths – it will also help us put the concept of the Hero in perspective, both conceptually and across (pre-) history.

This chapter may be read as consisting of a first section in which the gist of the argument is al-

³⁸⁹ This is the fully referenced collection compiled by Isaak 2006, and here gratefully acknowledged. My agreement with Mark Isaak has been to explicitly list him as collaborator to my first ever paper on this material (van Binsbergen with the collaboration of Isaak 2008), after which I would be free to publish my subsequent results (although likewise based on his data) exclusively under my own name. Regrettably, Isaak's additions to his collection after 2006 could not be taken into account here: the enormous investment of time and effort that went into data entry and statistical processing of the initial, 2006 data could be made only once. However, it is my impression that inclusion of the new data would not have drastically changed the statistical outcomes.

ready delivered, followed by sections 15.2-15.5 which are really only elaborations (often methodological) of that overview. After introducing the data set, analysis and method, and indicating how I will apply the concept of the Hero in the context of Flood myths (section 2), I will proceed¹⁵; to situate Flood *Heroes* within the total data set of Flood myths; this will be done by briefly looking at some aggregate results of multivariate analysis (section 15.3), in which the presence of a prehistoric transformative cycle of elements³⁹⁰ will be highlighted as an important background of that combat that gives the Heroes their main narrative features. But as we shall see, for reasons of statistical methodology multivariate analysis can only capture a limited part of the information contained in the data set, and the remainder will be considered in Appendix 1: an overview of statistically significant associations found when cross-tabulating each Hero-related variable against all non-Hero-related variables. These numerous associations will have to be further sorted out and weeded out – preferably on the basis as such feedback as I hope to receive from the audience. Finally, the conclusion reiterates the main points of this summary.



source: designed after Needham with Wing Ling 1956: 260 f.

Fig. 15.2. The Taoist / Chinese five-element model of the cyclical transformation of elements, complete with catalytic function

³⁹⁰ According to Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy, much ceritised throughout my present book, heroes with their attending linear conception of progressive history belong to the Laurasian realm. The cyclical element transformation, where every element may change into the next and at the end of its cycle return to its original nature in other words where true change and difference are still unthinkable, implying an *Ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Nietzsche 1973a: "an eternal return of the same"), clearly belong to Witzel's Gondwana typological realm. My argument in the present chapter is predicated on the rejection of Witzel's typology, and in the consistency of its statistical results may also go a long way towards refuting Witzel's dichotomy.

15.1.3. Postulating a series of consecutive and evolving modes of thought in prehistory

The *discussion* (section 15.5) will advance interpretations of the statistically significant patterns found, in the light of a limited number of mythemes that amount to evolving modes of thought in prehistory. Within the limited scope of the present chapter, I cannot fully substantiate my claim that my schematised ‘modes of thought’ are not just figments of my scholarly imagination, but – with all inevitable simplification and standardisation of such mythemes – demonstrably correspond with worldviews actually held by the ancient (pre-)historical actors.

1. The hypothesis of the existence of a major mytheme (in Upper Palaeolithic Eurasia) of the – essentially horizontalist – *Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land*; this cosmogony revolves on the image of the (inevitably virgin) Mother of the Water and her unique male child, Land, who is also to be her lover

This mytheme is unmistakably present in the oldest attested cosmogonies of the Ancient Near East, the Bible, Ancient Egypt, and has left many traces in Nordic, Uralic and other mythologies. However, when we encounter it, it is often only in conjunction with the next mytheme, which has superimposed itself upon it and has become dominant. In a recent study Emily Lyle (2010) has given what appears to be a related perspective on this mytheme, concentrating however when male Hero and female Waters have already dissociated into enemies, and their earlier parental relationship is no longer conspicuous.

2. The hypothesis of the existence of a major mytheme (in Eurasia between the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic) of the – essentially verticalist – *Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth*

So conspicuous is this mytheme, that throughout the Old World (including much of Africa,³⁹¹ and with extension into Oceania) mythologies tend to present the separation of Heaven and Earth as the central cosmogonic act, necessary but traumatic, so that much mythological and ritual attention is paid to the problem as to how to re-connect Heaven and Earth: through natural and man-made devices (including altars and sacrifices, food crops, mountains and trees), through humans in particular roles (shaman, Hero, king, twin, priest), and through Demiurges, Tricksters and demi-gods uniting celestial and terrestrial qualities.

3. The existence of a horizontalising *transformative cycle of ‘elements’*, widely attested throughout the Old World (with likely extension into the Nearctic World), and amounting to an immanentist, cyclical worldview of an *Ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Nietzsche), where the ontological status of each form of being is merely ephemeral, fluent and transient, underneath of which undifferentiated and immutable primal matter perpetuates itself timelessly³⁹²
4. The emergence of a lineal and verticalising perspective on the world and humankind,
 - in which Heaven (as a distinct realm of existence, and as such not identical with the ‘sky’ over everyday experience) is invented,
 - in which also the possibility of an irrevocably, irreversibly *different* state of being than the here and now is contemplated,

³⁹¹ In what could be considered (although I have rejected Witzel’s terminology as unjustifiably essentialising and dichotomizing) Northern, ‘Laurasian’ imports into the Southern, ‘Pre-Laurasian domain’, cf. van Binsbergen 2010d.

³⁹² For extensive details, see van Binsbergen 2012a.

- firm and lasting absolute distinctions are becoming thinkable,
- and with them transcendence,
- the supernatural, and
- the concept of history as we understand it today.

15.1.4. Detectable changes in human thought operations in the relatively recent past (< 30 KA BP)? *Borean 'range semantics' and Aristotle's excluded middle

At this point a digression is in order. Although the point is rarely considered in the context of comparative mythology,³⁹³ *we are not justified to assume that the logical toolbox of Anatomically Modern Humans has always been in place, throughout the 200 ka of their existence, in exactly the same way in which it presents itself in our own, Modern North Atlantic / global specialist academic discourse* – in our conference debates and publications. While we have some reason to assume

- that the capability for language and logic is innate in our variety of humans (Chomsky 1965), and
- that present-day structures of natural language and practical reasoning, however variable, yet remain within a recognisable range to which also the expressions of the first Anatomically Modern Humans belonged 200 ka BP,

yet it is quite likely that these logical capabilities *have a history*, and that much of that historical process took its course not before, but *during* the 200 ka of Anatomically Modern Humans' existence. Let us concentrate on one very crucial thought procedure: the Aristotelian³⁹⁴ logical principle of the excluded middle (' $P \vee \neg P$ ': 'either P or not P ', in other words 'where P there not not- P '). The tendency towards blurred distinctions and towards violating the logical principle in question is typical of much natural language use in most non-

³⁹³ #15.1. COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY IS PREDICATED ON AN UNLIKELY TACIT ASSUMPTION: THAT THE THOUGHT FACULTIES OF ANATOMICALLY MODERN HUMANS HAVE UNDERGONE NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE 200 KA OF THEIR EXISTENCE, AND ARE IDENTICAL TO THOSE OF MODERN SCHOLARS. Or, if cursorily considered *within Comparative Mythology*, the usually unquestioned assumption is simply that the thought faculties of Anatomically Modern Humans have remained unchanged both in nature and in scope since our own human type emerged in Africa, 200 ka BP. An illuminating theoretical exploration of the personalising aspect of these thought structures, with much background literature but without going into periodisation, in Farmer 2010. The assumption of extreme immutability stands in great contrast with views circulating only a few decades ago, e.g. the view according to which the 'bicameral' mind had only yielded modern thought processes notably a self-reflective identity, as late as the Late Bronze Age (cf. Jaynes 1990-1974; Vroon 1992 – often in consideration of what literacy does to thought processes); or the notion of the *Human Revolution*, much discussed in the 1980s prior to the paradigmatic shift to the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis as a breaking point, c. 40 ka BP, when Humans (with an emphasis on Western Eurasia) were thought (by various archaeologists including Colin Renfrew) to have acquired faculties of symbolic thought and wider group processes, resulting e.g. in extensive ornamentation, group symbols, and body adornment. These – in hindsight – presentist, myopic and potentially Eurocentric approaches find few supporters today, now that the long-range prehistoric study of the human mind has developed into a sub-discipline of its own (Mithen 1996; Renfrew & Zubrow 1994; Mellars & Gibson 1996). An important consideration is that minds capable of symbolic thought and of articulate language do not drop from Heaven lock, stock and barrel, but must be understood as having emerged in association with crucial social-organisational, economic and ecological processes – such as palaeoanthropological archaeologists are now perceiving, with ever more detail, to have taken place since c. 200 ka BP in Africa, and from c. 50 ka BP also in other continents.

³⁹⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 2, 996b 26–30, and 7, 101b 26–27; idem, *De Interpretatione*, c. 9.

specialist conditions, not only in historic, pre-industrial rural societies but also in North Atlantic everyday life, even among scholars in their everyday life. To account for this widespread violation of specialist logic, the analyst has a choice between, for instance:

- *Lévi-Strauss's arch-rationalism* (for Lévi-Strauss, 'savage' thought, *i.e.* non-specialist 'natural thought',³⁹⁵ makes *different* distinctions from those made in Modern North Atlantic specialist science – yet it thrives on these very distinctions, to such an extent that this theoretician can declare *the binary oppositions out of which such distinction consist the very backbone human culture*; he thus insists on the human's quality as a rational animal in the best Aristotelian and more recently French tradition ever since Descartes (and mediated in anthropology via Lévi-Strauss' intellectual forebears Durkheim and Mauss, as well as de Saussure); or, as a radical alternative, one might choose
- *Derrida's (1967a, 1967b) recognition of the condition that every distinction necessarily carries within itself its own negation*, so that the Aristotelian principle of the excluded middle becomes a peripheral, artificial stipulation merely for abstruse specialist language games, rather than a true reflection of common human thought.

Recent long-range linguistics has offered us one context in which these theoretical ideas may be given, albeit most tentatively, a historical dimension.³⁹⁶ This is the detailed reconstruction of the lexicon of *Borean (Fleming 1991, 2002; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), a hypothetical language construct associated with Central Eurasia and the Upper Palaeolithic, and argued to have left substantial traces in practically every linguistic macrophyllum spoken today. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2018) I have considered the reconstructed *Borean lexicon in some detail, and I argue that instead of firm binary semantic distinctions it seems to operate on the basis of what could be called 'range semantics'. A particular lexical root may indicate not so much either 'wet' or 'dry', 'penis' or 'vulva', 'dark' or 'light', but *any* specific variable value in the ranges 'degree of wetness / dryness', 'genital of either genders', 'degree of lightness / darkness'.³⁹⁷ *Firm, sustained, consistent, absolute* logical distinctions would thus appear to be post-*Borean, and while their emergence and installation, ultimately to become standard, should in the first

³⁹⁵ This expression is merely to be understood by analogy with the common expression 'natural language'.

³⁹⁶ A complementary approach I have already suggested in my writings (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, and reprinted here. I group the emergence of specific Narrative Complexes ('NarComs') before and after the Out-of-Africa Exodus (c. 80-60 ka BP) around less than a dozen so-called 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs), *i.e.* specific complexes that (through analysis of linguistic material, modes-of-production, archaeology, iconography, and hermeneutical analysis of the logical and modes-of-production implications contained in surviving mythical texts) can be most provisionally identified in space and time, in such a way that each NarCom, and *a fortiori* each CITI, appears to constitute a specific innovation in the logical field: identity, distinction, duality, synthesis, *etc.* ³⁹⁷ Meanwhile we must realise that range semantics as a syntactic device has not entirely disappeared from natural languages with modern times. Thus a handbook of modern Chinese (Williamson 1968: 458) reminds us that a common way to construct abstract nouns in Chinese is 'by joining together two adjectives of exactly opposite meaning; e.g. [大小] *ta-hsiao* (big-little) is 'size', [長短] *ch'ang-tuan* (long short) is 'length,' etc. A modern Dutch example would be 'man-vrouw verhoudingen' (gender relations), and 'nacht-dag-evening' (equinox).

place be regarded as a result of intensified use of articulate language³⁹⁸ (and the socio-organisational, productive and ritual practices facilitated by, and engendering, articulate language) since the Upper Palaeolithic. It might then be correct to say that the subsequent, increasing dominance of such binary distinctions in human culture was largely brought about by the pivotal role of increasingly precise and technical language in the context of the *post-Neolithic package of writing, the state, proto-science, and organised religion*.

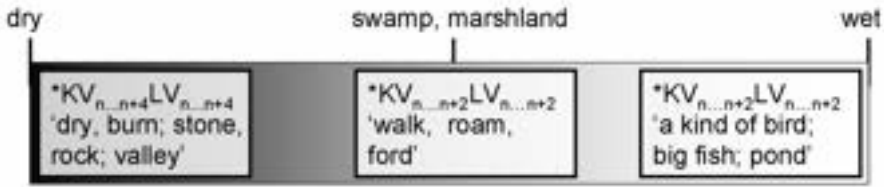
WATER		INTERMEDIATE <i>(note: a vessel is solid, contains fluid)</i>		LAND	
				*CVCV _{1,2,3}	dry; stone; tip; spout
*CVKV	bird			*CVKV _{1,2}	land; stand
		*CVLV _{1,2}	fish trap; fence; stone; dirt	*CVLV	steppe, valley, meadow
*CVLV	water, pour				
*CVMV _{1,2}	a kind of bird; fish			*CVMV	marsh, uncultivated land
				*CVNV	stone, mountain
*CVPV	to sink				
*CVRV	to flow, drip			*CVRV _{1,2,3}	dirt; to dry; to stand
*CVTV	drink, liquid				
*CWW _{1,2}	liquid; sea, water				
				*HVHV	to stand up, move upwards
*HVKV	water				
*HVLV	wet				
				*HVMCV	stone
				*HVMGV	dirt, earth ?
*HVMV	drink, swallow				
				*HVNLV	stone
*HVNV	water				
*HVRCV	rain, pour				
*HVRV	liquid			*HVRV	stone
*HVWV _{1,2}	bird; stream, flow of water				
*JVMV	sea, water				
				*JVNV	to live, stand
				*KVCV _{1,2}	dry; sand
*KVHV?	water				
				*KVKV	dry
*KVLV _{1,2,3}	a kind of bird; big fish; pond	*KVLV	walk, roam, feed; vessel	*KVLV _{1,2,3}	dry; burn; stone, rock; valley
*KVMCV	a kind of fish				
*KVMV	a kind of bird			*KVMV _{1,2}	dry; land
				*KVNIV	corner, enclosure ?

³⁹⁸ Articulate language can be claimed to have been humans's principal context for learning to generate and to handle immensely subtle and complex distinctions – by the phonological principle of *distinctive features* (Jakobson *et al.* 1952), the distinction and use of phonemes and other language elements entirely depends on the dextrous management of binary oppositions.

*KVVV	a kind of bird			*KVVV _{1,2}	burn, roast, dry; kill
*KVPV	a kind of bird			*KVRTV	enclosure
*KVRV _{1,2,3}	a kind of fish; a kind of gallin- oan bird, crane			*KVRV _{1,2,3,4}}	dry; dung, mud; enclosure; moun- tain, hill
*KVTV _{1,2}	water, to submerge; a kind of bird			*KVTV	dit
*LVJV	liquid, flow			*KVVV	stone, mountain
*LVKV _{1,2}	a kind of bird, grouse	*LVKV	pool, low ground	*LVVV	dit
*LVLV	boat				
*LVMV _{1,2}	large fish				
		*LVMV	swamp (land / water)		
*LVNV	to wash, pour			*LVNV	stone
*LVPV	wet, wet				
*LVTV	liquid				
*LVVV	to pour				
*MVKV	wash				
*	wet			*MVLV	mountain
*MVRV	wet				
*MVTV	incision				
MWVV	water, wet				
				*MWBV	to stay, be, stand
*MWW	a kind of fish				
*MWRV	flow				
*PVCV	spreads				
*PVRV _{1,2}	bird, fly; to pour			*PVRV	hill, rock
*PVVV	to pour, wash			*PVVV _{1,2}	dit, dit, last, firm
				*PVLV _{1,2}	ashes, dit, mountain, hill
				*PVMV	earth, mound
*PVVV	water			*PVVV _{1,2}	clay, mud, stone
				*PVVV	mountain, top
				*PVTV	ashes, burn
				*RVMCV	stone
				*RVNVV	dry
				*RVVV	stand
*SVKV	a kind of bird				
*TVbV	spit, spittle			*TVVV _{1,2,3}}	bottom, earth, stone
*TVKV _{1,2,3}}	a kind of duck or hen, fish; to pour, deep	*TVKV _{1,2,3}}	vessel, boat; vessel, to scoop, water, pond	*TVKV _{1,2}}	earth, mountain, high
*TVNV _{1,2}}	pot, vessel, to melt, flow			*TVLV _{1,2}}	hill, stone
				*TVNV	top
				*TVPV	hill
*TVRV _{1,2}}	a kind of bird, to drink, flow			*TVRV _{1,2}}	earth, dit, enclosure, yard
				*TVTV	dit, ashes
				*WVCV	enclosure
				*WVRV	mountain
*WVTV	water				

Cells with a grey background present the isolated words, i.e. those that are not paired with an opposite or intermediate form displaying the same consonantal structure. The subscripts indicate a plurality of otherwise indistinguishable reconstructed *Borean words with the specified consonantal structure.

Table 15.1. *Borean reconstructed words of dryness and wetness, as examples of ‘range semantics’



where $-9 \leq n \leq 1$: the number of different vowels involved in these 10 reconstructed *Borean words of the general form *KVLV is minimum 1 and maximum 10. For each of the dry, intermediate and wet clusters, n is to be determined in the same way. Note in many ancient cosmologies, birds are regarded as 'fishes of the waters above'

Fig. 15.3. The semantic field of the cluster of *Borean words *KV_{n...n+10}LV_{n...n+10}

For my argument in this chapter this is an important point: the ancient and widespread *transformative cycle of elements* to which I will repeatedly appeal below, *can be considered a transitional thought technique to be situated somewhere between*

- *Borean blurred range semantics, and
- Modern absolute binary distinctions.

Whereas the transformative cycle is inherently immanentist and cannot appeal to some ulterior, external principle outside it, the proposed historical process through which (a) the transformative cycle (with its cyclical ontology of ephemeral phases systematically giving way to one another) was supplanted by (b) absolute binary distinctions, also means *the invention of transcendence* – without which the notion of 'Heaven', morality, truth, and the Supreme God would be unthinkable. There is nothing more transcendent than writing, which creates a virtual but viable and increasingly decisive world that is in principle away from the here and now. For good reasons (although perhaps regionally chauvinistic and myopic; cf. similar developments in China, Meso-America), comparative religionists (most of them at home in the North Atlantic region) have situated the emergence of organised religion in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Ancient Near East including Egypt, where a literate theocratic and proto-scientific priestly class formed the backbone both of the early state and of a temple-based economy.

15.1.5. Introducing Noah as a Flood Hero

In the light of these considerations we may begin to consider (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011) Noah, the Hero par excellence (but with many cognates world-wide) of the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth (shortly to be characterised in detail),

- not as a static mythological given,
- but as the thought-provoking end of a long development towards transcendence, morality, the invention of Heaven and of a Supreme God, and a linear and unique and dramatic (in other words, *heroic!*) conception of events and of the human condition (in other words: the emergence of the notion of history), on the basis of earlier, more immanentist and cyclical modes of thought whose outlines we may increasingly discern.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ In a way, this argument continues an approach which I first pioneered in my *Religious Change in Zambia* (1981), which, beyond its inevitably regional empirical focus on South Central Africa since 1500 CE, was essentially a statement on a materialist theory of religion from the perspective of modes-of-production analysis.

– all this against the background of recent and largely converging insights⁴⁰⁰ in the prehistoric emergence and unfolding – mainly in Eurasia from the Middle Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age – of a limited number of specific mythological themes. In the specific theoretical perspective that I have developed in recent years under the admittedly stilted title ‘Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology’, I have recognised a few dozen of Narrative Complexes (NarComs), to be conceived as transformations and innovations of the original, and to some extent reconstructible, mythological contents of *Pandora’s Box* (i.e. the common cultural package that Anatomically Modern Humans built up within the African continent between c. 200 and c. 60 ka BP, and with which they left for other continents in the context of the Out-of-Africa Exodus, c. 80-60 ka BP).⁴⁰¹

As my contribution to the section on Hero myths, of the 4th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, I have argued that Flood Heroes are not necessarily what they appear: fully-fledged individuals conceived after the Heroic pattern of West-Asian/Mediterranean Antiquity and considerably transformed (in terms of personhood, agency, and morality) and North Atlantic Modernity. I first explored

- in what sort of historic constellation (in terms of thought mechanisms, modes of production, variety of religious forms in terms of immanentism or transcendentalism) we can expect to encounter such fully-fledged Hero myths at all –
- in such a way that such Hero myths may be considered the relatively recent end products of a mythological, and in general socio-cultural and conceptual, development which, in earlier phases, may be thought of as having engendered prototypes from which our Heroes could be argued to have evolved.

A worldview that puts a low premium on personhood and distinction, that knows no linear history but insteads conceives all events as interchangeable steps in an endless, circular, repetition, that knows no morality, no transcendence and no gods, let alone a Supreme God (and this characterisation comes close to the cosmology of cyclical element transformation!) apparently cannot produce Hero myths.⁴⁰²

Yet, as far as Flood myths go, the type of the Noahic Flood Hero is widespread, and by no means limited to the Ancient Near East. The Noahic model posits the

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Witzel 2001, 2003b, 2012; Berezkin 2008, 2009, 2010; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b.

⁴⁰¹ Specialists’s estimates of the time spans involved are subject to constant change. Throughout the present book I have adopted the date of 90-60 ka BP. The date of c. 50 ka BP appears to reflect specialist majority views as vented at the Radcliffe conference on Comparative Mythology, Harvard, October 2010.

⁴⁰² Between 2004 and 2010, and instigated in the first place by Michael Witzel’s (2001) seminal explorations in this direction, he and I have engaged in an exchange on the broad general trends in the global development of mythology since the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans. Although we continue to disagree in our appreciation of the difference, periodisation, interpenetration, and mutual indebtedness between a Northern (in Witzel’s terms, ‘Laurasian’) and a Southern (in Witzel’s terms, ‘Gondwana’), Witzel’s emphasis on the historical and person-centred nature of the Northern trend (primarily Eurasian, and reflected in the literate mythologies of the Ancient Near East, South and East Asia, the Ancient Mediterranean and the Iron-Age Northern Europe) is very well-taken: it makes possible a mythology of *exalted persons in time* – in other words of heroes and kings, in ways that a more cyclical, a-historical cosmology could never yield. In ch 21 of this book I will come back to Witzel’s work.

image of

- a righteous human of the male gender
- who is forewarned of the Flood by the Supreme God as his ally,
- and who therefore manages to survive the Flood
- in a specially constructed vessel (an Ark) as the ultimate Flood Hero,
- and to repopulate the devastated earth in the course of some sort of Second Creation,
- where Heaven and Earth (collapsed in the cataclysm – when they sky could no longer contain the Waters Above and also the Underworld opened its Waters Below) are re-connected once more (through the Rainbow, sacrifice, divine election, priesthood, food crops including the vine, the Tower, by the very air),
- sexuality
- and the handling of fire are resumed once more,
- and animals find themselves put under the salutary patronage of the Heroic human;
- also post-Flood repopulation is mythically presented as the beginning of human ethnico-linguistic diversity.

This ‘Elaborate Standard Flood Myth’, as I have called it, appears to be remarkably widespread. Although some of that distribution must be due to contamination⁴⁰³ as a result of the worldwide expansion of three world religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam – all of which feature Noah-Nūḥ as a central figure), for reasons of historical analysis as well as statistical distribution patterns⁴⁰⁴ it is likely that most of that global distribution is not due to contamination but reflects a widespread substrate which has produced, as a relative late and highly evolved variant, the Noahic variant among others.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ A point repeatedly, and rightly, made by Steve Farmer, first in plenary discussion during the founding meeting of the IACM in Beijing 2006, and taken care of in the present statistical analysis by the control variable CONTAMIN, see next footnote.

⁴⁰⁴ See my discussion of the constructed variable CONTAMIN in van Binsbergen c.s. 2008.

⁴⁰⁵ Much more could be said, and has been said, about Noah in this connection. Although typologically the Noah of the Elaborate Standard Flood myth is clearly an advanced type of Flood hero, for the systematic reasons given in the main text, I have elsewhere (van Binsbergen c.s. 2008, and much more elaborately van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, argued the great antiquity of the name and some of the characteristics of Noah. The connotations of whiteness that surround him identify as another ‘White God’ of Creation or Second Creation – belonging to a large and widespread class of ancient primal gods, all associated with the colour white (e.g. Heimdall, Poseidon, Śiva, Viracocha, etc. etc.), and nearly all supplanted and reduced to subordinate status in the pantheon, with the rise of new celestial male gods, such as Yahweh, Zeus, etc. (Fig. 15.4.) Moreover, as set out at length in van Binsbergen oudhuizen 2011, nearly a dozen (cognates of) the name Noah, with cognate connotations including those of Flood heroes, can be found throughout the Old World and the Nearctic, e.g. the South Chinese Flood heroine Nü Wa. Finally, etymological explorations into the names of Noah and his main three sons suggest him to represent the primordial matrix (‘Chaos’) out of which Day and Night (Japheth ‘openness’ and Ham ‘darkness’) were separated – or by a slightly different etymology, Heaven (the open sky) and Earth (the dark land) – another reason to see him as a primal but supplanted cosmogonic god – originally not necessarily male – of an earlier dispensation, upon which only secondarily the subaltern relationship with a Supreme God and ally was imposed as a later development within the new worldview that was opening up, presumably in the course of the Neolithic.



1. Attestation of the idea of the lowly pigmented, giant god of Creation or Second Creation (after disaster); 2. Uncertain attestation

Fig. 15.4. Global distribution of attestations of the White God of Creation or Second Creation

However, *if by 'Flood Hero' we understand a mythical protagonist who features centrally in a Flood story as actually braving the Flood* (regardless of such braving is with or without success, with or without survival, with or without warning and protecting divine ally, with or without adversary causing the Flood, with or without post-Flood repopulation, rekindling of Fire, re-connection of Heaven and Earth) – then the corpus of Flood myth has many more types of 'Flood Heroes' to offer besides the Noahic model:

1. not male but female
2. not human but animal, in a world where the only sentient beings were (still) animals – the ancestors of later, human clans (in this light, Noah's role as saviour of animals suggests a conceptual transformation from animals as fellow beings to animals as domesticated within Neolithic food production)⁴⁰⁶
3. not righteous but a devious Trickster, '*jenseits von Gut und Böse*' (Nietzsche)
4. not elected to survive because of his superior morality but because of other reasons (notably, his superior knowledge – by implication of sinister magical relationships and practices incompatible with pious dependence on a Supreme God) or for undisclosed reasons
5. not righteous but causing the Flood by his own transgressions
6. not a simple earth-dweller but a Demiurge situated somewhere between Heaven and Earth
7. escaping not in an Ark but by other means,
 - *e.g.* by using a boat already at hand, or some other man-made device
 - or by the use of some vertical, natural element such as retreating to a mountain top or a tree, ascending through the inside of a reed stalk, *etc.*

⁴⁰⁶ In ch. 16 we shall come back to this Neolithic connection, and argue that in fact it is more relevant than the, much earlier, Middle to Upper Palaeolithic connection we have reconstructed on the basis of the Flood myth's apparent coincidence with MtDNA Type B.

- or by re-creating dry land with the aid of an animal helper, 'Earth Diver', in the shape of an aquatic bird or a rodent
- 8. in the process of constructing his escape vessel, not necessarily being ridiculed by the members of his community (like Noah was reputed to have been)
- 9. at some point in the Flood narrative, confronted with strong evocations of blowing (e.g. on conches, as in Ovid's Flood evocation), pipes, reeds, wind, trumpets – in what I will identify below as likely manifestations of another element besides Water and Earth, notably Air
- 10. at some point in the Flood narrative, confronted with strong evocations of carpentry or other use of arboreal themes – in what I choose to identify as likely manifestations of another element besides Water and Earth, notably Wood
- 11. at some point in the Flood narrative, confronted with strong evocations of Fire (e.g. the general extinction and post-Flood re-kindling⁴⁰⁷ – or, in the Prometheus variant, the theft –of Fire, or the attribution of the cosmoclasm not to Water but to Fire – in what I choose to identify as likely manifestations of another element besides Water and Earth, notably Fire
- 12. braving the Flood, not singly but as a couple of both genders
- 13. braving the Flood, not singly but as a set of twins of both genders
- 14. braving the Flood, not singly but as a pair of brothers
 - either bonded by friendship or fighting among each other
- 15. not single but a group
 - either bonded by friendship or fighting among each other
- 16. not surviving but perishing
- 17. not forewarned but surprised by the Flood
- 18. not in alliance with the Supreme God but with some other supernatural being
- 19. not in alliance with any deity, but confronting formidable, evil supernatural beings
- 20. sending out, or not sending out, a bird to ascertain whether the Flood has ended
- 21. not involved in post-Flood reproduction
- 22. involved in post-Flood reproduction, but of an extraordinary kind:
 - a-sexual, plant-like fission and growth
 - homosexual
 - sibling incest
 - parent-child incest
 - any combination of such abnormal forms of reproduction

#15.2. POST-FLOOD EXTRA-ORDINARY REPRODUCTION. In many Flood stories world-wide we find an emphasis on non-normal means of post-Flood reproduction. An obvious rationalisation is that after the Flood the usual, human, non-kin mates are no longer available, so that the one or two survivors have no choice but to take recourse to sibling incest, father-daughter incest (Lot, in *Genesis* 19:31), or to producing offspring with the help of animals, plants and stones. I think the real reason goes deeper. In the first place, sexuality may be simply too sacred in an archaic context to deal with explicitly in public narrative – a convention prevailing even in the urban North Atlantic region less than half a century ago, and in Southern Africa right until today – during my extensive Botswana fieldwork I found adults firmly believing that they could openly discuss their sexual activities in front of their pubescent

⁴⁰⁷ The Annual Extinction And Rekindling of a community's Fire, from a common (priestly or royal) source, is a recurrent trait in many parts of the Old World (van Binsbergen 2010), and can convincingly be interpreted as an annual renewal of the post-Flood reconstruction of the world. See Section 8.5.10, above.

daughters because the latter, considered still innocent children, would not be able understand what it was all about (the truth was that, behind their parents's backs, these adolescents had a thriving sex life of themselves already...). Another reason, more particular to the Flood stories as a genre in their own right, is that the Flood often appears to be triggered by the discovery of sexuality, and/or by engagement in illicit sexuality, and that therefore all sexuality is to be ruled out in the earliest post-Flood period, when the restored cosmic order is still very precarious. For instance (but there are many other cases from other parts of the world) Talmudic and Islamic sources (cf. Heller 1993; Qur'an, sura 71, al-Nūḥ [= Nūḥ]; Talmud: Sanhedrin 108a-b – cf. Goldschmidt 1908-1935; Mishna as in Danby 1983) emphasise that Nūḥ's family had to observe strict abstinence whilst in the Ark – Ḥam's curse being based, not so much on ridiculing his father when the latter was indulging himself in alcoholic drink and nakedness (Genesis 9: 22 f.), but on Ḥam's own indulging in sexuality while aboard the Ark. There is an interesting parallel here with sorcery (of which Ḥam is also accused in the same traditions – especially manipulating, with evil intentions, the potent remains of Adam and Eve, and their Leopard-skin clothes, which has been taken along in the Ark as ancestral mementoes). There is an even clearer parallel, on this point, with the use of Fire, which (as an alternative cosmoclasm) in some Flood stories triggers the Flood, and which in many Flood stories needs to be re-initiated specifically after the Flood. Again there is a practical rationalisation: all fire will have been extinguished by the Flood, but again there seems to be more to it. Also compare Prometheus (uncle of the Greek Flood Hero Deucalion) who – after the Flood, as the comparative logic of Flood stories suggests – brought the stolen Fire in a *narthex* i.e. a Reed (!); and whose name means 'Thinking Ahead' – like Bees (!) accumulating their honey, and contrary to crickets who (by a famous Aesop fable rendered by De la Fontaine) just sing and dance without a thought to the future (cf. the name of Prometheus's brother Epimetheus, 'Thinking Afterwards', the husband of Pandora).

23. not engaging in food production through agriculture and animal husbandry (as is obliquely suggested by Noah's Ark full of animals and his success with viniculture) but an immanentist hunter/gatherer, who may kill, but also reproduce with, animals, and for whom even vegetal forms of reproduction may be the most effective ones for post-Flood repopulation.

Most of these dimensions are taken up in the course of our discussion of the quantitative results.

15.1.6. More general underlying assumptions

My argument is predicated on a number of assumptions which need to be made explicit and to be critically discussed (although not necessarily within the present argument):

1. Not only the contents but also the format, the toolbox, of the thought of Anatomically Modern Humans has evolved, and not only prior to their emergence c. 200 ka BP but also after their emergence, and these changes are in principle open to empirical investigation – although the conceptual, methodological and empirical difficulties on this point are enormous.
2. Yet, despite this shifting toolbox, enough of a basic logical, conceptual and emotive instrumentalism has persisted across tens of ka, to allow us, as intellectual special-ists in the Postmodern Age, to arrive at something like a valid (albeit necessarily distorted and partial) understanding of Ancient Models of Thought
3. While (2) is already an appeal to the underlying unity of humankind (at least human-kind in our Anatomically Modern variety) in terms of mental and communicative capabilities (van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f., 2020f), another – I admit, potentially even more contentious – appeal to continuity is being made: *the cultural history of Anatomically Modern Humans ever since their emergence in the African continent 200 ka BP has been*

one sustained process, where myriad local and regional developments inevitably and demonstrably have gone their own way, without however totally being out of touch – both by contemporary contacts and exchanges however diffuse, and by their reliance on the common Pre-Exodus heritage. This is the theoretical justification for lumping all Flood myths from all over the world in one all-encompassing data base, and analysing them statistically as if they constituted one consistent population.

4. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2003b; this book ch. 3) I have presented a general definition of myth that has received the honour of being incorporated into Witzel's awesome edifice of global mythological history (2012). However, my fourth assumption is that in Flood myths we often find one particular type of myth, which we may call *amnesic*: the type in which the narrator tells a story while the original, coded meaning of that story has already been lost from the narrator's consciousness, so that the narrator resorts to templates of narration and dramaturgy that may translate the underlying implied (but no longer consciously perceived) relationships into deceptively real-life moving images, whilst potentially distorting these relationships almost beyond recognition. In the context of Flood myth, it appears as if we encounter many examples of this amnesic dynamics: Flood Heroes that are not Heroes of flesh and blood but elements in a transformative cycle, or Flood-surviving incestuous siblings apparently engaging in re-population of the earth after the Flood (what could be more logical and more interesting) but in fact constituting oblique representations of Land and Water, or Heaven and Earth, or Sun and Moon, etc.

15.1.7. Statistical methods are merely a tool, not a goal in themselves

This chapter is an instalment⁴⁰⁸ of a comprehensive analysis, that kept me occupied nearly full-time for a year in 2007-2008, and whose final report (now completed in draft, and scheduled for publication) is to run into more than 500 pages. In this light the present argument, despite my apparently ineradicable tendency to long-windedness, can only be truncated, and will have to leave most methodological and interpretational points untouched. Much of this chapter will be spend on presenting the statistical results in tabulated form – a text genre that could hardly be more removed from the habitual and familiar text production of comparative mythologists. I am aware that this strategy will tax my readership's patience and interest. However, we should not forget that, to non-specialists in the fields of historical linguistics or Vedic scholarship among the Comparative Mythologists, the highly technical discussions belonging to such specialist fields could be equally taxing. Although I was initially trained as a social scientist and taught quantitative research methods already four decades ago, I have soon moved on to become a student of identity, of religion, of the philosophical bases for interculturality, and – increasingly – a student of the remoter past, first of the Mediterranean and Africa, more recently at a global scale. My interest in statistics as such is as slight as that of most people in my audience. What attracted me to comparative mythology (or rather, what brought me back to it, after a fallow period of decades, following substantial early work on this topic) was (cf. Witzel 2001) the hope that it could be a *vehicle towards the identification and periodisation of prehistoric patterns of thought* – ultimately in a bid to create, instead of merely speculative wishful thinking, an empirically-based, analytical framework for understanding both the underlying unity of

⁴⁰⁸ The first being: van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008, based on my paper for the 1st Annual Meeting of the IACM in 2007, Edinburgh.

present-day humankind (with special emphasis on the integral place of sub-Saharan Africa within that global pattern),⁴⁰⁹ and its cultural and linguistic diversity. It is on this endeavour that I have concentrated since the early 2000s,⁴¹⁰ with the present argument constituting merely another step.

15.2. *Data set, analysis and method*

It is almost impossible to summarise,⁴¹¹ in a few pages, and for a non-specialist and potentially unsympathetic audience, the complex strategies and problems of a quantitative contents analysis of Flood myths, with great varieties of length, contents and symbolism; gleaned from many cultures and their languages all over the world; and dating, at least in their recorded version, from anytime between the Early Bronze Age and the present. Appendices A15.2 and A15.3 give some impression of the kind of original data that formed the starting point of the analysis, and of the routine by which these very heterogeneous data were forced into the straightjacket of one, consistent and sustained, procedure of data entry. For reasons of space I cannot here give the descriptive statistics of the full data set. Since the analysis had to be conducted single-handed, I soon had to decide not to process Mark Isaak's entire 2006 data set of 395 Flood myths, but to take a 20% subsample – including only every fifth item in the set. This means, of course, that the results based on an analysis of this 20% subsample have a certain error distribution around the true sample values that would have been obtained had it been possible to enter all 395 cases into the analysis; therefore my final data set reflects the true population (*i.e.* the hypothetical collection of all Flood myths of all times and from all over the world) only in a somewhat blurred manner; however, the subsample was large enough and the statistical tests used were sufficiently powerful to make this blurring effect negligible. Data entry was not only time-consuming but also tantalising, for only while already processing the various myths did it become clear what new categories had to be added to the original 'code book', and what categories turned out to be impracticable and needed to be replaced by others; as a result, much of the exercise had to be done all over again a number of times.

After data entry, the following main difficulties had to be faced, in a fashion not uncommon in anthropological statistics which are often based on small-sample data:

15.2.1. *Missing cases*

The factor analysis I intended to use as a main technique would only be meaningful with *listwise deletion of all missing cases*, yet that would have been potentially disastrous, since the heterogeneity of the data set, and my initial predilection for finely tuned distinctions, left many cells in my entry forms empty. Many input variables could be slightly rephrased so as to avoid missing cases (*e.g.* 'is there a Hero in evidence' might have the pre-set values 'o' (no), 'i' (yes) and 'missing' (unclear, contradictory *etc.*); however, rephrasing this as 'is there *positive* evidence of a Flood Hero', would only leave the non-missing values '1' (no) and '2' (yes). However, given the heterogeneous nature of the data missing values are bound to occur, and we have no option but to keep these outside the multivariate analysis, reserving them for cross tabulation only.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010d – the present book chs 5, 6 and 8.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. van Binsbergen 2004, 2006a, 2006b, *etc.*; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

⁴¹¹ Meanwhile, some methodological discussion was already given in van Binsbergen *c.s.* 2008.

15.2.2. The handling of dichotomous variables

Dichotomous variables notably 'yes/no questions' constitute the great majority of the entry variables, besides variables measured on ordinal (...'good...better...best') and interval (...6.95...6.96...6.97...) scales. It is common practice, although with shaky mathematical foundation, to treat dichotomous variables as having interval scales (e.g. 'no' = 0, 'yes' = '1', and this practice has been followed here. For specific tests e.g. cluster analysis, other solutions are available.

15.2.3. The small number of cases for many cells in cross-tabulation

The most common statistical test of association for cross tables is the chi-square (χ^2) test, which however requires a minimum expected value of 5 for each cel. With the present data, that requirement cannot always be met, but there is a sound alternative, the likelihood ratio test – yielding (in Spitz's approach, Spitz 1961; van Binsbergen 1972) the test statistic known under the letter 'l' (L) – , where no such requirement exists.

15.2.4. Multicollinearity

#15.3. MULTICOLLINEARITY AS A PROBLEM IN MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS. It is common practice, in quantitative analysis, to derive one variable from one or more others: e.g. age of source = (year of source minus year of data entry); however, such derived variables are stochastically dependent upon the original variables, and if both types would be entered in a multivariate analysis simultaneously, such would result in meaningless artefacts of multicollinearity – the spurious piling up of multiple items of essentially dependent information. In constructing the set of about a hundred variables upon which the factor analysis was to be performed, careful selection must be made of the proper combinations, a task rendered even more complex because also variables with more than a few missing values are to be excluded from such sets. As a result, a considerable part of the total information contained in the data set cannot be utilised in multivariate analysis. These excluded variables have been singled out for simpler tests of association with the use of cross-tabulation, employing the likelihood ratio test so as to yield 'l', and (given a particular number of degrees of freedom df) l's associated probability ($p; 0 \leq p \leq 1$; l's distribution is basically identical to that of χ^2) indicating whether a particular association can be claimed to exist at a chosen level of significance. In line with common social-science practice, a p of 5% i.e. 0.05 is accepted as an indication that such association between variables as is revealed by statistical testing, is not merely a research artefact but corresponds with a genuine association in reality, between the phenomena measured by these variables. However, we must realise that accepting such a relatively low threshold of significance means that we are prepared to run the risk that, of all our statistical conclusions, 1 out of 20 will be unjustified.

15.2.5. The distinction between empirical associations and logical implications

A problem similar to that of multicollinearity is the following: two variables may more or less presuppose each other by implication and thus yield highly significant statistics, which yet are meaningless, and in fact confusing, in so far as they cannot be used for the identification of genuine, empirically demonstrable underlying stochastic patterns of association in the data set. Let us consider the following example from our analysis:

There is a statistically significant, positive association between (a) 'animals stated or implied to survive the Flood' / (b) 'Flood Hero stated or implied to have directed the Earth Diver'⁴¹²

⁴¹² Here and with subsequent cross-tabulations in chs 15 and 16, I adopt the policy that statistical tables included in the main text will be issued with a specific caption and number and a place in the Table of Contents in their own right, whereas cross-tabulations that only occur in the footnotes in order to back up a particular statistical conclusion, will remain uncaptioned and unnumbered.

animals stated or implied to survive Flood		TOTAL		Flood Hero stated or implied to direct Earth Diver
no	yes			
-1.000	1.000			
-1.000	46	29	75	no
1.000	0	4	4	yes
TOTAL	46	33	79	

l = 7.283; df = 1; p = 0.007

Here, and in many similar cases in our analysis, any statistically significant association that may be found must be considered an artefact – not in the sense that it does not correspond with reality, but that it does so by logical implication and not as the outcome of a stochastic process of chance variation: since the Earth Diver is an animal, (b) cannot attain a positive value as long as (a) is not positive

15.2.6. Underlying variables

There is a fundamental difference between multivariate techniques such as factor analysis, and simple cross-tabulation. Multivariate analysis is an aggregative approach, whose scope is not limited to the numerous surface variables that happen to have lend themselves for data entry; instead, multivariate analysis (e.g. factor analysis) brings out a much smaller number of underlying variables which, if properly identified (on the basis of the respective factor loadings on each mathematically constructed and initially anonymous factor), promise to offer much more overall insight in a much smaller principles at work, and to specify exactly which percentage of the data set's total variance each factor is capable of accounting for. Cross tabulation however remains at the naïve level of the surface variables available at data entry. One suspects that when a whole series of such surface variables of comparable wording ((a)'the supernatural'..., 'a god'..., 'the Supreme God'..., etc. (b) 'warns the Flood Hero') all yield significant statistical results, that then there one and the same underlying variable responsible for this, so the results should not be treated as so many different dimensions of insight, but as one insight gradually manifesting itself. The results of cross-tabulation, however spectacular at times as we shall see, are essentially weaker and of lesser scope than those of multivariate analysis.⁴¹³

In ways to be set out in the final report, more or less satisfactory solutions for these methodological problems and challenges were found, often by time-consuming trial and error.

15.3. Origin of Flood myths: A possibly American provenance

Another point concerns the likely place of origin of Flood myths.

How much reason is there to postulate that the Flood myth complex is originally American, in other words did not reach the Americas from Asia but the other way around, originated in the Americas and from there fed back to Asia? In fact there is ample genetic evidence of such a move from North America 'Back into Asia' (Forster 2004; Tamm *et al.* 2007), in addition to the main movement which has been agreed to have been westbound, from Asia to North America. . An American origin was already suggested by my earlier discussion (van Binsbergen with Isaak, 2008) of Flood myths in the face of Oppenheimer's claim that the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East were indebted to Sunda expansion. What kind of data would we need to substantiate an hypothesis to the effect that Flood myths are originally American? The concentration of Flood myths in the Americas seems an authentic datum going back to prehistory, and cannot entirely be accounted for on the basis of Christian / Jewish / Islamic diffusion of the Noahite model.

TABLE OF VALUES FOR LINGS
FREQUENCIES

AA	Altaic	Amerind	Austr	AustrAs	Austron
2	3	37	5	5	10

⁴¹³ One could try to compensate for this weakness by doing further analysis of variance upon the constructed factors broken up against the kind of variables (with typically a high degree of missing cases) that have been more or less excluded from multivariate analysis for reasons of multicollinearity, and that now dominate the cross tabulations. But further difficulties arise here.

EskAl	IE	IndPac	Dene	NigKord	Sinotib
2	6	1	3	3	1

Ural-Yuk	TOTAL				
1	79				

TABLE OF VALUES FOR SPRLINGS FREQUENCIES

Amerind	Austric	DenSinCa	IndPac/A	SuprNost	TOTAL
37	15	4	6	17	79

Table 15.2. Regional provenances of Flood myths in our data set

With all this overrepresentation of the Americas, I am surprised that there are only 3 Na-Denē attestations in our data set (one uncertain, two positive), however I checked this point very carefully and repeatedly. It is among the Amerind speakers, not Na-Denē speakers that most Flood myths are being found. Considering the world's linguistic families in historical times, it is the Na-Denē group far more than Amerind which links the Old World (especially East Asia) with North America: the Dene-Sinocaucasian Hypothesis (Shevoroshkin 1991) proposes a linguistic macro-family which encompasses North American Na-Denē, East Asian Sinotibetan, West Asian Caucasian languages such as Avaro-Andian and Nakh, a few language isolates such as Burashaski, and according to several specialists, Basque around the Gulf of Biscay, South Western Europe. If the Dene-Sinocaucasian group is relatively underrepresented in our sample even though Flood myths are otherwise overrepresented in the Americas, possible explanations of such a state of affair would include the following *hypotheses*, among many others:

1. Flood myths and their spread in the Old and the New World are older than the rise of the Dene-Sinocaucasian macro-family

a. being older than the emergence of Dene-Sinocaucasian, Flood myths still may be considered to have originated in the Old World, in Central Asia, most likely in a linguistic environment reminiscent of what was reconstructed under the name of ‘*Borean’; and from Central Asia, Flood myths were carried, on the one hand to the rest of the Old World, on the other hand to the New World, by an early wave of immigrants, establishing themselves there before Dene-Sinocaucasian speakers arrived in the New World

b. being older than the emergence of Dene-Sinocaucasian, Flood myths may be considered to have originated in the New World among Proto-Amerind speakers, and they were only carried to the Old World by a feed back trickle of such speakers venturing back into extreme North-eastern Asia, – from where Flood myths further spread all over the Old World.

2. The postulated Dene-Sinocaucasian macro-family is merely a figment of the imagination and does not correspond with actual linguistic (and linguistically supported, mythological) distributions on the ground; therefore such a super family cannot be invoked to explain long-range prehistoric mythological distributions.

It is my impression that with the present state of our knowledge, hypothesis 1a is by far the most plausible. It is also the model advanced by me in earlier, qualitative approaches to the

distribution of Flood myths (especially van Binsbergen 2007).

15.4. A simple example of the kind of results quantitative analysis may yield: ‘Did the Earth Diver inspire Noah’s sending out of a bird to find out of the Flood had ended?’

Let me give a simple example of the kind of results quantitative analysis may yield. In the qualitative analysis of Flood stories world-wide the idea came up that the bird sent out by Noah may have developed from the Earth Diver as directed by the Flood Hero. Although not quite at the high level of abstraction and wide regional applicability that I have come to associate with my earlier analyses (van Binsbergen 2006, 2007; this book chs 5 and 6), this is the kind of hypothesis towards which we are more and more moving in the development of our Aggregative, Diachronic Model of World Mythology: describing not just the temporal sequence of mythical forms, but also understanding how later forms are transformations of earlier forms, and what mechanisms govern such transformations. *Can we find statistical support for the Earth-diver-to-bird hypothesis? The answer is affirmative.* In our N=79 sample, there are only 4 cases where the Flood Hero is stated or implied to instruct the Earth Diver. When we cross-tabulate these cases against the cases where the Flood Hero is stated or implied to send out one or more birds in order to ascertain whether the Flood has subsided, we obtain the following result:

	Hero sends bird no -1.000	yes 1.000	
	-----		TOTAL Hero instructs earthdiver
-1.000	67	8	75 no
1.000	4	0	4 yes

TOTAL	71	8	79

Table 15.3. The Earth Diver and the Flood Hero sending out a bird to find out if the Flood had ended

In this table, the association between sending birds and instructing the Earth Diver is by no means significant ($l = 0.864, df = 1, p = 0.352 \gg 0.05$, not significant), but that is not the point. The point is that the two conditions appear to be complementary: if the Earth Diver is instructed, no birds are sent out; and vice versa: if the Earth Diver⁴⁴⁴ is already transformed into a bird to be sent out (transformed, because the horizontal cosmology under which the Earth Diver impersonated the Separation of Primal Waters and Land was no longer paramount), then the Earth Diver can no longer, at the same time, appear as such and be instructed by the Flood Hero. This line of argument would suggest a statistically demonstrable relation between whether the Flood Hero is said or implied to instruct the Earth Diver (HERODIVR), and one of the factors to be constructed by factor analysis: FACTOR(5): ANIMAL SURVIVORS. Since HERODIVR is a dichotomous variable and FACTOR(5) was constructed to be a continuous variable, a t-test is the indicated statistic to assess their association. There is a significant difference in FACTOR(5) depending on whether the Hero is, or is not, said or implied to instruct

⁴⁴⁴ I take the Earth Diver to be the older motif, and bird sending as a later transformation of this motif. The Earth Diver belongs to the essentially horizontal cosmology of the Primal Waters and the Land, whereas sending out birds (recognised as intermediate between Heaven and Earth throughout the Old World) hints at the later cosmology of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, and in general at the shift towards verticality which I have argued (van Binsbergen 2006, 2007) to be the hallmark of a later cosmological dispensation to which also the emergence of naked eye astronomy, and shamanism, belong.

the Earth Diver (separate variance, $t = -3.628$, $df = 3$, $p = 0.035$, significant). This is logical, since only if there are animal survivors can Earth Diver, as a surviving animal, be instructed by the Flood Hero to bring up the Earth once more and thus the end the Flood.

I mentioned at least two ways in which the data set on Flood myths may yield statistical results: through cross-tabulation, and through multivariate analysis specifically factor analysis. We shall turn to cross-tabulation in Appendix 15.A1., and ultimately relegate the many tables that might have appeared there, to a website. Let us now first consider how multivariate analysis illuminates our understanding of the comparative mythology of the Flood.

15.4. Flood Heroes within the total data set: Some aggregate results of multivariate analysis, and a new perspective on Heroic combat

15.4.1. Aggregate factors and their bearing on Flood Heroism

The following Table 15.1 (adapted from my 2008 article) summarises, in highly simplified form, the main results of factor analysis on the data set. It turns out that twelve mutually totally unrelated factors can be constructed (and can be identified on the basis of their loadings on the original variables). These 12 factors together account for just over 50% of the total variance in the data set. Given the heterogeneity of the data set in place and time, and the qualitative nature of the variables, this is an excellent result. I have shaded the factor descriptions that have a manifest bearing on the Hero theme.

Factor;% of total variance explained	PROPOSED FACTOR NAME, cursory indication of variables involved, and proposed interpretation
FACTOR(1) 4.461	VERTICAL FROM PARADISE: In this factor/motif the vertical dimension is emphasised, with the vertical Reed (NarCom27) which, like the shamanism (NarCom6) that is also explicitly included in this factor, represents the vertical connection between the separated Heaven and Earth – and also in the image of animals suspended from Heaven in their attempt to escape from the Flood. The same idea of suspension between Heaven and Earth we find in the Spider motif. While this separation implies the notion of transcendence, the vertical, spatial separation also becomes a conceptual and temporal separation in the sense that a transcendent paradise, not here and not now, is evoked as Pre-Flood and having ended with the Flood. To this attaches the NarCom14 of the two children, twins often, who belonged to a paradisiacal state which however came to an end when one killed the other – the Cain and Abel theme (which however in the Bible is not recognised as specifically part of the Nuahic Flood story there).
FACTOR(2) 5.646	GOD AS ALLY OF HERO: The supernatural is present in the form of the supreme god, who dwells in Heaven (NarCom3), sends the Flood (NarCom1) and enters into an unequal alliance with the Flood Hero – the supreme god being evidently superior to the Hero. The latter receives warning of the Flood, sends out birds (probably transformations of the Earth Diver <i>i.e.</i> NarCom26, belonging to an earlier phase of mythological development) at the end of the Flood, and (in a sense that is evoking NarCom24) engages in agriculture after the Flood – this is the core of the Biblical or in general Ancient Near Eastern Elaborate Flood story
FACTOR(3) 4.694	HERO AND ARK: There are survivors to the Flood, specifically there is a Flood Hero who is the survivor, and there is a concrete material rescue device (an 'Ark') which allows the Hero to survive; this motif/ factor is an alternative to the Ogre motif (NarCom6 – there the confined space is doom rather than rescue), and also an alternative to the blood motive (NarCom30)(both of which are evocations of the feminine traits – the feminine as source from which life emerges (womb/Earth) and to where it returns in death (grave/Earth); <i>cf.</i> the Primal Waters, or Earth not as male land, but as life-giving and death-receiving)

FACTOR(4) 4.815	FLOOD ALTERNATIVE: An alternative to the Flood motif is the evocation of other cosmoclasm besides the great Flood. Here the attention is drawn to the vertical axis, with the emergence of mountains as a result of the Flood, the evocation of the celestial cow (NarCom25), and cosmogony from the fragments of a shattered featureless object (NarCom33)
FACTOR(5) 5.310	ANIMAL SURVIVORS: Animals survive the Flood, especially the Earth Diver (NarCom26) who is usually in the shape of a rodent-like small mammal. The theme also speaks of the human Demiurge of male gender. A formal characteristic attaches to this factor: if it is high, also the length of the Flood story in question will be high – which reflects the tendency for Elaborate North American Flood stories, where the themes of this factor prevail, to be rendered <i>in extenso</i> in the professional ethnographic literature
FACTOR(6) 3.890	SWEETNESS THROUGH INCEST (<i>cf.</i> Shi Yang 2006): The themes of sibling incest and honey (NarCom18) appear to celebrate the discovery of sexuality (<i>cf.</i> Lévi-Strauss's equation of honey and sexuality; Lévi-Strauss 1969-78; <i>cf.</i> Cook 1976). In some, still unclear way this is associated with the theme of a warning which comes to the Flood Hero from some third party and not from the causer of the Flood himself or herself – one is reminded of the Snake in the Biblical paradise, since the Fall of Man was sometimes (especially in the Christian tradition) associated with, again, the discovery of sexuality.
FACTOR(7) 3.777	POST-FLOOD REPOPULATION ABNORMAL BUT NOT STONE: Since the Flood usually is held to destroy the whole of humankind with the exception of up to a handful of Flood survivors, there is usually the need for post-Flood repopulation of the earth. Under FACTOR(7), such repopulation proceeds along abnormal lines <i>i.e.</i> otherwise than through normal heterosexual human sexuality. This FACTOR(7) offers several variations for the connection between the Flood and stones (NarCom8) – Flood victims turning into stones, ⁴¹⁵ and repopulation after the Flood taking place by means of stones which (as in the Greek Flood story of Deucalion and Pyrrha) turn into human beings. This factor appears to reveal relatively very ancient mythological layers, with the original Creator identified as female.
FACTOR(8) 4.393	KILLING ANIMAL DEMIURGE AND WHITE GOD: This motif highlights the animal Trickster or Demiurge, who is being murdered or himself engages in murder. This attaches to the theme of the White God (NarCom21), who may be evoked as a Primary God of Creation, subsequently to be supplanted by a later divine generation or dynasty, and then may be associated with the Sun or Moon – bright luminaries between Heaven and Earth in a less than supreme role. One reason for the appearance of the White God theme appears to be the following: this is typically the original God of Creation, and the narrative therefore is situated at a time, and emulates a worldview, when the separation of the waters into sea, Heaven and Underworld had not yet taken place or at least not completed. In the context of this primordial mythical time, repopulation was not by normal means (<i>i.e.</i> sexual, and intra-species), but by a-sexual, homosexual or inter-species means. We are here in the presence of such shape-shifters as Proteus, Nereus <i>etc.</i> : transformations of the Original Mistress of the Primal Waters once she was dethroned by the gods of a later dispensation, and typically of male gender. This suggests something about the origin of the Trickster figure in general: possibly as a transformation of the original Creatrix, of reversed gender. The typical North American Flood Hero is a Trickster: Coyote, or Raven, who may cause and fight the Flood at the same time (<i>cf.</i> Dorsey 1892).
FACTOR(9) 3.485	SACRIFICE AS RE-CONNECTION: This is an unusual factor in that it only loads considerably on one variable only, in the data set: the variable measuring whether in the context of the Flood, and especially after the Flood, an explicit reference is made to sacrifice.
FACTOR(10) 4.359	HEAVEN, LUMINARIES, CONNECTION, PARADISE: I have postulated that the Flood stories are predicated on a thought experiment revolving on the following idea: 'if the essence of the cosmic order is the separation of Land and Water (later verticalised and otherwise transformed into the separation of Heaven and Earth), then destruction of that order must be equivalent to the annulment of the separation of the Waters (or of Heaven and Earth, respectively). This factor considers Heaven, not (as in factor 2) as the dwelling place of the supreme god as Flood causer, but as the context of the great luminaries Sun (NarCom35) and Moon (NarCom9). Remarkably, the Spider complex (NarCom5) turns out to belong to this factor – confirming an earlier hypothesis of mine, which equates the Spider with the Sun in ancient cosmologies. In the mytheme conveyed by this factor, the connection of Heaven and Earth is still intact, hence the inclusion of the chain theme, and the explicit idea that the Flood ended the period of paradise – which, of course, what that of the unproblematic, self-evident connection – the incessant embrace – of Heaven and Earth.
FACTOR(11) 3.683	HEROIC COMBAT: In this motif the combat theme (NarCom28) appears as, emphatically, an alternative to the Flood motif; there is a Heroic evocation of the Hero as the human incarnation of the re-connection (NarCom2) par excellence between Heaven and Earth; yet, in line with the Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern conception of the Flood Causer and the Flood Hero as allies, the combat is not between the Flood Causer and the Flood Hero, but with a third party – or with the Flood itself.
FACTOR(12)	NUMBERS: This motif is predominantly about numbers, especially entire numbers greater than one. One

⁴¹⁵ *Cf.* Lot's wife at the fiery cosmoclasm of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis* 19: 26); here the destruction is in the form of Fire (NarCom36) as an alternative to the Flood; but there are many similar examples in the regular Flood stories in our global sample.

3.056	might even say that this motif is about numerical rationality. It stresses that there is more than one Flood Hero. If we are allowed to proceed to consider the weaker loading variables, the emphasis on a plurality of Heroes merges with another plurality: that of the four directions and/or elements (NarCom29); since these are, virtually globally, the dominant evocation of the land, and since the Flood Hero, in the light of the above analysis, is another evocation of the land, it is not surprising that the four directions / elements have come to be thought of as persons, implicitly even as Flood Heroes joining their forces. Moreover we encounter a number of additional themes here: if there are more Flood Heroes mentioned, these will not be closely related as siblings. The emphasis in this factor is on equality. No special, exalted rank is attributed to the Flood Hero. The Flood Hero is not picked for such rank, but for instance for his moral quality; the latter could be interpreted in terms of personal achievement, since in traditional contexts rank is often a matter of ascription, of birth right. If this factor is high, a specific duration for the Flood tends to be given. Also this factor loads slightly on the theme of volcanic qualities (NarCom37 (Fire, earthquakes etc.) as opposed to the theme of the Earth as source of life and nourishment).
51.569	total variance explained

I have shaded the factor descriptions that have a manifest bearing on the Hero theme.

Table 15.4. Detailed discussion of the factors identified in the multivariate analysis of Heroes in Flood Myths

Out of these twelve constructed and identified factors, at least six do not bear manifestly upon the *Flood Hero* theme: FACTORS(1), (4), (5), (7) although dealing with post-Flood repopulation, (9), and (10). The Hero component in FACTOR(6) is puzzling but slight. In FACTOR(8) the Flood Hero does appear, but as a whimsical and rebellious Trickster, and not as the pious and obedient, subservient Noahic type in a transcendent context dominated by the Supreme God, Flood causer and warner at the same time.

15.3.2. Heroism, combat, and the transformative cycle of elements

FACTOR(11) highlights Heroic combat, which in 2008 I still attributed to the Hero's capacity as the connection par excellence between Heaven and Earth. Meanwhile, however, after much further work on the ancient cosmology of the transformative cycle of elements, I am inclined to see the combat primarily (although, as the further statistical analysis reminds us, not exclusively) in a different light, that of a transformative cycle of elements. Essentially, the cyclical transition between elements can take two forms:

- element E_n destroys elements E_{n+1} , or
- element E_{n-1} produces elements E_n .

Both transitions may also have – as in the Taoist version of such systems (cf. Carus 1898; Needham c.s. 1956) – an attenuated form: insult or hinder next to destroy; and stimulate or further, next to produce.

In many Flood myths, the (non-sexual, processual) 'production' motif in the succession of elements seems to replace ordinary, (hetero-)sexual reproduction in humans especially for the purpose of post-Flood repopulation of the earth; this is an aspect of my present reading of the abundance of non-sexual post-Flood reproduction in Flood myths worldwide, even in cases when the post-Flood actors appear to be human and in possession of the usual organs of reproduction.

On the other hand, the 'destruction' type of elemental transition may take the narrative form of a *struggle*. In other words, it is in a mutation of the transformative cycle that I would now seek the origin of the emphasis on combat in Flood myths as brought out by FACTOR (11). The combat myth could even be said one of the principal mythemes in comparative mythology world-wide (cf. Fontenrose 1980), and I suggest – contrary to Fontenrose, who gets no further than a sweeping appeal to the universal human condition in the face of

death – that here, too, a widespread model of the transformative cycle constitutes the explanatory underlying factor.

It stands to reason to see ‘combat’ as the main qualifying factor of Heroes in the context of Flood myths. *But that would mean that many Heroes in such myths are not Heroes of flesh and blood enacting the tragedy of the human condition, but merely superficially disguised personifications of the destructive type of cyclical transition from one element to another. In other words, many Flood Heroes are not Heroes at all, but dummy representations of proto-chemical relationships!*

The final Hero-related factor, FACTOR(12), with its emphasis on a plurality of protagonists, in my opinion drives home the fact that in a cyclical transformative system, it would be absurd to have only one protagonist – only if there are at least two, could there be a transformation of one into the other. The striking implication of FACTOR(12) is that of ‘numerical rationality’ – between items of equal rank in a series. I suggest that this, again, is a barely disguised reference to a cyclical system of elements. On the other hand, still other number-variables load significantly on this factor, such as the duration of the Flood in number of days; *this suggests that an interpretation in terms of a transformative cycle of elements does not quite exhaust the dazzling implications (of proto-science?) of this factor.*



The sculptor, Bill Reid, of mixed Haida / European descent, allegedly claimed that the male child crawling back into the clamshell rather than being born into the world, represents himself in the belated pursuit of his Haida identity

Fig. 15.5. Bill Reid, ‘Raven meets the first humans’ (commissioned by, and now on display at, the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver)

15.4. Conclusion

Apparently, statistics can be a tool to plausibly reveal genuine, coded structures of thought going back to tens of thousands of years ago. By a painstaking analysis of these many dimensions as mythically narrated for Flood Heroes, I believe to have situated Flood Heroes, in all their dazzling variety (hitherto largely underplayed by comparative mythologists), in a sustained history of ideas ranging from the Upper (perhaps even Middle) Palaeolithic to present times, and informed by the major developments listed above:

- the supplanting of cyclical immanentalism by linear transcendentalism; only at the latter end of this continuum could we situate the Noah type of Flood Hero, the morally impeccable and obedient servant of an incomparably more powerful, male Supreme God who issues a Flood warning while causing the Flood himself
- the emergence of history; regardless of whether the Flood – as I find absolutely implausible – has ever been a historic event of whatever local or more extensive scale (as an indefatigable scholarly industry has sought to prove),⁴¹⁶ the idea of a Flood as a total cosmoclasm is a historic concept that constitutes a total departure from the transformative cycle of elements – even though ingredients of the cosmoclasm (Water, and by a transparent transformation also Fire)⁴¹⁷ could be argued to have been borrowed from the transformative cycle, *the fact that one element (Water) takes total disastrous possession of reality as a whole goes to show that a unique and non-repetitive event is meant, in other words a breach of the transformative cycle is implied*
- the invention of Heaven;
- the invention of food production (through agriculture and animal husbandry – featuring in Flood stories as post-Flood re-connections of Heaven and Earth, and as the special charges of the Flood Hero in what can only be interpreted as a mythical evolution of animal husbandry), and
- the gradual assault – by male religious and socio-organisational power and initiatives – on the unmistakable creative and procreative prerogatives women derive from their specific anatomy; hence the discrediting of the female body and its manifestations (menstrual blood, childbed, nurturation) and instead the claim of abnormal post-Flood reproduction and of male creation through the power of the word rather than from the womb.

As an unexpected further result of this analysis, we are now in a better position to understand the figure of the Flood Hero and the Earth Diver in their interrelation. As Villem's (2005) research has shown, the mytheme of the Earth Diver (coot-like bird, or rodent) is mainly found in Northern Eurasia and North America. At an abstract level of structural analysis, identity could be argued between

- (a) the Land as produced from the Water, in the postulated Cosmogony centring on their Separation, and
- (b) the Ark, as some concentrated form of the Land function but now amenable to human agency and to the instructions of a Supreme God.

⁴¹⁶ Literalist approaches to Noah's Flood include Marler & Robbins Dexter 2003; Mestel 1997; Prestwich 1895; Reinhold 2005 / 2007; The Canadian Press 2001; Thompson 2004-2007; Yanko-Hombach *et al.* 2007; Kadanoff 2001.

⁴¹⁷ As in the transformed Flood story of Sodom and Gomorrah, complete with a few surviving Flood Heroes notably Lot and his daughters, resorting to parent-daughter incest for the purpose of global repopulation.

The Earth Diver is usually presented, in Flood myths, as subservient to the human Flood Hero, yet as an Aquatic Bird (although, admittedly, less so as rodent) this character may be seen as a simple transformation of the incomparably primal Mother of the Waters (who throughout Eurasia manifests herself as or through an aquatic bird, preferably white, cf. Noah's own whiteness! – for an extensive discussion with literature see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011). The Earth Diver would then appear as a transitional character, a vestige of the main, female, protagonist in the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land, but transformed beyond recognition by the rise of another cosmogonic dispensation, centring on a celestial male god. In fact, Earth Diver and Noah-like Flood Hero would be each other's *alter egos*, and both may be seen as a radical mythological development, making the Land-producing Mother of the Waters into the *ultimate enemy* (which she has become throughout Ancient Near Eastern mythology: as Leviathan, Apep, Yam, Tiamat), not so much of the Flood Hero (who after all is her transformation) but of the male celestial god that has taken her cosmogonic place. By striking an alliance with the Flood Hero (even though he is a transformation of the enemy) the Supreme God in the Noahic model renders the contradictions generated by the imposition of two successive cosmologies, more negotiable, and thus clears the way towards a historic, linear, transcendent worldview – one in which Heroes have been eminently in place, from Gilgamesh, and his forebear Utnapishtim (the Noahic prototype), to the myriad Heroes, usually highly violent, that populate our TV screens in modern times.⁴¹⁸

Appendix A15.1. Statistically significant associations found when, in our data base on Flood myths world-wide, each Hero-related variable is cross-tabulated against all non-Hero-related variables

At this point I intended to insert a selection of statistically significant associations found when, within a data based Flood myths world-wide (as constructed on the basis of Mark Isaak's extensive and well-referenced overview, 2006) cross-tabulating each Hero-related variable against all non-Hero-related variables This was to be the most empirical but also the roughest part of my forthcoming

⁴¹⁸ When I wrote the paper proposal for the 2010 argument on which this chapter is based, I still departed from the idea that the Flood Hero could be considered a transformation – under the new and soon dominant disposition of the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth – of Land as the junior complement (Son and Lover) of the Primal Waters as senior complement. What I had in mind was a prototypical hero as exemplified by the Greek heros Achilles, child of the sea goddess Thetis who in many ways qualifies as a demoted Mother of the Waters, again under the newer Heaven-Earth cosmology, with male celestial / meteorological gods in control. However, on second thoughts Achilles, while the her *par excellence*, is also a major sea god in his own right, especially in the Pontic region (Black Sea). So is (as demonstrated by many of her epithets: 'stormy petrel', 'seafarer, etc.) the goddess Athena' (for the detailed argument see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 2011k), while her protégé, Odysseus, in many ways qualifies as a Flood Hero – almost inescapably tied to the sea (personified by his arch-enemy Poseidon – another, male transformation of the Mother of the Waters), from which he emerges as if shipwrecked, both among the Phaeacians and finally at Ithaca. Through the mythical character of Achilles, although a formidable fighting machine, still shimmer the feminine connotations of the Mother of the Waters from which, I propose, he is a transformation: at one crucial stage he hides in women's quarters, and women's clothes. The point of the gender transformation (from female to male) of many primary gods throughout Eurasia in the course of the Bronze Age need not be discussed here; see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 149f.

ing report on quantitative analysis of Flood myths (van Binsbergen , in press (f)). Out of nearly a thousand (!) *significant* statistical returns of cross-tabulation, I tried to select (none too rigorously) those that appear to have a direct bearing on the nature and associations of Flood Heroes. I tried to provisionally order this material, and add selective comments – but in fact, almost every significant return when written out in the form of a discursive statement of association of the type

‘there is a statistically significant, negative association between ‘human agency stated or implied to have caused Flood’, and ‘Flood Hero stated or implied to survive the Flood’⁴⁹

constitutes a text for lengthy contemplation and reflection, to an extent that could not be done justice to in the present context. I am not hiding the fact that the results, although remarkably convergent and consistent, are not so to the full 100%. We are working here with statistical tendencies, inevitably manifesting themselves somewhat out of focus for a number of reason:

- our limited understanding across the mists of time
- the inherent inconsistency and flux of the prehistoric systems – their lack of total integration;
- errors of transmission across many centuries.

We cannot expect total consistency any more than we will find total consistency in the analysis of any living socio-cultural and symbolico-religious system; in fact, for the reasons mentioned, such consistency as the results yet display is truly remarkable. We have to ask ourselves whether such consistency as we see is a true reflection of the prehistoric systems under review, and of their dynamics over time – or whether it could yet to some extent be a research artefact, produced by the analytical distinctions and procedures which we have imposed on the data in the process of constructing our corpus, of designing our analytical categories, of processing the raw data according to their categories in the course of data entry, and of grouping the results in writing up.

However, as the editing of the present book was in progress and it increasingly took its final shape, I began to fear that these rather raw statistical results, without the benefit of an overarching qualitative argument, would be rather out of place in this context. I will accommodate them on my personal website under the following URL: <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/Appendix%20A15%20weggehaald%20BETER.pdf> (van Binsbergen 2022b)., and must ask the reader to peruse these provisional results there.

With such insufficiently processed intermediate data on Flood Heroes, I hoped to impress the reader with the unexpected powers released in myth analysis by the application of quantitative, statistical methods. Meanwhile a more convincing application has been found to this effect: the demonstration, in the next chapter, 16, of how statistical analysis of a corpus of Flood myths may add, empirically, methodologically, and intersubjectively, a time depth of several dozen ka (millennia) to our comparative myth analysis. It is to this argument that we shall now turn.

⁴⁹ human agency stated or implied to have caused Flood

	no	yes	
-1.000	1.000		TOTAL Flood Hero stated or implied to survive Flood
-1.000	2	7	9 no
1.000	37	13	50 yes
TOTAL	39	20	59

l = 8.722; df = 1; p = 0.003

Appendix A15.2. A glimpse of the raw data set (adapted after Isaak 2006)

	such to turn into something in the world below.
number	245
latitude degrees	618
N or S	N
longitude degrees	121
E or W	W
region	10
ethnic group*	Tuleyoone Miwok (near Clear Lake, California)
genetic group	3 North and E Asia and Americas
linguistic group	12 Amerind
macro linguistic group	Amerind
source*	Morrison, pp. 138-151
year (T.E.) source	1993
length	2097
story*	<p>Wekwek, the falcon, visited Wamok Lake, a region new to him, and found many ducks and geese. His grandfather Ollie, Coyote-Man, taught him how to make and use a sling. Wekwek went back to the area, killed hundreds of birds, gathered them, and brought them back to Ollie. The next day, Wekwek saw Sabte, Weasel-Man, coming and going and was curious about him. Wekwek followed Sabte north to Clear Lake and found his horse while Sabte was out. He found several sacks of shell-bead money there and took it all back with him. When Sabte returned, he wanted to find out who stole his money. He set fire to one end of a stick and pointed it in different directions. When it pointed south towards the thud, the flame leaped from the stick and spread southwest. Wekwek was concerned when he saw that the country to the north was on fire, and he told Ollie. Ollie knew the reason for the fire, but he said only, "the people up there are burning holes." when the fire came close so that Wekwek thought they would soon burn, he confessed to Ollie that he had stolen the money and hidden it in the creek. Ollie then took a sack from his roundhouse and burnt it against an oak tree, creating fog. He burnt another sack against the tree, causing more fog, and then rain. He said the rain would last for ten days and nights. The rain covered all the land except the top of Mount Kosokoi. Wekwek flew around in the rain and eventually found that refuge. On the tenth day, the rain stopped, and the water started going down. After about a week, the land was bare again. At that time, there were no real people in the world. Ollie took the feathers of the geese that Wekwek had killed at Wamok Lake. They traveled over the country, and whenever they found a good site, Ollie laid two feathers side by side. The next morning, each pair of feathers had turned into a man and a woman. Later, Wekwek commented to Ollie that the people had no fire, and Ollie sent Wokowillah, the Shew-Mice Brothers, to steal fire from Kalkabta, the Crow, who had it at his roundhouse. They succeeded, and Ollie put the fire in the backbone tree.</p>
number	250
latitude degrees	644
N or S	N
longitude degrees	122
E or W	W
region	10
ethnic group*	Shasta (northern California interior)
genetic group	3 North and E Asia and Americas
linguistic group	12 Amerind
macro linguistic group	Amerind
source*	CLARK, p. 12
year (T.E.) source	1953
length	513
story*	<p>Coyote encountered an evil water spirit who said, "there is no wood" and caused water to rise until it covered Coyote. After the water receded, Coyote shot the water spirit with a bow and ran away, but the water followed him. He ran to the top of Mount Shasta, the water followed but didn't quite reach the top. Coyote made a fire, and all the other animal people swam to it and found refuge there. After the water receded, they came down, made new homes, and became the ancestors of all the animal people today.</p>
number	244

latitude degrees	045
N or S	N
longitude degrees	121
E or W	W
region	10
ethnic group*	Pomo (north central California)
genetic group	3 North and E. Asia and Americas
linguistic group	12 Amerind
crucio-linguistic group	Amerind
source*	Roberts, pp. 153-154
year (CE) source	1992
length	607
story*	One day, the thunder people found trout in their spring. At first, the people were afraid of them, but driven by hunger, the people ate them, except for three children who were warned by their grandmother not to eat them. The next morning, all but these three children had been transformed into deer. The children went to a very high mountain. Rain came and flooded all but the mountain top. The children asked an old man what he could do; he said he didn't know, but he dug all night while the children slept. In the morning, he woke the children. The flood was gone, and the world was beautiful.
number	260
latitude degrees	033
N or S	N
longitude degrees	115
E or W	W
region	10
ethnic group*	Havasupai (lower Colorado River)
genetic group	3 North and E. Asia and Americas
linguistic group	12 Amerind
crucio-linguistic group	Amerind
source*	Alexander, 1916, p. 180
year (CE) source	1916
length	371
story*	Two brothers feuded, and Hekomata angrily sent a deluge which destroyed the world. Before it came, though, Tochopa sealed his daughter Pukelch in a hollow log. She emerged when the flood subsided. She bore a son, fathered by the sun, and a daughter, fathered by a waterfall; these two repopulated the world. Havasupai women are called "daughters of the water".
number	265
latitude degrees	052
N or S	N
longitude degrees	092
E or W	W
region	10
ethnic group*	Cree (Canada)
genetic group	3 North and E. Asia and Americas
linguistic group	12 Amerind
crucio-linguistic group	Amerind
source*	Frazier, pp. 309,310
year (CE) source	1919
length	1172
story*	Wissaketchak was an old magician. A certain sea monster hated him and, when the old man was paddling his canoe, the monster lashed the sea with its tail, causing waves that flooded the land. Wissaketchak, though, built a great raft and gathered on it pairs of all animals and birds. The sea monster continued its exertions, and the water continued to rise, until even the highest mountain was covered. Wissaketchak sent a duck to dive for earth, but the duck could not reach the bottom and drowned. He then sent the muskrat, which, after a long time, returned with its throat full of slime. Wissaketchak moulded this slime into a disk and floated it on the water; it resembled a nest such as muskrats make on ice. The disk swelled, and Wissaketchak made it grow more by blowing on it.

(etc.)

Appendix A15.3. The data entry form (Filemaker Pro, precoded)

Layout #11 Records: 403 Found: 79 Unsorted	no. 49 49 region 3 ethnic group Yoruba (southwest Nigeria) Yoruba (southwest Nigeria) latitude * 007 N N S longitude * 003 E E W delete <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETED CHECK analysis in beginning only sky and waters, not primal waters and land; thus also the Greek version -- however, sky = waters above, in fact they are saying: there was only primal waters, no land CHECK the location mentioned the sea is a possible transformation of earth disc NB: for contact2 see 618181AT file and output 8; if contact3="" then let contact3=contact2 so I only score contact3 if I feel it should differ from contact2																																																																										
Layout #11 Records: 403 Found: 79 Unsorted	clearan story At the beginning of time, there was only the SKY, ruled over by the orisha (god) Olorun, and the waters below, ruled by the female deity Olokun. Obatala, an orisha who lived in the SKY, decided to make solid land in the sea. He descended on a gold chain, poured sand on the water, and loosed a HEN to scatter the sand (forming hills and valleys). Obatala named the place where he came down Ife. He PLANTED palms, asked Olorun to create the SUN, and, in time, created people from sculpted clay. He gave people tools; they began farming and procreating. Obatala returned to the SKY, but other orishas heard his story and decided to live among people. However, Olokun, orisha of the sea, was ANGERed and humiliated. When Obatala rested in the SKY, she sent waves against the shores of the land, flooding low areas, causing marshes, DESTROYING fields, drowning many people, and threatening to DESTROY all of Obatala's work. The people called to Obatala for help, but he could not hear them, so they went to the orisha Eshu, who lived on EARTH then. Eshu refused to move until they brought him a proper SACRIFICE; then he carried the message to Obatala. Obatala consulted Orunmila, an orisha diviner. He consulted his DIVINING NUTS and determined to handle the problem himself. He went to EARTH and, with his powers, weakened Olokun's waves and dried the land. He stayed on EARTH awhile and taught divining to people. Olokun was still upset and sought a way to humiliate the SKY god. She challenged Olorun to a contest of clothmaking, at which she excelled. Olorun sent Agemo, the chameleon, as a messenger, asking Olokun FIRST to show some of her cloth. Each fabric she showed, Agemo duplicated exactly on his SKIN. Seeing such a power in a mere messenger, Olokun wondered at Olorun's powers and acknowledged his greatness.																																																																										
Layout #11 Records: 403 Found: 79 Unsorted	process COMPLETED other NarCom 1 10 The 10 other NarCom 2 0 no 0 other NarCom 3 0 no 0 genetic group 1 African linguistic group D1 Niger-Kordofanian macro linguistic group Super-Nostratic																																																																										
	WHICH NARCOMS ARE IN EVIDENCE IN THIS FLOOD STORY?																																																																										
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	region2 3 87. summaryary +1 yes 88. Complements ske replaces number 50 89. Omit from analysis 1 (use) region3 sub-Sah Africa source Courlander, pp. length 1820 HULPSOURCE Courlander, pp. HULPYEAR 1996 sourceyear 1998 90. Contact reconsidered: broadly indebted to ANE contact needed; rethought/modified HULNUMBER 49 cleanumber 49																																																																										
	A. GENERAL NATURE OF THE NARRATIVE 1. Suggests Jutaeo-Christian Islamic culture contact 2. Social rank/hierarchy 3. How many destructions were there 4. Are all destructions just flood 5. Are all destructions just flood 6. Mention of future flood 7. Modes of production in flood story 8. mention of rope OR CHAIN 9. Mention of ladder 10. mention of fish 11. mention of horse 12. mention of snake 13. mention of bird 14. mention of pou																																																																										

Layout #1	15. mention of needle	-1 no							
Records: 403	16. two children/siblings (any age) mentioned	-1 no	c1						
Found: 79	17. dog (wolf, coyote) mentioned	-1 no	c1						
Unsorted	20. boas/dogs/snakes/scorpions mentioned	-1 no							
	84. BRISKIAT/MOUSE/BEAVER MENTIONED	-1 no	c1						
	83. blowing upon/WARNING mud (scorpion)	+1 yes	c1						
	24. reassembling bones, TAKING OFF	-1 no							
	22. plurality works	+1 yes	c1						
	23. hanging from heaven / tree	-1 no	c1						
	B. BEFORE THE FLOOD: SETTINGS AND PROTAGONISTS								
	24. Nature of SUPERNATURAL protagonists	d [4]	f	0					
	25. gender SUPERNATURAL PROTAGONISTS	0 no	0						
	26. Who or what sent flood	B a god	f	-1					
	27. reason flood	b [2]	c1	-1					
	37. Was there a third party involved indirectly causing	+1 yes	c1						
	28. Where was flood before it was unleashed?	b [2] in	f						
	29. demurge / trickster in evidence	+1 yes	c1						
	30. nature of the demurge / trickster	b1	-1	1					
	31. gender demurge / trickster	-1 male	-1						
	32. murder (attemp) demurge/trickster STATED	-1 no	-1						
	33. Origin of first humans	f from							
	34. Nature first humans (i.e. at time of flood)	0 [6]	f	-1					
	35. mention of serpent / snake/LIARD	-1 no	-1						
	36. Relation serpent / snake/LIARD vs flood hero	0	0						
	C. THE FLOOD								
	18. Duration of flood stated?	-1 no	-1						
	19. How many days flood?	0	0						
	38. Was the flood universal	3	0						
	39. What ended the flood	0 no	0	0					
	40. Role of fire/(DROUGHT) in the context of the flood	0 no	0	0					
	41. Animals survivors of flood REPORTED	0 no	0						
	42. Details animal survivors	0 no	0						
	43. people TURN to stone in flood	0 no	0	0					
	44. Flood associated with blood	0 no	0						
	45. Flood end of paradise / begin death	0 no	0						
	D. THE HERO(ES)								
	46. any HERO(ES) (i.e. protagonist not flood)	+1 yes	1						
	47. Did any living being survive flood (no use to ask)	+1 yes	1						
	48. WAS THERE ANY PRIOR WARNING OF THE FLOOD?	-1 no	-1						
	49. if prior warning, from whom	0 no	0						
	82. WARNING OR ARR BUILDING HIDCULED/IGNORED?	0 no	0						
	50. Nature HERO(ES)	f [twos]	f	1					
	51. WHAT FEATURE MADE THE HERO(ES) JUST THAT?	-1	-1	1					
	52. Number of HEROES	1 one	1						
	53. Gender of HERO(ES)	-1 male	-1						
	64. Where do(es) HERO(ES) come from	0 no							
	55. HERO(ES) PARTNER/SIBLING before fld MENTIONED	-1 no	-1						
	79. If more heroes, relationship between heroes	0 no	0	0					
	56. Relation HERO(ES) vs causer of flood	-2 hero	0	-1					
	65. EFFECTIVE rescue device i.e. an Ark?	+1 yes	1						
	57. Nature of the ark								
	58. Is flood beginning of mountains, valleys	0 no	0	-1					
	59. What gender triggered flood if any?	+1	1						
	66. Gender HERO(ES)'s PARTNER/SIBLING	0 no							
	61. HERO(ES)'s shapeshifting MENTIONED	0 no	0						
	62. HERO(ES) ATTEMPT TO KIL PARTNER/SIBLING	0 no	0						
	63. hero(ES) / other protagonist(s) in contest game-combat	+1 yes	1						
	81. details OF THIS contest	g	g	c1					
	64. source of strength/weakness: HERO(ES)	g							
	E. AFTER THE FLOOD								
	66. How WAS IT KNOWN THAT the flood stopped	g nul	-1						
	67. Fate HERO(ES) after flood	0 no	0	0	0				
	68. postflood reproduction	0 no	0	0	0				
	69. incest after flood	0 no	0	0	0				
	70. Is earth drier in evidence	-1 no	-1						
	71. IS earth drier SAID TO STOP the flood	0 no	0						
	72. Deep earths/diver contribute to repopulation	0 no							
	73. Association flood / intoxicating drink?	0 no	0						
	74. Connection after flood	m fa	1	-1	-1	1	1	1	
	75. Reconnection venerated/SITE OF SACRIFICE?	0 no	0						
	76. Evocation diversity of tongues et nations	-1 no	-1						
	77. After flood, victims restored to life(et c-?)	-1 no							
	78. How animal world repopulated after flood	0 no							
	80. foul crops AFTER/DURING flood mentioned	-1 no	-1						

original 68 value f both sexual and non sexual, check effect on var68b and var68c

[data entry stops at no. 80; lines stricken out in red are initial entry variables which were discarded in later phases of the data entry, and which therefore did not appear in the final data set]

Appendix A15.4. Listing and definition of all variables in the statistical analysis of Flood myths worldwide

variable name	definition of variable
AGENCY	27a. was the Flood due to human agency?
ANIMSRV	41. animals reported to be survivors of Flood?
ARKPRES	65. mention of an effective rescue device <i>i.e.</i> 'an Ark'?
BIRDSEND	66. were birds sent out to ascertain if the Flood had stopped?
BLOW	#83. blowing upon / warming, mud (/corpse) mentioned?
CANINE	17. dog (wolf, coyote) mentioned?
CAUSREND	39a. did the Flood causer end the Flood?
CHAIN	8. mention of rope or chain?
COMBAT	63. was/were the Flood Hero(es) / or other protagonist(s) in contest-game-combat?
COMCSRHE	81. if there is a combat-contest-game, it is between the Flood Hero and the Flood causer?
CONTACT ₂	*2a. is this Flood story suggestive of culture contact reconsidered?
CONTACT	*2. is this Flood story suggestive of culture contact?
CONTAMI ₂	%contamination ₂ from Judaeo-Christian-Islamic Flood stories in evidence?
CONTAMIN	%*contamination from Judaeo-Christian-Islamic Flood stories in evidence?
CONTINT _s	continent of provenance of this Flood story
DAYSFLUD	19. how many days did the Flood last?
DEMIANIM	30a. is the Demiurge an animal?
DEMIHUM	30b. is the Demiurge human?
DEMIPRES	29. Demiurge/Trickster in evidence?
DESTFLUD	5. are all destructions just Floods?
DIVERSIT	76. is there any evocation of the diversity of tongues and nations?
DURASTAT	18. duration of Flood stated?
ERZDIVEND	71. Is the Earth Diver stated or implied to end the Flood?
ERZDVEND	39b. did the Earth Diver end the Flood?
ERZDVPRS	70. is Earth Diver in evidence?
FIRECAUS	40a. was Fire cause <i>sive</i> reason <i>sive</i> nature of Flood?
FIREEND	40b. did Fire end the Flood?
FIRSTANI	34b. at the time of the Flood, were the inhabitants of earth animals?
FIRSTHUM	34a. at the time of the Flood, were the inhabitants of earth humans?
FISH	10. mention of fish?
FLDMOUNT	58. Is Flood the beginning of mountains, valleys?
FLDPARAD	45. is Flood the end of paradise / beginning of death?
FLUDBLUD	44. is the Flood associated with blood?
FLUDUNIV	38. was the Flood universal?
FUDCROPS	%80. food crops after/during Flood mentioned?
GEN _s	*the world's broad genetic clusters as defined by Cavalli-Sforza
GENDRDEM	31. gender Demiurge /Trickster?
GNDRFLUD	59. which gender triggered Flood if any
GNDRHERO	53. gender of Hero(es)
HANG	#23. hanging from Heaven /tree mentioned?
HEROAGEN	51a. is the Flood Hero, an Hero through agency?
HEROALLY	56a. is the Flood Hero an ally of the Flood causer?
HERODIVR	67c. If the Flood Hero survives the Flood, does the Flood Hero direct the Earth Diver?
HEROHUM	50a. is the Flood Hero human?
HEROKNOW	51d. has the Flood Hero special knowledge <i>sive</i> skills?
HEROMORL	51c. was the Flood Hero selected by moral criteria?
HEROPRES	46. any Hero(es) in evidence? (<i>i.e.</i> protagonist(s); Flood itself is not counted as protagonist)
HERORANK	%51b. is the Flood Hero high-ranking?
HEROREPO	67b. If the Flood Hero survives the Flood, does the Flood Hero repopulate the earth?

HEROSUPR	56b. is the Flood Hero superior to the Flood causer?
HEROSURV	67a. does the Flood Hero survive the Flood?
HEROTRIC	50b. is the Flood Hero a Trickster?
HMSAVANI	42. did human agency save animal survivors if any?
INCEPRE	69a. was there incest after the Flood?
INCESSIB	69b. if there was incest after the Flood, was this sibling incest?
INTOXIC	73. is there evidence of an association between the Flood and intoxicating drink? ⁴²⁰
LENGTH	number of written characters in the edited Flood story
LINGs	*language phylum (as distinguished by Cavalli-Sforza) within which this Flood story was collected
MLTHRSIB	var79a. if there are multiple Flood Heroes in evidence, are these siblings <i>sive</i> blood brothers <i>sive</i> cowives <i>sive</i> colleagues?
MLTHRSPO	79b. if there are multiple Flood Heroes in evidence, are these spouses?
MODES	%7a. modes of production beyond hunting <i>etc.</i> in evidence
MURDDEM	32. murder (attempt) on or by Demiurge/Trickster in evidence?
NARCOM ₁	other NarCom ₁
NARCOM ₂	other NarCom ₂
NARCOM ₃	other NarCom ₃
NEWCONTs	%*better version of CONTAMIN and CONTAMI ₂
NUMDEST	4. how many destructions were there?
NUMHERO	52. number of Flood Heroes?
PARTKIL	62. mention of Hero(es)'s (attempt to) kill partners/sibling
PLURAL	#22. plurality of worlds mentioned?
PRTNRSIB	55. mention of Hero(es)'s partner/sibling before Flood?
RANK	%3. social rank hierarchy indicated?
RECONMMD	74d. if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this man-made material?
RECONHUM	74e. if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this through humanity and their institutions?
RECONMET	74b. if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this natural / meteorological?
RECONPRE	74a. after the Flood, is re-connection of Heaven and Earth mentioned or implied?
RECONTER	74c. if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this natural / terrestrial?
REGION	*world region
REGION ₃	world region alphanumeric = REGION recoded
REPOABNO	68b. after the Flood was there repopulation through abnormal for instance incestuous sexuality?
REPOASEX	68c. after the Flood was there repopulation through asexual reproduction ?
REPONORM	var68a. After the Flood, was there repopulation through normal human heterosexual reproduction?
RESCMMD	57b. was there Flood rescue through a manmade vegetal product??
RESCNATR	57a. was there Flood rescue through a natural vegetal product?
RESMOUNT	57c. was there Flood rescue through a mountain?
RIDIC	82. warning or admonition towards ark building ridiculed / ignored?
RODENT	84. (musk)rat mouse beaver mentioned?
SACRIF	75. is the re-connection of Heaven and Earth venerated / is it a site of sacrifice?
SEPARWAT	28. before the Flood, is there evidence of a Separation of the Waters Up, Aside and Below?
SERPFLUD	36. Snake <i>sive</i> Serpent <i>sive</i> lizard sends Flood
SERPMENT	35. mention of Serpent / Snake/lizard?
SHAPSHIF	(#)61. Hero(es)'s shapeshifting mentioned?
SIN	27b if Flood was due to human agency, was it due to sin specifically?
SNDRGOD	26a was the Flood sent by a god?
SNDRSUP	%26b. if the Flood was sent by a god, was that god the Supreme Being?

⁴²⁰ Regrettably, this variable is not in itself relevant to periodisation. Admittedly, in Neolithic cultural history and later, much intoxicating drink has been produced by the fermentation of agricultural produce (grapes, wheat, root crops, honey as a product of apiculture), and in that respect intoxicating drink would be associated with Neolithic food production; but also the fermentation of wild berries, wild honey, and many other proceeds from collecting in the wilds may have produced intoxicating drinks, and human collection and consumption of wild honey goes back to the Lower Palaeolithic (Reichholf 1991).

SORCEYR	year CE/BCE the source was published or original Flood story was first committed to writing
SPNATGND	25. gender of the supernatural protagonists
SPNATPRS	24a. is there a supernatural protagonist in evidence?
SPNATSUP	%24b. if there is a supernatural protagonist in evidence, is this then one Supreme Being?
SPRLINGs	*language macrophyllum (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008) within which this Flood story was collected
STNREPOP	43b. after the Flood was there repopulation from stones?
SURVIV	47. did any living being survive Flood?
THIRDPRT	37. was there a third party involved indirectly causing the Flood?
TURNSTON	43a. were people turned to stone in the Flood?
TWOCHILD	16. two children/ siblings (any age) mentioned?
VARNUMBR	serial number of this Flood story in the data set
WARNCASR	49. did the Flood Hero <i>sive</i> survivor get warning from the Flood causer?
WARNING	48. was there any prior warning of the Flood?

LEGEND: a number preceding the variable definition corresponds with the number in the entry form and the data analysis; * marks a so-called criterium variable; # marks one of several indicators of shamanism; % [added as an afterthought in 2022] marks one of several handles for periodisation of a specific Flood narrative.⁴²¹

As was to be expected, variable 'VAR52ALT = Number of Heroes' yields exactly the same results as VAR52, and therefore has been deleted from the data set. The variable COMBAT leaves in principle the possibility that there is combat that does not involve the Flood Hero himself or herself.

For many variables, the value 'no information' or 'not applicable' are rendered by the same coded value, '1'.

Table 15.5. The variables in the quantitative analysis of Flood myths worldwide, and their definition

⁴²¹ At various places in the present book I contest (*pace* Witzel) the possibility that the notion of a High God or Supreme God could be as old as the Lower to Middle Palaeolithic. For further substantiation of this contention of mine see van Binsbergen 2018, especially chapters 8 and 9. In this respect also the variables registering the presence and action of a Supreme God could be used as (none to secure) handles for periodisation of a specific Flood narrative.

Appendix A15.5. The matrix of factor loadings of all variables in the statistical analysis of Flood myths worldwide

	FACTOR NO.											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
HANG	<u>0.671</u>	-0.205	0.024	-0.017	-0.077	-0.07	0.005	-0.085	-0.078	0.043	0.004	0.107
TWOCHI14	<u>0.603</u>	-0.147	0.137	-0.030	0.044	<u>0.330</u>	-0.056	0.067	-0.094	0.036	0.400	-0.137
PARTKIL	<u>0.599</u>	0.157	-0.121	0.218	0.203	-0.11	0.160	0.095	-0.093	0.147	-0.064	-0.222
REED27	<u>0.576</u>	-0.018	-0.009	-0.191	0.401	0.038	-0.074	0.180	-0.102	0.252	0.099	0.115
SHAMAN16	<u>0.541</u>	0.017	-0.047	0.244	0.118	-0.00	-0.254	-0.045	-0.042	0.289	-0.069	0.018
PRINRSIB	<u>0.505</u>	0.063	0.141	0.108	0.053	0.259	-0.179	-0.066	0.253	-0.050	0.282	-0.133
SNDRSUP	-0.073	<u>0.708</u>	0.125	0.140	-0.094	0.047	-0.182	0.062	-0.007	-0.117	-0.257	0.179
SPNATSUP	0.076	<u>0.700</u>	-0.174	0.102	0.031	-0.13	-0.114	-0.042	-0.103	0.229	-0.130	-0.040
SPNATPRS	0.002	<u>0.623</u>	-0.072	-0.080	0.040	-0.00	-0.223	0.025	-0.272	0.170	0.235	0.037
HEAVEN3	0.067	<u>0.621</u>	-0.092	0.043	0.031	-0.01	-0.164	0.253	0.069	-0.031	0.082	0.097
BIRDSEND	-0.112	<u>0.580</u>	0.186	-0.159	0.059	0.034	0.226	-0.020	0.212	0.008	-0.015	-0.037
WARNING	-0.029	<u>0.566</u>	0.104	0.023	-0.005	0.264	0.280	-0.062	0.200	-0.188	-0.033	<u>-0.326</u>
HEROALLY	-0.144	<u>0.530</u>	0.218	0.060	-0.108	0.123	-0.139	-0.046	-0.058	-0.099	0.024	-0.164
HEROSUPR	-0.073	<u>-0.522</u>	0.084	0.208	-0.020	0.211	0.127	-0.009	-0.052	0.201	-0.277	<u>0.317</u>
CORN24	-0.003	<u>0.516</u>	0.103	<u>0.359</u>	0.078	0.039	-0.114	-0.039	0.047	0.265	0.042	-0.060
ARKPRES	0.051	0.065	<u>0.703</u>	-0.035	0.117	-0.01	0.045	-0.121	0.115	-0.007	0.073	0.007
HEROSURV	-0.249	0.053	<u>0.675</u>	0.169	0.100	0.241	-0.035	-0.003	-0.138	0.078	0.029	0.181
SURVIV	0.013	-0.029	<u>0.652</u>	-0.023	0.058	-0.07	-0.047	0.102	0.022	0.032	0.082	0.108
OSRE6	-0.110	0.111	<u>-0.533</u>	0.182	0.036	0.041	0.044	-0.080	0.102	0.118	0.016	0.155
BLOOD30	0.064	-0.089	<u>-0.510</u>	-0.097	-0.080	-0.11	0.015	0.067	-0.112	-0.004	0.173	0.023
HEROPRES	0.150	0.125	<u>0.507</u>	-0.116	0.089	-0.21	0.083	0.116	-0.029	-0.215	0.121	0.039
DESTFLUD	0.045	0.120	-0.126	<u>-0.709</u>	-0.055	0.052	0.151	-0.007	0.023	0.033	-0.291	-0.057
NUMDESTR	-0.079	-0.092	-0.128	<u>0.708</u>	0.076	0.074	-0.133	-0.024	0.104	0.090	0.125	0.039
FLDMOUNT	0.000	0.159	0.009	<u>0.671</u>	-0.020	-0.21	0.051	0.221	-0.139	-0.029	-0.049	0.064
COW25	0.183	0.186	0.024	<u>0.670</u>	-0.045	-0.07	0.137	-0.016	0.000	0.028	-0.099	-0.137
FRGMT33	0.145	0.115	0.016	<u>0.623</u>	0.030	0.464	0.036	0.190	-0.082	-0.089	-0.045	-0.062
ERZDIV26	-0.057	-0.108	0.006	0.204	<u>0.650</u>	-0.08	-0.028	0.210	-0.125	-0.016	-0.154	-0.064
GENDRDEM	0.053	-0.023	0.047	-0.064	<u>-0.614</u>	-0.10	0.145	0.203	0.070	0.120	<u>-0.352</u>	0.011
LENGTH	0.204	0.103	0.051	0.433	<u>0.528</u>	0.159	-0.008	<u>0.396</u>	0.195	0.277	0.139	0.068
DEMITHUM	0.087	-0.045	-0.183	-0.137	<u>0.515</u>	-0.10	0.125	-0.166	0.061	0.032	0.153	<u>-0.334</u>
RODENT	-0.069	-0.254	0.158	0.126	<u>0.514</u>	0.141	-0.070	0.081	0.036	0.044	0.102	0.018
ANIMSRV	-0.084	0.283	<u>0.341</u>	0.248	<u>0.501</u>	0.015	0.188	0.193	0.085	0.133	-0.146	0.047
INCESSIB	0.137	0.134	0.108	-0.014	-0.062	<u>0.706</u>	0.191	0.051	-0.056	-0.142	0.195	-0.010
HONEY18	0.007	-0.093	-0.216	0.117	-0.018	<u>0.609</u>	0.123	-0.075	0.008	-0.063	-0.150	-0.038
WARNCASR	0.058	0.184	-0.078	0.245	0.170	<u>-0.50</u>	0.191	-0.123	-0.108	0.029	-0.050	-0.072
STNREPOP	-0.015	0.252	0.138	-0.083	-0.046	-0.05	<u>-0.736</u>	0.004	-0.034	-0.035	-0.066	-0.083
STONESS	0.013	-0.026	-0.071	0.084	-0.087	-0.07	<u>-0.719</u>	0.149	0.118	-0.080	0.154	-0.107
REPOARNO	0.050	0.087	0.061	-0.061	-0.293	0.005	<u>0.567</u>	0.244	-0.186	0.195	0.007	<u>-0.316</u>
DEMIANIM	-0.188	-0.069	0.166	0.028	0.012	0.095	0.078	<u>0.718</u>	0.023	-0.028	0.128	0.106
WHITGD21	0.089	-0.005	-0.067	0.119	<u>0.313</u>	-0.00	-0.154	<u>0.578</u>	0.073	-0.062	-0.173	0.023
SEPARWAT	-0.080	-0.155	0.049	-0.098	0.267	0.009	0.260	<u>-0.556</u>	0.012	0.121	-0.124	-0.115

REPONORM	-0.028	-0.262	-0.039	0.044	-0.072	-0.13	0.102	<u>-0.555</u>	0.275	-0.205	-0.040	0.193
MURDEM	0.064	0.168	0.076	-0.059	0.117	0.007	-0.027	<u>0.513</u>	-0.055	0.169	0.099	<u>-0.305</u>
SACRIF	-0.040	0.124	0.173	-0.125	-0.137	-0.06	-0.110	0.136	<u>0.747</u>	-0.088	-0.084	-0.064
SPIDER15	0.242	-0.009	0.025	-0.061	0.004	-0.01	0.008	-0.111	0.023	<u>0.683</u>	-0.040	-0.134
SUN35	0.191	0.086	0.002	0.167	0.026	-0.20	0.132	0.101	0.028	<u>0.627</u>	0.122	0.055
FLLPARAD	<u>0.350</u>	0.229	0.070	-0.100	0.288	-0.02	-0.174	0.122	0.104	<u>0.538</u>	-0.089	-0.026
MOON9	0.033	0.021	0.006	-0.129	-0.114	-0.10	0.190	0.126	0.061	<u>0.529</u>	0.076	0.078
CHAIN	-0.195	0.142	-0.268	0.004	0.094	0.144	-0.070	-0.184	<u>0.383</u>	<u>0.525</u>	0.106	0.074
RECONHUM	0.163	-0.031	0.108	-0.066	0.243	0.176	0.109	0.176	0.085	-0.069	<u>0.556</u>	0.137
COMBAT28	0.127	-0.016	0.206	0.295	0.163	-0.13	0.114	0.111	-0.071	<u>0.341</u>	<u>0.515</u>	-0.044
NUMHERO	0.095	-0.158	0.027	0.048	-0.295	-0.15	0.050	-0.132	-0.163	-0.133	0.124	<u>0.678</u>
FORDIR29	<u>0.332</u>	-0.024	0.100	-0.115	<u>0.337</u>	0.116	0.015	0.034	-0.146	-0.081	0.014	0.470
MLTHRSIB	0.279	-0.072	-0.052	0.017	0.128	<u>0.341</u>	0.133	0.016	0.243	-0.126	<u>0.366</u>	-0.459
HERORANK	0.038	0.045	0.074	0.158	-0.070	-0.05	-0.144	-0.002	-0.006	-0.063	0.140	-0.455
DURASTAT	0.023	0.178	0.160	-0.071	0.113	<u>0.337</u>	-0.095	-0.038	0.272	-0.114	0.138	0.450
HEROMORL	-0.007	0.236	-0.123	0.004	-0.100	0.272	-0.088	0.032	0.410	0.007	-0.047	0.407
VULCAN37	-0.095	-0.070	0.218	0.265	0.051	-0.24	-0.043	0.123	0.069	-0.171	-0.180	<u>0.328</u>
RESMOUNT	-0.146	-0.213	0.185	0.116	-0.219	-0.25	0.171	0.153	0.055	0.099	0.215	0.273
FLUDUNIV	-0.031	<u>0.365</u>	0.063	0.181	-0.264	0.201	0.042	0.012	-0.150	<u>0.311</u>	-0.060	0.261
RESCNATR	0.444	-0.102	0.182	-0.117	0.030	<u>0.342</u>	0.122	0.114	-0.151	0.146	0.012	-0.252
RECONMET	0.114	0.063	0.082	-0.055	-0.161	-0.25	0.131	0.008	-0.145	0.042	0.154	0.197
LIGHTNI4	0.142	0.017	-0.137	<u>0.333</u>	-0.052	0.102	-0.010	-0.244	-0.054	0.479	-0.143	-0.170
CANINE	-0.041	0.121	0.235	-0.126	0.260	0.010	0.099	0.211	-0.246	0.039	0.254	0.165
FIRE36	-0.040	0.033	0.007	0.456	0.078	0.159	-0.021	0.064	-0.048	-0.099	<u>0.385</u>	-0.163
ASTRON22	0.212	0.038	-0.071	0.107	0.219	0.402	-0.058	0.077	0.190	0.206	0.004	0.161
RECONN2	0.272	-0.002	<u>0.383</u>	0.155	-0.163	0.139	-0.259	0.159	<u>0.311</u>	0.247	0.201	0.160
TRIKSR23	0.034	0.193	0.184	-0.169	<u>0.395</u>	0.154	0.104	<u>0.347</u>	0.157	0.141	0.208	-0.160
SERP13	0.420	0.045	-0.131	<u>0.330</u>	0.050	-0.25	0.135	0.484	-0.014	0.102	-0.051	0.134
WATERS11	0.005	0.058	-0.047	-0.112	0.073	0.078	0.086	0.081	-0.040	0.071	-0.447	0.119
HEROHUM	<u>0.313</u>	0.187	0.135	0.051	-0.241	-0.07	-0.031	-0.206	0.165	-0.462	-0.007	0.115
CAUSREND	-0.193	0.004	-0.395	-0.056	-0.075	0.201	-0.125	0.211	-0.035	0.008	<u>0.374</u>	0.112
SIN	0.178	<u>0.382</u>	-0.186	0.070	-0.185	-0.08	0.065	-0.055	0.184	0.180	-0.184	0.104
SPNATGND	-0.078	-0.262	-0.078	-0.073	-0.072	-0.20	0.479	0.035	0.251	<u>-0.315</u>	-0.210	0.103
SHAPSHIF	0.196	-0.151	-0.024	-0.134	<u>0.322</u>	-0.07	-0.018	0.413	0.038	-0.020	0.292	0.102
AGENCY	0.477	0.236	<u>-0.312</u>	-0.053	-0.195	-0.14	0.037	-0.001	0.244	-0.025	-0.023	0.100
DAYSFLUD	-0.153	0.252	0.035	-0.116	0.057	0.411	0.085	0.004	0.093	0.058	0.230	0.099
MODES	-0.187	<u>0.344</u>	0.039	0.217	0.058	0.019	-0.026	-0.265	<u>0.301</u>	<u>0.327</u>	0.025	-0.087
SEPABTR1	<u>0.379</u>	<u>0.390</u>	-0.041	0.229	0.093	0.075	<u>-0.310</u>	0.091	0.141	0.266	0.179	0.083
RANK	-0.038	-0.140	-0.124	-0.094	<u>0.318</u>	-0.00	0.079	0.078	0.494	0.217	<u>0.343</u>	-0.082
GNDRHRO	0.245	-0.170	-0.246	-0.239	-0.457	0.057	-0.075	-0.020	-0.411	0.135	0.015	0.081
DIVERSIT	-0.032	-0.097	0.052	0.152	-0.243	0.245	0.073	<u>0.347</u>	-0.004	0.018	-0.002	0.081
VIRGIN19	-0.104	-0.086	-0.034	-0.076	-0.140	0.044	0.014	0.073	-0.134	0.076	-0.055	-0.074
GNDREFLUD	0.050	0.065	<u>-0.366</u>	-0.184	0.047	-0.05	0.155	-0.262	-0.078	0.175	-0.128	0.073
SPOTTD17	0.261	0.065	0.134	-0.131	0.474	-0.01	0.018	0.148	-0.029	-0.008	-0.036	0.066
RIDIC	0.162	-0.241	-0.205	0.221	0.021	<u>-0.332</u>	0.060	0.095	<u>0.352</u>	0.072	-0.088	0.058
RECOMMND	-0.093	0.012	0.080	-0.022	0.012	0.223	-0.081	-0.099	0.470	0.164	0.084	-0.055
COMCSRHE	-0.094	-0.234	-0.195	-0.295	0.284	-0.11	0.028	-0.078	0.005	-0.223	-0.476	0.053
INTOXIC	-0.130	-0.090	0.070	<u>0.322</u>	-0.015	0.069	-0.079	0.491	0.064	-0.041	-0.177	-0.052
FIRSTHUM	0.137	0.226	<u>0.300</u>	0.006	-0.240	-0.04	0.053	-0.295	0.195	-0.468	0.036	-0.049
HEROREPO	-0.205	-0.045	0.422	0.125	-0.171	0.406	-0.112	0.122	-0.102	0.066	-0.003	0.048
FISH	-0.081	0.004	0.030	0.001	-0.009	0.093	-0.094	-0.252	-0.072	-0.011	-0.072	0.039

TURNSTON	0.140	-0.073	-0.164	-0.102	0.041	-0.02	<u>-0.388</u>	0.252	<u>0.379</u>	-0.022	0.022	-0.037
FIRSTANI	-0.191	<u>-0.385</u>	-0.044	0.039	<u>0.325</u>	0.029	-0.019	0.408	<u>-0.326</u>	0.197	0.038	0.026
HMSAVANI	0.114	0.262	0.193	0.135	0.454	-0.12	0.191	-0.172	0.175	0.206	-0.258	-0.020
RECONTER	0.161	0.055	<u>0.303</u>	0.249	-0.216	0.011	<u>-0.382</u>	0.096	0.038	0.142	<u>-0.366</u>	0.017
TREE12	0.069	0.195	<u>0.368</u>	0.127	0.297	<u>0.319</u>	-0.162	-0.162	<u>-0.307</u>	0.013	-0.162	-0.017
THIRDPRT	0.052	0.060	-0.266	0.063	0.007	0.023	-0.098	0.171	0.054	0.229	0.475	0.016
EARTH10	0.136	0.152	0.182	<u>0.305</u>	<u>0.375</u>	-0.10	<u>-0.398</u>	-0.008	-0.143	0.200	-0.037	-0.015
REPOASEX	0.098	0.245	-0.261	0.192	<u>0.365</u>	-0.00	-0.402	0.076	-0.047	-0.159	0.061	-0.013
AGESOURC	-0.064	0.270	0.167	-0.114	-0.048	-0.01	-0.438	-0.092	0.161	-0.087	-0.105	0.011
HEROKNOW	0.143	-0.226	0.098	-0.130	0.490	-0.10	0.028	-0.069	-0.071	0.265	0.011	0.010

On the basis of the full data set , and specifically on the basis of a full correlation matrix of all variables in the analysis, the factor analysis programme blindly constructs, through a process of mathematical manipulations, a series of new, fictitious variables (designated FACTORS) in such a way that each FACTOR is totally unrelated to all other FACTORS (*i.e.* does not correlate with them), whereas the overall effect of these constructed FACTORS is that together they can explain a fair percentage (in the present case: as much as 5th) of the total variance within the data set. After the blind mathematical construction of the FACTORS, the next step for the analyst is to try and identify the nature of each FACTOR, but scrutinising which of the actually observed / recorded / measured variables load relatively highly on each specific FACTOR. The fruit of this interpretation is to be found in Tables 15.4-5. .

LEGEND: double underline = high (>0.500); single underline = intermediate (≥0.400 but <0.500); dotted underline: low but not minimal; full variable names in Table 15....

Table 15.6. Matrix of factors and factor loadings, contents analysis Flood myths worldwide

Chapter 16. The periodisation of Flood myths world-wide (2022)⁴²²

16.1. The long-range history of Flood myths: General themes

16.1.1. General

In order to set the scene for an empirical, statistical argument on the periodisation of Flood myths, let me first give an overview of the various qualitative themes that have emerged in the research on Flood myths as conducted by others and myself in the course of the past decade and a half; inevitably there will be overlap with ch. 15 and with other sections of the present book.

If I am more or less right in my conjectures and reconstructions, then Flood myths have been a remarkable presence in the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans since c. 30,000 years. Such myths appear to go back to a model which may originate in Central Asia.⁴²³ Ac-

⁴²² The chapter was written as an afterthought when the rest of this book was already in the press. I found that I was dissatisfied with the originally projected Appendix 15.A, where plenty of significant statistical results were to be given but without a proper discursive argument towards their interpretation and significance. The present chapter 16 is to remedy that situation (albeit by reference to different but related data), by demonstrating that statistical analysis of a comparative corpus of myths may allow us extensive, methodologically underpinned, statements on historical processes going back dozens of millennia.

⁴²³ For an argument supporting my identification of the origin of this cosmology in space and time, and its being linked with the branch of Anatomically Modern Humans characterised by Mitochondrial DNA Type B, see: van Binsbergen 2006a, included in the present book as chapter 5. Apparently, it has been Michael Witzel's contention that the near-universality of Flood myth can only be explained by assuming that such myths formed part of Pandora's Box – i.e. of Anatomically Modern Humans's shared cultural heritage developed inside the African continent prior to the Out-of-Africa Exodus which dates from ca. 80-60 ka BP. Meanwhile, my detailed semantic analysis (van Binsbergen 2018; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; cf. ch. 15, above) of the worldview and cosmology implied in the oldest reliably reconstructed extensive lexicon available to Anatomically Modern Humans (i.e. *Borean, supposed to be spoken in Central to East Asia by the Upper Palaeolithic) lends further support to my claims concerning the Upper Palaeolithic emergence of Flood myths. The present chapter's argument, meanwhile, reinforces ch. 15's suggestion that, whatever this early origin, Flood myths are truly at home in the Early Neolithic.

ording to this model the Separation of Land and Water is the central cosmogonic and anthropogonic event – in other words, the original event to which the universe and humankind owe their existence. The distinction between Land and Water then seems to have offered a model for any other distinctions, conflicts and dialectics. The Land seems to have been conceived as male and junior. It is the son of the Primal Waters; the latter seem to have been conceived as female and senior. The world as we know it seems to have been the fruit of their incestuous union. If thus the order of reality may be reconstructed to have been based on the Separation of Land and Water, undoing that Separation (in other words, exposing the world to the Flood) means the end of the world, in other words a return to the state of Non-Being. Perhaps 10-5 ka later this horizontal model was transformed by the invention of Heaven – a concept still scarcely documented in the *Borean vocabulary. With the invention of Heaven, in many Flood myth vertical themes become dominant, *which deal with the Separation, no longer of Land and Water, but alternatively of Heaven and Earth.*

With the idea of the Separation of Land and the Primal Waters the possibility was engendered of beginning to think *absolute difference* – the concentrated *point* which, as the basic ingredient of speckledness, but also as the Primal Hill, as the Land, emerges from the undifferentiated extension of the Primal Waters. However, this distinction was not yet *transcendent* – Flood myths in fact bring out the implication that the Separation between Land and Water may be annihilated, so that the order brought by that distinction is undone. The Primal Waters are maternal and senior, the Land is filial and junior, but the latter remains a transformation, a product, of the former. *Thinking absolute difference, and hence transcendence, only becomes possible with the invention of Heaven.* Only then, Heaven and Earth may appear as fundamental, irreducible categories. Heaven begins to represent true transcendence as compared with Earth.

This emerging perspective on transcendence also reflects on the nature attributed to the *Hero*. Interestingly, the twelve complementary motifs of Flood myths, which I have identified through factor analysis (van Binsbergen 2007c / 2022b / in press (f); the preceding chapter 15) upon the data base of Flood myths compiled and referenced by Mark Isaak (2006), do not all take the same position on a scale ranging from pure immanence to total transcendence. The Flood Hero may be an animal competent in its dealings with the natural world and with its obvious enemies, or the Flood Hero may be a human of the same description, but then, as human, displaying features of immanence – he is a Trickster, possibly an animal, possibly a Demiurge trapped in the material world (as is the cherished image of the Hermetic tradition rendered famous by the writings associated with the name Hermes Trismegistus, from Hellenistic and Imperial times),⁴²⁴ but he never rises to be a transcendent god, he never reaches beyond the bounds of the here and the now. This immanent context is also where the Earth Diver makes its appearance – an animal (a coot or other aquatic bird, or a rodent) who signals the end of the Flood by diving up the first clod of dry Earth – usually at the instigation of the Flood Hero.. However, when a god, especially a Supreme God, appears and poses as ally of the Flood Hero, an element of transcendence is stressed – albeit that that transcendent God's interest in a mere human suggests limits to the extent to which the God is transcendent. In fact, to the extent to which, according to this motif 'God as ally', the Flood Hero is some sort of Demiurge who re-connects Heaven and Earth, the Flood myth really is, at one level of analysis, about the interplay between transcendence and immanence.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Festugière 1945-1954; Colpe 1979; Quispel 1992.

Interestingly, but not very surprisingly, these distinctions are associated with the *gender* distinction as suggested by humans' reproductive biology and underpinning many social institutions and even (in a minority of languages including Indo-European, Afroasiatic and Nilosaharan) gender-specific linguistic forms. Inevitably, the male gender (in whose anatomy the absence of a womb and milk-producing breasts makes for a very modest, indirect and far from obvious role in human reproduction) is associated with transcendence, the female with immanence. Hence Flood stories in which a successful Flood Hero is the ally of a Supreme God, tend to have male protagonists. Underneath we suspect (and frequently detect) a feminine current, with the original Creator / ruler / Mother of the Primal Waters being female, – but often appearing as a capricious chaos demon (a Trickster) defying and attacking (like Tiamat, or Lilith, of *Sehmet*) the masculine powers of order, and being defeated by the latter. By the same token, Flood stories with female Heroes tend to be stories not of qualified rescue but of utter annihilation. In the last analysis, Flood stories may be said to be *not only about gender, but especially about the founding of transcendence*. Transcendence is a quality of cultural products and situations which (through its logocentric association with writing, the state, organised religion and proto-science) is utterly constitutive of modern life, yet may be suspected to be a relatively recent achievement of human thought, by and large not going back to the Palaeolithic but largely an innovative achievement during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, and hence a (none too well-defined) clue towards the *historicisation* of our Flood narratives.

Another distinction attaches itself onto the immanence / transcendence juxtaposition at this point. That is the distinction between *human and animal*. When immanent themes prevail and the Hero is a divine Trickster more than a Demiurge let alone a god, he might as well be an animal; but in the presence of, or in the move towards, transcendence the protagonist can only be a human. In this respect Flood stories are about the elevation (in the conscious minds of the prehistoric actors) of humankind from animal existence, and once more, an ushering in of the world of transcendence.

Behind the human-animal distinction lurks another one that might be considered equally fundamental: that between *animal and vegetal*. At crucial points in many Flood myths, vegetal themes break through in a way that is not even immanent anymore, no longer a celebration of the here and the now, but merely the reduction of all animate life to purposeless, senseless vegetal growth – the motif of the NarCom 'From the Tree', reconstructed to have been already in Pandora's Box. A ready instance is that when, after the Flood, the Earth needs to be repopulated, that process does not always – according to the narrative – involve the usual human biological reproduction through heterosexual genital sexuality, but instead involves animal and vegetal alternatives, including the emergence of indistinct bulbous vegetal objects which ultimately burst open so as to yield newborn human babies (a story retained till this very day in nursery tales, also in the literate North Atlantic region). Once the idea of the Separation of Heaven and Earth has been installed, from then on the Flood is mainly about undoing the beneficial and cosmogonic Separation of Heaven and Earth; and for that purpose, the Waters Above (Rain) and those Below (underground streams, springs) join once more with the surface waters of the sea and rivers, as it presumably was before the moment of Creation. Later also this cosmogonic awareness is lost, and the Flood is subsequently interpreted as, not the undoing, but as the result of the Separation of Heaven and Earth – and that Separation is no longer recognised as a

cosmogonic necessity but as a disaster.⁴²⁵ Hence at the end of the Flood it is imperative that a new Connection is made between Heaven and Earth, in the shape of a stair or ladder (a motif from Ancient Egypt, the Bible, and Oceania), a bridge (Persian), a Tower (a motif from *Genesis* 11, the *ziggurat*-dotted Ancient Near East in general and from South Central Africa), the *Rainbow* (*Genesis* 9, the Ancient Near East⁴²⁶), etc.

The cosmogony of the Primal Waters has yielded yet another mythical theme: it turns out that *the incestuous union of the Virgin Mother-Creatrix And Her Only Son* has been one of the most obvious answers to the burning question of *creatio ex nihilo*, in other words as to *how, both before and after the Flood, the first being could have produced the world without the intercession of a being from the opposite gender*. We may safely assume (on the grounds of numerous indications in comparative mythology – which thus adequately reflects the much greater extent to which the female body is manifestly geared to reproduction as compared to the male body) that this being was in the first place conceived of as feminine – the Biblical story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib is unmistakably a late, masculine, hysterically perverse transformation of this idea.

16.1.2. My engagement with Flood myths through the decades

Despite their great incidence and world-wide distribution, yet Flood myths (except in versions propagated by the world religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam) were not among the myths with which I came into contact during fieldwork or in the context of my literary work. So it was only in the context of the New Comparative Mythology that I recognised this genre as dominant in the mythological production of Anatomically Modern Humans. I first hit on the significance of Flood myths when working on my 'Aggregative Diachronic Approach To World Mythology Starting From The African Continent' (2004-2006). Contrary to James Frazer's (1918) widely believed assertions as to the absence of Flood myths in Africa, yet nearly two dozen Flood myths could be identified there (*cf.* Fig. 5.4., above). Also in the examination of *Genesis 10* as a major source for ethnicity in the Bronze Age Mediterranean (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), Flood myths turned out to be highly revealing – the whole of *Genesis 1-12* (and not just the Noahite chapters 6-10) can be read as one sustained Flood story. An interesting interpretative hypothesis was presented by S.J. Oppenheimer, who suggested (*Eden in the East: The Drowned Continent of Southeast Asia*, 1998; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2019, 2020) that the package of Flood myths of the Ancient Near East was entirely due to 'Sunda' seaborne expansion emanating from insular Indonesia (previously the subcontinent of 'Sundaland') since the beginning of the Holocene, 10 ka BP, from which the inhabitants were expelled by flooding when the polar caps melted at the end of the Ice Ages. As painstaking Assyriological and Biblical scholarship has brought out since the middle of the 19th century CE, this mythological package extends, besides Sumerian, Babylonian and Hittite traditions, to *Genesis*, where it encompasses such utterly fa-

⁴²⁵ #16.1. THE UNEXPECTED PRICE OF COSMOGONY. We hit here on a remarkable, yet often overlooked, dialectics in the conception of the Separation of Heaven and Earth: dramatically constitutive of Creation, it also deprives those on Earth from the benefits of what is in heaven, in other words, Being comes at a considerable price; a considerable part of the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans is taken up by the description of devices intended to compensate for the undesirable effects of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, and to re-establish their Connection, *e.g.* through altars, temples, poles, towers, thongs, trees, bridges, ladders, the Rainbow, ritual actions and words / sacred texts, and exalted humans such as princes, kings, priests, prophets, shamans, twins.

⁴²⁶ van Loon 1992; Draffkorn 1987.

miliar themes as the Creation of the World and of Man, Paradise, the Serpent and the Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, the Flood, and thus has offered many-faceted and enduring inspiration for European civilisation and for the world culture at large. Oppenheimer's thesis is unmistakably anti-Eurocentrist.⁴²⁷ Finding the Sunda thesis attractive though hard to believe and poorly substantiated, I engaged (March-June 2007) in a multivariate statistical contents analysis of an extensive collection of Flood myths worldwide. For this purpose I used the well-researched and referenced large sample of Flood myths compiled by Mark Isaak (2006). With further involvement from Isaak, I completed a preliminary report on the findings. One major result is the firm, quantitative demonstration that (*pace* Oppenheimer) the Flood myths of the Ancient Near East and the Bible derive, *not* from Sundaland 10 ka BP, but ultimately (as suggested by my other recent work on long-range, prehistoric comparative mythology) from a body of Flood-related cosmological myths apparently emerging in Central Asia c. 30 ka BP in close association with a population characterised with Mitochondrial DNA Type B (a type gradually drifting to East and South East Asia, and finally, in the most recent millennia, to Oceania and Madagascar; *cf.* Forster 2004). From Central Africa, and partly (especially initially, but less and less so) on the wings of the exceptionally wide diffusion of mtDNA Type B, this mythological complex – in a continuous process of innovation and transformation, part of which can be retrieved in the statistical analysis – ramified in all directions through Eurasia and the New World, largely over land (though they did reach Oceania and Australia by boat). So we have here the classical pitfall of historical explanation when considering connections and transformations in cultural history: two specific cases of myth production

A (the Ancient Near East 5 ka BP – richly attested) and
B (Sunda 10 ka BP – not directly attested)

may, for all we know, merely be sharing a remote common origin, notably

C (Central Asia 30 ka BP; C --> A and C --> B),

yet they are spuriously interpreted as if they stood in a direct genetic relationship A --> B. (Again a parallel with Bernal, with whom A= Ancient Egypt and B= the Aegean, without stopping to consider C, which is Mesolithic / Neolithic Central and West Asia). As far as the Ancient Near East is concerned, Oppenheimer's Sunda whale is probably just a red herring.

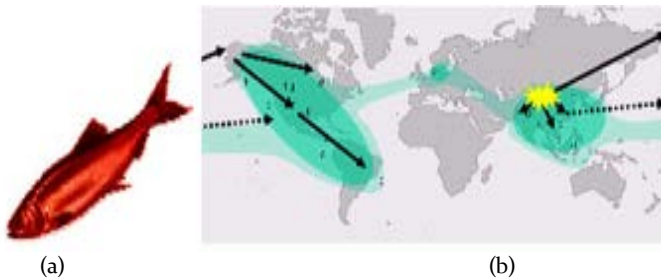


Fig. 16.1. (a) A red herring; (b) Proposed Sunda dynamics in my earlier analysis of Flood myths (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008)

⁴²⁷ It has its refreshingly anti-Eurocentrist thrust in common with Bernal's *Black-Athena* Thesis (1987-91-2006), where, incidentally, like in Oppenheimer's approach (and in Velikowski's for that matter) the violence of natural disasters: inundation, volcanism, cosmic collisions (rather than the dynamics of culture, society, and the economy – to which I would give precedence as a social scientist) is regarded as an ultimate explanatory *deus ex machina* in cultural history.

However, this anticlimax is not entirely the end of the story, for genetic, ethnographic (including musicological) and linguistic evidence demonstrates that Oppenheimer was partly right: there was, in fact, a considerable demic and cultural flow from Indonesia to Africa and the Mediterranean, but it was much more recent than the Early Holocene (*cf.* the peopling of Madagascar as part of the same process, now dated by specialist to have taken place after the middle of the 1st mill CE); and while this connection can be argued, on substantial grounds, to have brought some Flood myths to Africa, other such myths were simply diffused there over land from West Asia – as part of the more general 'Back into Africa' migration that made for a genetically demonstrable westbound migration from Central and West Asia from c. 15,000 BP (Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002;; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004).



source: Picture source: after: Cory, I.P., Sanchuniaton (1832).

Fig. 16.2. The Ancient Mesopotamian / Phoenician god Dagon

The Ancient Mesopotamian / Phoenician god Dagon is thought to be identical to the amphibious Culture Hero Oannes which appeared (according to the book *Babyloniaca* of the Hellenistic historian Berossus) in the Persian Gulf at the onset of (what we now call) Sumerian civilisation (c. 3,000 BCE). Oppenheimer takes Oannes as another sign of Sunda expansion. The Assyriologist Temple (in his best-selling *The Sirius Mystery*, 1977) considered Oannes to be an *extraterrestrial* – the ultimate source of the apparently amazing (but most probably non-existent, a mere figment of the scholarly imagination) astronomical knowledge which the French anthropologists Griaule and Dieterlen attributed to the Dogon of Mali, West Africa.⁴²⁸ In my own, comparative mythological analysis (van Binsbergen 2020c: see that book's Index), Oannes is interpreted as a transformation of the Mistress of the Primal Waters, who apparently has haunted Eurasian mythologies for tens of millennia;⁴²⁹ and

⁴²⁸ I have repeatedly discussed the merits and especially the demerits (*pace* Mudimbe 2004) of the case for the Dogon's advanced astronomy, *e.g.* van Binsbergen 2021: 250 *f.*

⁴²⁹ Yes, *apparently tens of millennia*, that is, if we choose to stress the link – as argued in chs 5 and 6 of this book – with MtDNA Type B, rather than the emphasis on the Early Neolithic which emerges from the present chapter, in addition to

particularly as the most fundamental and characteristic transformation of the Primal Waters – when their unbounded and featureless extension contracts and becomes focussed and concentrated in one spot that invites thought: the Fish (e.g. the fish Matshya which, as an avatar of the South Indian god Vishnu, assisted the regional Flood Hero Manu), the Ark, the Primal Hill, the Land, the Flood Hero, and ultimately the Virgin Creatrix's son and lover.

An important aspect of the analysis of the Flood-myths data set concern aggregate categories of genetics and linguistics, against their world distribution.⁴³⁰ It looks as if North and East Asia and the Americas, which are enormously overrepresented in our global data set of Flood myths, do constitute the core genetic branch (GEN\$ = 'North and East Asian, American') and the core linguistic group (LING\$ = 'Amerind') originally owning the Flood myths. This is also in accordance with my approach to Flood myths in the context of my more general Aggregative Diachronic Model Of World Mythology (van Binsbergen 2006 and especially 2007, this book chapters 5 and 6).⁴³¹

ch. 15, above. In one of his mythological explorations, as wild as inspired, the (not entirely deservedly) disreputable mythographer Robert Graves (1964) sets out what he calls the Pelasgian Creation Myth; the point is not that, in addition to the Mother of the Waters, it involves a male serpentine agent who may have impregnated her – thus denying her essential virginity; in other, apparently earlier, version the impregnator was her own parthenogenetical son and lover – , but that the Pelasgians, with the rustic god Aristaeus as a typical exponent (Eurydice's assailant; cf. Table 3.2, above) correspond with the typical Early Neolithic modes of production and the attending worldview (simple agriculture and *idem* animal husbandry, apiculture, aniconic palleadiums, and rejection of the Olympian *i.e.* male, sky gods).

⁴³⁰ TABLE OF VALUES FOR GEN\$
FREQUENCIES

African	EuBrbSW&	N&EAsAm	NwGuinAu	SEAsOc	TOTAL
3	9	45	6	16	79

TABLE OF VALUES FOR LING\$
FREQUENCIES

AA	Altaic	Amerind	Austr	AustrAs	Austron
2	3	37	5	5	10

EskAl	IE	IndPac	Dene	NigKord	Sino-Tib
2	6	1	3	3	1

Ural-Yuk	TOTAL
1	79

TABLE OF VALUES FOR SPRLINGS
FREQUENCIES

Amerind	Austric	DenSinCa	IndPac/A	SuprNost	TOTAL
37	15	4	6	17	79

⁴³¹ In a companion paper to his sample of Flood myths on which the present analysis has been based, Isaak also discusses the 'Language grouping for Flood stories' (Isaak 2002-2004). However, I have not adopted his questionable proposals for the linguistic classification in the present analysis. And whereas I have adopted the authoritative world genetic classification of the prominent geneticist Cavalli-Sforza, I have somewhat adapted his suggestions for a world linguistic classification in the light of more recent work that has a far greater claim to linguistic authority.

One question coming up in my 2008 analysis (with Isaak) was: *how much reason is there to postulate that the Flood myth complex is originally American, in other words did not reach the Americas from Asia but the other way around, originated in the Americas and from there fed back to Asia?* In fact, as we have already considered in ch. 15, there is genetic evidence of such a (limited) move from North America ‘Back-into-Asia’ (Forster 2004; Tamm *et al.* 2007). What kind of data would we need to substantiate an hypothesis to the effect that Flood myths are originally American? Anyway, the very *concentration* (which of course is very different from demonstrated origin) of Flood myths in the Americas seems an authentic given going back to prehistory, and cannot entirely be accounted for on the basis of Christian / Jewish / Islamic diffusion of the Noahite model during the latest three millennia.

16.1.3. The data set’s evidence on NarComs

My analysis here is predicated on my Aggregative Diachronic Approach to World Mythology, of which Flood myths form only a section, and in which the concept of NarCom (Narrative Complex) occupies a pivotal position (see above, chapters 5 and 6). My model is based on the presumed presence of a handful of original NarComs in ‘Pandora’s Box’, *i.e.* the cultural package that had developed among Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH) inside Africa from c. 200 ka BP onwards, and with which the first AMH’s ventured outside Africa c. 80 ka BP. In principle, the data set used in the present analysis of Flood myths is an interesting opportunity to probe further into the history and interrelations of NarComs, since inevitably many Flood myths display other NarComs in addition to the centrally relevant NarCom ‘The Primal Waters and the Flood’. However, due to the large number of NarComs and the relatively small sample size, data on NarComs in this data set turn out to be fragmented, and their statistical analysis yields little that is of evident value. It was my hope that a cluster analysis on NarComs would bring up interesting dendrograms showing interrelations between NarComs, but so far little of manifest value has been produced along this line. Yet in principle the idea is sound: NarComs have been demonstrated to emerge in small clusters, in specific spatio-temporal contexts which I have termed CITIs, *i.e.* Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation, and the initial closeness of such NarComs (*e.g.* within Pandora’s Box) could be expected to also show up in statistical analysis of mythological data collected in historical times – as in our Flood myths sample. My final report on the quantitative analysis of Flood myths (van Binsbergen in press (f)) will dwell more extensively on the question of the cluster analysis of NarComs.

16.2. Which vars are relevant for periodisation?

Meanwhile let us identify the variables in our data set that our manifestly relevant for historical analysis, in other words that allow us to more or less periodise the Flood myths concerned. These variables (marked by % in the CODEBOOK in Appendix 15.A.4), are the following (between parentheses I give reasons why these variables should be considered particularly relevant in terms of the time dimension):

no.	variable name	variable description	why is this variable time-relevant?
1	CONTAMIN	contamination from Judaeo-Christian-Islamic Flood stories in evidence?	this variable means the extent to which the Flood myth in question may be contaminated, across cultural and geographic boundaries, by the influence of the world religions Judaism / Christianity / Islam; the emergence of these religions in the Bronze Age, Iron Age, or Middle Ages respectively is eminently known, and in most cases we are aware of the

			history of world-religion penetration into the region whence the Flood myth in question originates
2	CONTAMI ₂	contamination ₂ from Judaeo-Christian-Islamic Flood stories in evidence?	as previous variable
3	NEWCONT ₃	better version of CONTAMIN and CONTAMI ₂	as CONTAMIN and CONTAMI ₂
4	FUDCROPS	food crops after/during Flood mentioned?	until the Early Neolithic invention of food production and animal husbandry, dated at 12 ka BP, hunting (and fishing) and gathering constituted the universal mode of production of humankind; so the mention of food crops allows us to date the Flood myth in question as Neolithic or later
5	MODES	modes of production beyond hunting <i>etc.</i> in evidence	the mention of higher modes of production beyond hunting (and fishing) and gathering, allows us to date the Flood myth in question as Neolithic or later
6	RANK	social rank hierarchy indicated	as the example of Australian Aboriginal societies (based on hunting and gathering) indicates we cannot entirely preclude the occurrence of social and political hierarchy before the Neolithic, yet the virtual impossibility of surplus production and of the accumulation of wealth in Pre-Neolithic situations allows us to associate social rank with the Neolithic and later
7	HERORANK	is the Flood Hero high-ranking?	as previous variable
8	SPNATSUP	if there is a supernatural protagonist in evidence, is this then one Supreme Being?	the notion of a Supreme Being is predicated on the thought operation of <i>transcendence</i> , which allows humans to consider real and imaginary aspects of reality beyond the here and the now; intimately associated with the development of articulate language, we have reason to consider this an achievement of the Neolithic or later
9	SNDRSUP	if the Flood was sent by a god, was that god the Supreme Being?	as previous variable

Table 16.1. Variables in our data set on Flood myths that may be considered relevant for periodisation

It will be by concentrating on these variables I shall now attempt a periodisation of Flood myths on the basis of quantitative analysis.

16.3. Discursive discussion of the statistical results

16.3.1. A note of caution

Before we start considering and interpreting the various significant results of our cross-tabulations of potentially periodisation-relevant variables, a note of caution is in order. We have been testing at the 5% level of significance, but this also means that we run the risk that one out of 20 significant result must be considered a spurious artefact of the very statistical procedures we are applying. Not all of our findings can be expected to be systematic and meaningful. It is already a miracle (and extremely reassuring!) that, in our data set, we

find so much consistency as the overview below will bring out.

16.3.3. HERORANK

How can our variable HERORANK contribute to the periodisation of the Flood narratives in our data set? It is positive in only 9 out of our 9 cases. It loads high on FACTOR₁₂ (= NUMBERS) and somewhat lower (but not minimum) on FACTOR₃ (=HERO AND ARK) and FACTOR₄ (= FLOOD ALTERNATIVE).⁴³²

The only significant result of cross-tabulation involving HERORANK is: *there is a statistically significant, positive association between HERORANK and WARNING.*⁴³³ This stands to reason. If by virtue of my interpretation the high-ranking human is one of the devices through which the Connection between Heaven and Earth is restored, then such a human is close to the supernatural and all the more eligible for early warning. The only insight we may draw from this result in terms of periodisation is that the Flood warning is associated with a later phase in history, when a hierarchically differentiated (in other words, ranked) society is in place, e.g. mainly the Neolithic or later. Before the Neolithic (when substantial surplus production began to offer the conditions for material social differentiation), the archaeological evidence of rank e.g. in burials is slight and difficult to interpret.

16.3.4. MODES

A much more promising variable for periodisation is that which measures *the mention of more advanced modes of production beyond hunting and gathering* (MODES). The latter variable is positive in as many as 18 (23%) of our 79 cases. It loads lowly (but not minimum) on FACTOR₉ (= SACRIFICE AS RE-CONNECTION) and FACTOR₁₀ (= HEAVEN, LUMINARIES, CONNECTION, PARADISE)

From the earliest formulation of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology, the rise of new modes of production has been stressed as the obvious Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation(CITI) of Narrative Complexes. It therefore stands to reason to consider modes of production also in the present analysis of Flood myths.

There turns out to be a statistically significant association between CONTINENT and MODES of Production ($\chi^2=36.026$, $df = 11$, $p=0.000$).⁴³⁴

⁴³² This FACTOR₄ seems close to the *Genesis* Nuhic model, but probably does not entirely coincide with it.

⁴³³ Hero stated or implied to be high ranking

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL warning stated or implied to have been given
-1.000	49	3	52 no
1.000	21	6	27 yes
TOTAL	70	9	79

$\chi^2 = 4.490$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.034$

⁴³⁴ TABLE OF MODES (ROWS) BY CONTINENTS (COLUMNS)

	Australia	Europe	Meso Am	N Ameri	N and	Near Ea
-1.000	5	3	6	24	3	0
1.000	0	0	2	0	0	4
TOTAL	5	3	8	24	3	4

The higher modes in the data set are confined to Meso America and the Ancient Near East

The attending distribution is remarkable: as far as the sample is concerned (which of course is only a very limited and demonstrably one-sided reflection of reality on the ground), Australia (5 cases), Europe (3 cases), North America (24 cases), North and East Asia (3 cases) and New Guinea (1 case) all completely lack higher modes of production including the Neolithic modes of agriculture and animal husbandry. The (Ancient) Near East is the only region that has higher-modes of production for all of its 4 cases. A mixture of cases with, as well as without, higher modes (*i.e.* the Flood myth in question contains or implies merely indications of hunting and collecting, but lacks explicit indications of higher modes of production) is displayed, in the sample, for Meso America (6 without higher, 2 with higher modes), the Pacific (3 without, 2 with), South America (7 without, 3 with), South Asia (2 without, 2 with), South East Asia (6 without and 3 with) and sub-Saharan Africa (1 without, 2 with). In some respect this outcome is in line with expectation, and bears out the quality of the sample (N=79) and of the data set on which it is based as a systematic 20% sample: for Australia, with its exclusive population of hunters and collectors until (Early) Modern times, we expect the total absence of higher modes of production; for the Near East, long acclaimed as the exclusive site of the Neolithic revolution (at the expense of Africa and possibly China and Meso America) and still recognised as one of the Neolithic's epicentres, we expect higher modes of production. However, we should not rush to conclusions: although our sample does include some hunting and collecting peoples from the Americas, South East Asia and the Pacific, all the other regions have had agricultural and pastoral food production for millennia. Yet our finding on this point suggests that, in so far as our limited sample is concerned, these regions have partly or entirely (North America is a particularly conspicuous example, with 24 cases!) retained Flood myths that lack all explicit reference to Neolithic food production. *This can only be explained by assuming that Flood myth as a genre are much older than the Neolithic* – which tallies with my overall hypothesis (based on an analysis of distribution patterns of Narrative Complexes, CITIs, and MtDNA Types) that Flood myths emerged in Central Asia c. 30 ka BP⁴³⁵ – even though subsequent analysis and reflection, particularly in the present ch. 16, have led us to consider the Early Neolithic dimension of Flood myths.

There is a statistically significant, positive association between MODES and PLURAL (*i.e.*

	New Gui	Pacific	Ameri	S Asia	SE Asia	ss Afri	TOTAL higher modes of production in evidence
-1.000	1	3	7	2	6	1	61 no
1.000	0	2	3	2	3	2	18 yes
TOTAL	1	5	10	4	9	3	79

1 = 36.026; df = 11; p = 0.000

⁴³⁵ If Flood myths then may be demonstrated to be much older than the Neolithic, why not adopt Witzel's view and accept that Flood myths are part of Pandora's Box? This question I consider elsewhere in the present book. Meanwhile the thrust of the present chapter's argument is that, even if Flood myths may be considered to have arisen c. 30 ka BP, still their principal contents and concerns are strongly associated with a much later period, the Neolithic and after.

the plurality of worlds).⁴³⁶The plurality of worlds (the parcelling up of cosmology into Heaven, Earth and Underworld, and possible other subdivisions) is an aspect of the rise of shamanism (which typically involves a human agent considered, by the historical actors, to be travelling up and down between these divisions), and of the invention of Heaven; the latter is not only as a precondition for the emergence of naked-eye astronomy (the Upper Palaeolithic is the period when some of our present-day constellations began to be discerned; Rappenglück 1998; Berezkin 2010; Gurshtein 1993), but also as the typical dwelling-place of a transcendent, ultimately Supreme, God. This implies that we must view shamanism, not as an archaic atavism shimmering through in later cultural achievements, but as a major form of innovation in its own right, in the course of cultural history.⁴³⁷

The mention of higher modes of production (MODES) has a significant negative association with RESCNATR,⁴³⁸ in other words if higher modes are present, then the Flood rescue is not through a natural vegetal product (such as a Reed stalk). This stands to reason: in the first place the higher modes imply a greater control of humans over Nature, so that not a natural product but an artefact of human construction (an Ark) becomes possible as a Flood rescue device; in the second place because the appearance of higher modes of production turns out to be a sign of the advent of a more complex, transcendence-orientated cosmology, in which not natural products but the alliance between the Flood Hero and a super-natural being becomes decisive for the course of Flood events.

Such an alliance is also brought out by the statistically significant, positive association between MODES and WARNING,⁴³⁹ in other words between the mention of higher modes,

⁴³⁶ higher modes of production in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL plurality of worlds in evidence
-1.000	53	11	64 no
1.000	8	7	15 yes
TOTAL	61	18	79

$\chi^2 = 5.333$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.021$

⁴³⁷ This is also why I disagree with Witzel when he sees no difficulty postulating shamanism in the Middle Palaeolithic. For instance, in his view it were shamans who directed Anatomically Modern Humans's crossing of the several kms wide Bab al-Mandab separating East Africa from the Arabic Peninsula, as a first step in the Out of Africa movement, 80 to 60 ka BP. The recourse to shamanism as some kind of primal ritual / cosmological response of humans also dominates the school of South African and European-rock-art interpretation initiated by Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989; cf. Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998.

⁴³⁸ higher modes of production in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL natural rescue device in evidence
-1.000	52	18	70 no
1.000	9	0	9 yes
TOTAL	61	18	79

$\chi^2 = 4.986$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.026$

⁴³⁹ higher modes of production in evidence

and the narrative of a Flood warning.

This is also why we find a statistically significant, positive association between MODES and SNDRGOD, in other words, why the mention of more advanced modes of production is compatible with the idea of the supernatural (this is why we find a statistically significant, positive association between MODES and SPNATPRS, – in other words ‘the supernatural is present’),⁴⁴⁰ and even MODES and SNDRGOD, in other words the claim that the Flood sender was a god.⁴⁴¹

In the light of such increased control over Nature, it stands to reason that the mention of higher modes shows a significant, negative association between MODES and SHAPSHIF,⁴⁴² in other words when higher modes of production are in evidence then shape shifting, as a feature of the immanent Demiurge or Trickster, is no longer in evidence. Such shape shifting (although a widespread general feature of mythical beings (cf. Anonymous, ‘Shapeshifting’) often appears as a feature of subaltern aquatic mythical beings such as Proteus and Nereus, and is interpretable as remote, gender-reversed echoes of the Mistress of the Waters) is to me an evocation of the capricious experiences hunters / fishermen and gatherers have in their encounters with Nature, largely reduced to powerlessness in the face of uncon-

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	
	-----	-----	TOTAL warning in evidence
-1.000	44	8	52 no
1.000	17	10	27 yes
	-----	-----	
TOTAL	61	18	79

$\chi^2 = 4.549; df = 1; p = 0.033$

⁴⁴⁰ higher modes of production in evidence

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	
	-----	-----	TOTAL the supernatural in evidence
-1.000	9	0	9 no
1.000	29	12	41 yes
	-----	-----	
TOTAL	38	12	50

$\chi^2 = 5.536; df = 1; p = 0.019$

⁴⁴¹ higher modes of production in evidence

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	
	-----	-----	TOTAL Flood sender stated or implied to be a god
-1.000	22	2	24 no
1.000	14	7	21 yes
	-----	-----	
TOTAL	36	9	45

$\chi^2 = 4.534; df = 1; p = 0.033$

⁴⁴² higher modes of production in evidence

no	yes		
		-1.000	1.000
		-----	-----
			TOTAL shapehifting in evidence
-1.000	51	18	69 no
1.000	10	0	10 yes
		-----	-----
TOTAL	61	18	79

$\chi^2 = 5.586; df = 1; p = 0.018$

trollable chance.⁴⁴³

The eclipse of the Demiurge / Trickster as the principal instance of agency in the world picture, is also clear from the statistically significant, negative association between HANG ('hanging from heaven / tree mentioned?') and MODES.⁴⁴⁴ Several North American Flood myths have the theme of *birds who try to escape from the Flood by hanging themselves by their beaks from the sky* – the rising waters reach their tail feathers or wings and there leave white stripes, which allegedly can be seen to this very day: the basis for aetiological story of the kind 'why does such and such a bird have white stripes on its tail?..'

If higher modes are mentioned or implied, there is a tendency that *hanging* is not mentioned. Initially I have earlier considered such hanging (of agents in the Flood story, from Heaven etc.) as a sign of shamanism, but now I am inclined to simply see it as an imperfect, still immanent transition on the way to the installation of transcendence, such as is manifest in the invention of Heaven.

However, at this point we seem to hit on contradictions in the data set, for along with our finding on MODES and HANG, we find that there is a statistically significant, positive association between CHAIN (i.e. mention of rope or chain?) and MODES of production.⁴⁴⁵ Such chains are typically Connections between Heaven and Earth hanging down, thus in principle the counter-image of the variable HANG. We cannot expect total consistency in contents analysis of very heterogeneous and potentially extremely old cultural data. Perhaps the impression of consistency may be restored if we dwell a bit longer of the meaningful difference between

- animate Flood personages hanging from Heaven (by their own impetus, as if they represent an autonomous aspect of Nature independent from both humans and the supernatural, in a most archaic, inchoate image of Heaven) , and
- chains as typically inanimate objects hung out by a personal Flood agent seeking to restore the Connection between Heaven and Earth. (Hence also the statistically sig-

⁴⁴³ Incidentally, in my extensive comparative work on divination over the decades I have brought such typical experiences of hunters and gatherers in relation with the emergence of divination.

⁴⁴⁴ hanging from heaven stated or implied

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL modes of production
-1.000	51	10	61 only hunting and collecting
1.000	18	0	18 food production etc.
TOTAL	67	10	79

$\chi^2 = 5.586; df = 1; p = 0.018$

⁴⁴⁵ chain in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL higher modes of production in evidence
-1.000	61	0	61 no
1.000	14	4	18 yes
TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 12.590; df = 1; p = 0.000$

nificant, positive association between CHAIN and PLURALITY of worlds).⁴⁴⁶

By the same token, there is a statistically significant, positive association between higher MODES and SEPARWAT ('before the Flood, is there evidence of a Separation of the Waters Up, Aside and Below?'),⁴⁴⁷ in other words where higher modes are mentioned, we are likely to encounter the idea of the Separation of the Waters into The Waters Above (Heaven) and The Waters Below (the Ocean, other surface waters, and subterranean waters including the Abyss). All this seems to be part of the installation of the capability of transcendent thought.

Not surprising, yet still revealing, is our finding of a statistically significant, positive association between HMSAVANI ('did human agency save animal survivors if any?') and MODES.⁴⁴⁸ Higher modes of production imply the presence of food production also through animal husbandry, so it stands to reason that animals should be saved in the course of the Flood. Yet there is an ambiguity here, for the saved animals *are not necessarily identified as the charges of a human engaging in animal husbandry* – sometimes the Flood story may be situated in a mythical time when animals, not humans, were the only animate inhabitants of the Earth hence the principal victims of the Flood.

Agriculture and animal husbandry are the two principal manifestations of Neolithic food production. Time for us to consider the periodisation results of the variable FUDCROPS.

16.3.5. FUDCROPS

Of course, our first handle when trying to impose some sort of periodisation upon our data set of Flood narratives, is by concentrating on modes of production. Before the advent of the Neolithic, ca. 12,000 BP, practically all humans were involved in hunting and gathering as the sole modes of production.^{449 450} The watershed towards datable periodisation of the narrative would be, at the onset

⁴⁴⁶ chain in evidence			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL plurality of worlds in evidence
-1.000	63	1	64 no
1.000	12	3	15 yes
TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 6.345; df = 1; p = 0.012$

⁴⁴⁷ higher modes of production in evidence			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL separation of the waters in evidence
-1.000	5	0	5 no
1.000	8	6	14 yes
TOTAL	13	6	19

$\chi^2 = 4.577; df = 1; p = 0.032$

⁴⁴⁸ human stated or implied to save animals			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL higher modes of production in evidence
-1.000	54	7	61 no
1.000	11	7	18 yes
TOTAL	65	14	79

$\chi^2 = 6.278; df = 1; p = 0.012$

⁴⁴⁹ I overlook, for an instant, the probability that some people were involved in local and regional and long-distance petty commodity producers making artefacts such as hand axes, axe heads, rope, mats, spears, atlatls, jewellery, salt,

of the Neolithic, the invention of food production through agriculture and animal husbandry.

Food crops (FUDCROPS), as a sign that the transition towards the Neolithic has already taken place, feature extensively in our data set. Some of the statistically significant associations of the FUDCROPS variable are obvious, others are revealing, others again puzzling.

- Obvious:

Since the Neolithic Revolution involves both agriculture and animal husbandry, it stands to reason that where food crops are mentioned, also animals were significantly present among the survivors of the Flood,⁴⁵¹ and that they were specifically rescued by humans, *i.e.* HMSAVANI / MODES.⁴⁵² By the same token, the positive association FUDCROPS / MODES⁴⁵³ – between the presence of food crops and the presence of

statuettes, lamps, lamp oil – probably as part-time specialists in addition to their ongoing hunting and collecting which they continued to have in common with all other adult members of their community. These activities are to some extent modes of production, and their products have occasionally been identified archaeologically, but regrettably it would complicate the present analysis beyond viability if we were to pay specific attention to them at this stage.

⁴⁵⁰ In my initial thinking about Flood myths, I opted for an origin in the Upper Palaeolithic, ca. 30 ka BP. That was nearly 20 ka earlier than the specialists's consensual date for the onset of the Neolithic. However, it is also thinkable (*although very unlikely*) that we should not so much bring the date for the origin of Flood myths down to 12 ka BP, but the date for the earliest agriculture and animal husbandry to c. 30 ka BP.

⁴⁵¹ animals claimed to survive

	no	yes	TOTAL	food crops in evidence
	-1.000	1.000		
-1.000	43	23	66	no
1.000	3	10	13	yes
TOTAL	46	33	79	

$\chi^2 = 7.984; df = 1; p = 0.005$

⁴⁵²

human stated or implied to save animals

	no	yes	TOTAL	higher modes of production in evidence
	-1.000	1.000		
-1.000	54	7	61	no
1.000	11	7	18	yes
TOTAL	65	14	79	

$\chi^2 = 6.278; df = 1; p = 0.012$

and similarly:

food crops in evidence

	no	yes	TOTAL	human stated or implied to save animals
	-1.000	1.000		
-1.000	57	8	65	no
1.000	9	5	14	yes
TOTAL	66	13	79	

⁴⁵³ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	TOTAL	higher modes of production in evidence
	-1.000	1.000		
-1.000	57	4	61	no, just hunting and collecting
1.000	9	9	18	yes, food production etc.
TOTAL	66	13	79	

$\chi^2 = 16.168; df = 1; p = 0.000$

higher modes of production than hunting and gathering is only what we were to expect – although the fact that it shows up in our statistical analysis is another confirmation of the essential quality of our data set and of our analytical approach.

Similarly, there is a statistically significant, positive association between *animsv* (animals reported to be survivors of Flood?) and *FUDCROPS*⁴⁵⁴ in other words, if food crops are mentioned, animals are reported as survivors of the Flood. This need not be as straightforward as all that: the Flood story may be situated in a mythical period when animals are still the sole inhabitants of the Earth (which is in principle incompatible with the notion of food crops – animals do not till the Earth), but most probably reference is to humans's control over domesticated animals which therefore are to be saved in the Flood.

- Revealing:

It is remarkable that there should be a significant relationship⁴⁵⁵ between the mention of food crops and the claim that the Flood was *universal*. The latter claim, which would come easily to Modern minds steeped in logocentricity, must have represented an enormous mental achievement on the part of the humans of the Early Neolithic. Just like the invention of Heaven, and the idea of a Supreme God, it constitutes a through movement of transcendence – the universal is the opposite of the immanent here-and-now that would dominate life and thought in a small-scale community. I cannot see how the sheer fact of food production in itself would lead to such a demarche, yet we are here in the presence of one of the major steps on the road to Modern thought.⁴⁵⁶

454

animals claimed to survive		TOTAL	food crops in evidence
no -1.000	yes 1.000		
-1.000	43	66	no
1.000	3	13	yes
TOTAL	46	79	

$\chi^2 = 7.984; df = 1; p = 0.005$

455 TABLE OF FUDCROPS (ROWS) BY FLUDUNIV (COLUMNS)

Flood:	local 1.000	regional 2.000	missing 2.500	universal 3.000	TOTAL
-1.000	6	15	18	27	66
1.000	0	0	6	7	13
TOTAL	6	15	24	34	79

$\chi^2 = 9.083, df = 3 p = .028$

⁴⁵⁶ #16.2. AFRICAN CONVERSION AND THE WIDENING SCOPE OF EXPERIENCE. I am thinking here of a theme that preoccupied the historical study of African religion in the early 1970s, when the question of 'African

A similar thought movement towards transcendence may be seen in the unexpected significant association between the mention of food crops and the claim⁴⁵⁷ that the *Flood Hero was an ally of the Flood Causer* – like in the Biblical case of Noah). There is little in the nature of food crops or agriculture in themselves that stipulates a close link between Flood Hero and a supernatural force strong enough to cause the Flood. But perhaps both agriculture and rescue from the Flood may be conceived as ultimate gifts from what only a transcendent conception of the divine may begin to explain – with this proviso that it is no longer the Earth or Nature (let alone the Primal Waters, and their Mother), but the active, skilful, purposeful working of humans upon Nature which constitute the Neolithic modes of production of agriculture and animal husbandry – dependence upon a supernatural force, all right, but of humans in conscious alliance with that force; in other words the rise of the concept of a transcendent supernatural being seems to have implied also a thought movement elevating humans themselves well above the plane of the surrounding world including its animals and plants

Revealing it is also, and rather along the same train of thought, when we find a positive association between FUDCROPS and PLURAL⁴⁵⁸ in other words between the mention of food crops and the idea of the plurality of worlds. The latter idea belongs to the framework of transcendence and the conceptualisation of Heaven as a different order of being.

More or less in the same vein, we find a significant, negative association between FUDCROPS and SHAPSHIF,⁴⁵⁹ in other words where food crops are mentioned,

conversion' (from 'animism' to Islam and Christianity) was on many scholars's minds (Ranger & Kimambo 1971; Horton 1971; Horton & Peel 1976; for a summary treatment see van Binsbergen 1981). Horton's inspiring idea was that the dramatic widening of the scope of local everyday lived experience through long-distance trade and soon colonial occupation and rule, necessitated a conception of the supernatural that, rather than de local ancestors and the regional royal ancestors, would be truly of a scope to be commensurate with the widened sense of unbounded reality after (van Binsbergen 1981) *the shattering of the microcosm*. I still find these inspiring ideas, but now have to consider that something of that process may already have occurred with the onset of the Neolithic.

⁴⁵⁷ We find a significant association between the mention of food crops and the claim that the Flood Hero was an ally of the Flood causer – FUDCROPS / HEROALLY

food crops in evidence		no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL	Hero stated or implied to be ally of a god
-1.000	21	1	22	no
1.000	13	5	18	yes
TOTAL	34	6	40	

$\chi^2 = 4.410$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.036$

⁴⁵⁸ food crops in evidence

food crops in evidence		no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL	plurality of worlds in evidence
-1.000	57	7	64	no
1.000	9	6	15	yes
TOTAL	66	13	79	

$\chi^2 = 6.273$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.012$

⁴⁵⁹ food crops in evidence

food crops in evidence		no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL	shapeshifting in evidence
-1.000				
1.000				
TOTAL				

shapeshifting (as a feature of Demiurges and especially of Tricksters, often with an aquatic background ultimately derived – or so it seems – from the Mother of the Waters) has disappeared from consciousness. With food crops we are steering away from the immanent world of the undomesticated capricious forces of nature, and we are well on our way towards the transcendent world of the Supreme God in alliance with the Flood Hero.

The same complex of thought tending towards transcendence appears to be invoked when we find a significant, positive association between FUDCROPS and SNDRGOD,⁴⁶⁰ in other words between the mention of food crops and the Flood as sent by a God; or again, when we find a positive association between FUDCROPS and SNDRSUP⁴⁶¹ ⁴⁶²– in other words when that God turns out to be even the Supreme God.

And when we find a positive association between FUDCROPS and RECONTER ('if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this natural / terrestrial?'),⁴⁶³ in

-1.000	56	13	69 no
1.000	10	0	10 yes

TOTAL	66	13	79
l = 3.871; df = 1; p = 0.049			

⁴⁶⁰ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL Flood sender stated or implied to be a god
-1.000	23	1	24 no
1.000	16	5	21 yes

TOTAL	39	6	45
l = 3.974; df = 1; p = 0.046			

⁴⁶¹ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL Flood sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	29	1	30 no
1.000	10	5	15 yes

TOTAL	39	6	45
l = 7.477; df = 1; p = 0.006			

⁴⁶² food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL supernatural in evidence
-1.000	9	0	9 no
1.000	29	12	41 yes

TOTAL	38	12	50
l = 5.536; df = 1; p = 0.019			

⁴⁶³ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL re-connection stated or implied to be terrestrial
-1.000	52	5	57 no
1.000	14	8	22 yes

other words between the mention of food crops and the Re-connection of Heaven and Earth through terrestrial means; this reminds us that food crops, growing from the Earth but as potentially a gift from a supernatural being, constitute a way to Re-connect Heaven and Earth after their Separation, and after the Flood has annihilated that Separation.

- Puzzling:

It is not easy to find a ready explanation why the mention of food crops should be significantly associated⁴⁶⁴ with the claim that the Flood was the origin of mountains and valleys – unless as an implication of the general verticalisation of the world image, which also relates to RANK and to the idea of a Supreme God, and which made it possible to conceptualise cosmogony as the Separation of Heaven and Earth, and thus of the Flood as annihilation of that cosmogony, and the Post-Flood situation as restoration of verticality.

Nor can I readily explain why there should be a significant *negative* association between FUDCROPS and DESTFLUD ('are all destructions just Floods?'),⁴⁶⁵ i.e. between the mention of food crops, and the Flood as the sole cause of destruction. In other words, if there are food crops, then there would be also other sources of destruction beside the Flood. Here we (along with the authors of *Genesis*, who let God promise that never again would the world be destroyed by a Flood; *Genesis* 9:11 f.) think in the first place of Fire. One would be tempted to think of the slash-and-burn method of early agriculture, which in the regions of the world where it is still being practiced (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, and South East Asia) often leads to dangerous bush fires. This suggestion is borne out by a significant positive association between Fire as a cause of the Flood, and the mention of food crops.⁴⁶⁶ What seems to be in-

TOTAL	66	13	79
l = 7.924; df = 1; p = 0.005			

⁴⁶⁴Flood stated or implied to be the origin of mountains

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL food crops in evidence
-1.000	64	2	66 no
1.000	10	3	13 yes
TOTAL	74	5	79
l = 5.307; df = 1; p = 0.021			

⁴⁶⁵destruction stated or implied to be Flood

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL food crops in evidence
-1.000	4	62	66 no
1.000	4	9	13 yes
TOTAL	8	71	79
l = 5.573; df = 1; p = 0.018			

⁴⁶⁶Fire stated or implied to have caused Flood

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL food crops in evidence
-1.000	63	3	66 no
1.000	10	3	13 yes

volved here is a transition from

- (a) Fire (and Water) as transient points in the transformative cycle of elements, to
- (b) the hardening identity of Fire (and of Water) as an element in its own, immutable right, as an aid in agriculture.⁴⁶⁷

In the distance we may begin to contemplate the possibility to the effect that, after all, Flood myths may not be so primordial as hailing from the Upper Paleolithic (ca. 30 ka BP), let alone (*pace* Witzel) from Pandora’s Box, but whatever their remotest origin may have been dramatically revised with the emergence of Neolithic food production, when after all no longer Water (in the shape of the Mother of the Waters) had to be considered the source of all life, but that function had shifted to Earth / Land – hitherto considered the former’s junior, son and lover.

That there should be a statistically significant, positive association between FUDCROPS and MURDDEM (‘murder (attempt) on or by Demiurge/Trickster in evidence?’), in other words between the presence of food crops, on the one hand, and the murder or attempted murder of the Demiurge or Trickster, on the other hand,⁴⁶⁸ certainly offers food (!) for thought. I like to think of the Demiurge or Trickster as an intermediate, relatively archaic conceptualisation of the relationship between humans and the powers of the non-human world – not so much divine, nothing in the way of a Supreme God, but capricious and immanent evocations of the undomesticated forces to which humans are subjected in their struggle for survival. Why should these forces be considered to be murdered? Is it because they are already (in the outgoing Upper Palaeolithic) on their way to be supplanted by the transcendent notion of a far more powerful and comprehensive Supreme God? Or is it, simply, that agriculture is essentially about burying (‘killing?’) the seed so that it may ripen inside the Earth so as to yield the crop (*e.g.* the Biblical image of the grain dying in the Earth (*John* 12:24). – implicit evocation of an entire mythology of dying agricul-

TOTAL	73	6	79
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$\chi^2 = 4.011; df = 1; p = 0.045$

⁴⁶⁷ #16.3. THE PRESOCRATICS’S ACHIEVEMENT: NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE COSMOLOGY OF CYCLICAL ELEMENT TRANSFORMATION. The difference may seem slight, but it is far-reaching and dramatic. It means discarding the cyclical nature of transformative element transformation. No longer can any element, in one or a few steps, turn into any other element, but the nature of each element is frozen and fixed forever. For the History of Ideas this is a decisive moment. At the end of my 2012 book *Before the Presocratics*, I argue that the emergence of Greek, and ultimately by implication Modern, science consists in the fact that, in a backwater of the Ancient Mediterranean World by the middle of the 1st mill. BCE, some comparatively ignorant amateur thinkers later to be known as the Presocratics had tragically lost sight of the essence of the cosmology of cyclical element transformation, and invented the immutability of each element as their highly consequential answer to the central problem of thought at the time: reconciling change and continuity. We are standing here at the cradle of science! Born, typically, out of misunderstanding.

⁴⁶⁸ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL murder and Demiurge in evidence
-1.000	57	8	65 no
1.000	9	5	14 yes
TOTAL	66	13	79

$\chi^2 = 3.909; df = 1; p = 0.048$

tural gods – Osiris, Tammuz / Dumuzi, perhaps even Jesus of Nazareth – in the Ancient Near East, Ancient Egypt, and Ancient Greece)?⁴⁶⁹ Are perhaps both explanations two sides of the same coin? Here one wonders whether perhaps the murder of the Demiurge / Trickster may have been thought of as the cause that set off the Flood in the first place.⁴⁷⁰

I find it not so easy to explain why we should find a significant, positive association between FUDCROPS and REPOASEX (‘after the Flood was there repopulation through asexual reproduction?’),⁴⁷¹ in other words why the mention of food crops should be positively associated with the a-sexual reproduction of the Earth’s population after their population had been all but destroyed in the Flood. Admittedly, the rise of agriculture drove home awareness of the principle of vegetal reproduction, in ways that as compared to the reproduction of mammals would look emphatically asexual (although of course to modern botanists also plants are gendered and engaging in gendered reproduction though pollen etc – and not just through propagation by tearing, shoots *etc.*). But it remains puzzling that this emphasis on vegetal reproduction could completely eclipse the unmistakable awareness that human repopulation would almost invariably (bar a few mythical cases of parthenogenesis) involve genital sexual intercourse.

⁴⁶⁹ I have recently discussed the mythology of agriculture in my book *Sangoma Science*, 2021: ch. 3.

⁴⁷⁰ MURDDEM is positive in 14 cases of our total 79. There is a positive association between MURDDEM and FLDPARAD. Flood stated or implied to be end paradise

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	
	-----		TOTAL murder and Demiurge
-1.000	64	1	65 no
1.000	11	3	14 yes

TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 6.778$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.009$

– which suggests that it is a unique cosmoclastic event rather than the routine planting of seed which is implied here. Also between GENDRDEM and MURDDEM:

gender Demiurge is said or implied to be

	male	female	
	-1.000	1.000	
	-----		TOTAL murder and Demiurge in evidence
-1.000	14	1	15 no
1.000	5	4	9 yes

TOTAL	19	5	24

$\chi^2 = 4.850$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.028$

if female then killing. MURDDEM also loads highly on FACTOR8, amidst the following vars:

DEMIANIM (0.78); WHITGD21 (0.578); SEPARWAT (-0.556); REPONORM (-0.555); MURDDEM (0.53)

But a more incisive interpretation of this puzzling variable MURDDEM and of FACTOR8 is not within our present scope.

⁴⁷¹ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	
	-----		TOTAL repopulation stated or implied to have been asexual
-1.000	18	3	21 no
1.000	6	6	12 yes

TOTAL	24	9	33

$\chi^2 = 4.812$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.028$

This exhausts our, unexpectedly fruitful, consideration of the significant results around the mention of food crops as an indication of Neolithic conditions. We shall now serially turn to the other variables that in principle may contain clues for periodisation.

16.3.6. RANK

In ca. 28% (22 out of 79). of the cases, differentiation in terms of RANK is mentioned or implied, in our data set. RANK loads high on FACTOR(9) = SACRIFICE AS RE-CONNECTION, and low on FACTOR(11) = HEROIC COMBAT: As we have already seen, more advanced modes of production than the perennial hunting, fishing and collecting come with a sense of social rank, in such a way that the high-ranking human or anthropomorphic Demiurge (shaman, priest, king) constitutes the Connection between Heaven and Earth; the chain, typically in a vertical position, conveys the same idea materially. This is also confirmed by the statistically significant, positive association between RANK and RE-CONHUM ('if there is mention of post-Flood re-connection, was this through humanity and their institutions?'),⁴⁷² in other words where there are indications of RANK, it is a *human* who constitutes the Re-connection between Heaven and Earth.

But the situation is not entirely unequivocal, for – contrary to our intuitive expectations – there is a statistically significant, *negative* association between RANK and SNDRSUP ('if the Flood was sent by a god, was that god the Supreme Being?'),⁴⁷³ in other words: where there is an indication of rank, there the Flood Sender tends *not* to be the Supreme God. This tallies with another significant finding: there is a statistically significant, positive association between RANK and THIRDPART ('was there a third party involved indirectly causing the Flood?'),⁴⁷⁴ in other words: where there are indications of RANK, there a third party tends to be involved indirectly causing the Flood. Apparently, with the rise of social differentiation

⁴⁷² rank in evidence			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL re-connection stated or implied to be human
-1.000	54	14	68 no
1.000	3	8	11 yes
TOTAL	57	22	79

$\chi^2 = 11.419$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.001$

Of course, there is an element of tautology here, for the exalted human (king, prince, shaman, saviour etc.) is exalted by virtue of constituting the connection between Heaven and Earth.

⁴⁷³ rank in evidence			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	15	15	30 no
1.000	13	2	15 yes
TOTAL	28	17	45

$\chi^2 = 6.298$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.012$

⁴⁷⁴ rank in evidence			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL third party in evidence
-1.000	37	7	44 no
1.000	20	15	35 yes
TOTAL	57	22	79

$\chi^2 = 7.097$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.008$

(in principle commensurate with the presence of higher modes of production), the world picture becomes sufficiently complex to allow for a Flood Causer who is a third party – but the entire setup remains puzzling.

Equally puzzling is the a statistically significant, positive association between RANK and TURNSTON ('were people turned to stone in the Flood?')⁴⁷⁵. We are surprised that a narrative event that so much has an archaic appearance (notably: *a human turning into stone*) yet should be associated with what presumably is a later historic development – the appearance of RANK. We may pain our heads to find an argument under which turning into stone can be interpreted, not as very archaic, but as commensurate with the historical progress implied in RANK (and higher modes of production). I have an inkling that here some unsuspected effect of the cyclical transformation of elements may be involved, but stone does not usually feature as an element in a transformative transformation cycle.⁴⁷⁶

But perhaps we have jumped too rapidly to conclusions with the idea that RANK implies a relatively advanced stage in the historical process leading to logocentricity and Modernity. Also societies of hunters and gatherers, like those of the Australian Aboriginals, have been reported to have leaders, notables, usually men, sometimes women. The relatively archaic connotations of the RANK variable are further suggested by the statistically significant, positive association between HEROTRIC ('is the Flood Hero a Trickster?') and RANK,⁴⁷⁷ in other words where RANK is in appearance, the Flood Hero tends to be a Trickster figure – i.e. associated with an archaic stage of human's productive control over nature. We must entertain the possibility that the RANK variable was insufficiently specific and insufficiently operationalised when used in the data entry – covering both priests and kings, as well as Trickster and Demiurg figures – who are all more or less distinct from ordinary humans, but in different ways and associated with different stages in the historical process. This potentially saving thought is also confirmed by the statistically significant, positive association between DEMIPRES ('Demiurge / Trickster in evidence?') and RANK⁴⁷⁸ – where rank

⁴⁷⁵ rank in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL victims stated or implied to have turned to stone
-1.000	56	18	74 no
1.000	1	4	5 yes
TOTAL	57	22	79

$\chi^2 = 6.346; df = 1; p = 0.012$

⁴⁷⁶ In my recent book *Sangoma Science* (2021) I have dwelled at length on the comparative mythology of stone. Perhaps that a hidden clue may be found there for our present aporia. But I did not yet spot it. Is perhaps some sort of negative Pygmalion effect involved: not a stone statue that turns into flesh and blood (as in the case of Pygmalion's creation, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X), but a live human turning into stone, c.q. salt (cf. Lot's wife, *Genesis* 19:26)? The dependence on a relatively late (and in some religious milieus expressly forbidden) activity, making stone images of living beings, would then mark the story as referring to a relatively late period.

⁴⁷⁷ Hero stated or implied to be Trickster

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	47	4	51 no
1.000	12	6	18 yes
TOTAL	59	10	69

$\chi^2 = 6.149; df = 1; p = 0.013$

⁴⁷⁸ Demiurge in evidence

	no	yes
--	----	-----

also turns out to be associated with the presence of the Demiurge. The same is brought out by the statistically significant, positive association between DEMIHUM and RANK,⁴⁷⁹ in other words: in the presence of RANK the Demiurge tends to be human. Clearly, we fall victim here to too broad and undifferentiated a conception of Demiurge, which does not allow us to distinguish from *e.g.* the seductive Serpent in Paradise, and the figure of Jesus of Nazareth as mediating between Heaven and Earth (although, admittedly, also the Serpent is such a mediator (*cf. Genesis 3:1*), and apparently a direct transformation of the Rainbow Snake of Palaeolithic times).

Puzzling again is the statistically significant, positive association between MLTHRSIB ('if there are multiple Flood Heroes in evidence, are these siblings sive blood brothers sive cowives sive colleagues?'), and RANK,⁴⁸⁰ in other words the tendency that in the presence of rank, there tend to be multiple Heroes who are claimed to be siblings. In the same vein, we note a statistically significant, positive association between COMBAT and RANK,⁴⁸¹ in other words evidence for combat in the presence of indications of rank, *e.g.* the Flood Heroes depicted as warriors engaging each other in combat. This is remarkable if we continue to insist on the combat as a representation of *cyclical element transformation* – which is implied to be between equals and implicitly annihilates change and difference; perhaps this means that my emphasis on cyclical element transformation as the clue to understanding the Hero in Flood myth is rather exaggerated. *My whole analysis in Chapter 15 of the present book, and*

	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	38	19	57 no
1.000	8	14	22 yes
TOTAL	46	33	79

$\chi^2 = 5.964; df = 1; p = 0.015$

⁴⁷⁹ Demiurge stated or implied to be human

	no	yes	TOTAL rank in evidence
	-1.000	1.000	
-1.000	52	5	57 no
1.000	14	8	22 yes
TOTAL	66	13	79

$\chi^2 = 7.924; df = 1; p = 0.005$

⁴⁸⁰ multiple Heroes in evidence who are said or implied to be siblings

	no	yes	TOTAL rank in evidence
	-1.000	1.000	
-1.000	19	9	28 no
1.000	1	8	9 yes
TOTAL	20	17	37

$\chi^2 = 9.606; df = 1; p = 0.002$

⁴⁸¹ combat in evidence

	no	yes	TOTAL rank in evidence
	-1.000	1.000	
-1.000	39	18	57 no
1.000	9	13	22 yes
TOTAL	48	31	79

$\chi^2 = 4.966; df = 1; p = 0.026$

throughout my book *Before the Presocratics (2012)* is predicated on the insight that cyclical element transformation is the key to an understanding of the combat theme, so this contradictory finding does considerable damage to my argument.

RANK implies a position of authority in which one is capable of directing others, e.g. directing the Earth Diver to bring up a clod of Earth in order to end the Flood. Therefore, whatever the eprecise nature of the agent exercising RANK, we are not surprised to find a statistically significant, positive association between ERZDIVEND ('Is the Earth Diver stated or implied to end the Flood?') and RANK.⁴⁸² Virtually the same ground is covered when we find a statistically significant, positive association between HEROdivr ('If the Flood Hero survives the Flood, does the Flood Hero direct the Earth Diver?') and RANK.⁴⁸³

Rather more puzzling is to find a statistically significant, positive association between BLOW ('blowing upon / warming, mud (/corpse) mentioned?') and RANK⁴⁸⁴- in other words, when there is presence of RANK, blowing upon / warming, mud (/ corpse) tends to be also mentioned.

We have already touched on the amazing finding of a statistically significant, positive association between RANK and CHAIN.⁴⁸⁵ This becomes somewhat understandable if yet we look at RANK as, after all, an expression of an advanced stage in socio-cultural history, when

⁴⁸² Earth Diver stated or implied to end Flood

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	56	1	57 no
1.000	19	3	22 yes
TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 4.065$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.044$

⁴⁸³ Hero stated or implied to instruct earthdiver

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	56	1	57 no
1.000	19	3	22 yes
TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 4.065$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.044$

⁴⁸⁴ blowing in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	56	1	57 no
1.000	17	5	22 yes
TOTAL	73	6	79

$\chi^2 = 8.814$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.003$

⁴⁸⁵ chain in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL rank in evidence
-1.000	57	0	57 no
1.000	18	4	22 yes
TOTAL	75	4	79

$\chi^2 = 10.797$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.001$

the idea (intimately associated with shamanism as a cultural achievement c. 20 ka BP) of a plurality of worlds has come up and when Heaven has been invented, e.g. as the place to hang chains on in order to Re-connect Heaven and Earth.

16.3.7. SNDRSUP

The next variable considered to be a possible aid in periodising specific Flood narratives is SNDRSUP, 'the Flood Sender is the Supreme God'. Out of 79 cases, this variable is missing / not applicable in as many as 34 cases (43%); negative in 30 cases (38%); and positive in 15 cases (19%). SNDRSUP loads highly on FACTOR(2) = GOD AS ALLY OF HERO. Almost by implication there is a statistically significant, positive association between SNDRGOD and SNDRSUP,⁴⁸⁶ in other words, when the Flood Sender is a god, this tends to be the Supreme God. RANK plays a puzzling role here: there is a statistically significant, negative association between RANK and SNDRSUP,⁴⁸⁷ in other words, when RANK is present or implied, the Flood Sender tends *not* to be the Supreme God. The most obvious way to explain this surprising outcome is to realise that with RANK, often a reference to the immanent Demiurge or Trickster is meant, which may serve as an alternative to the transcendent, Supreme God. Again we see that RANK is a confusing variable because sometimes it is suggestive of an advanced stage in cultural history (an alliance with the Supreme God), but sometimes of a more archaic, immanent phase.

The same contradiction comes up when we find a statistically significant, negative association between HEROTRIC and SNDRSUP:⁴⁸⁸ if the Flood Hero is a Trickster, there is a tendency for the sender *not* to be supernatural – since immanent Trickster and transcendent

⁴⁸⁶ Flood sender stated or implied to be a god

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL Flood sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	24	6	30 no
1.000	0	15	15 yes
TOTAL	24	21	45

$\chi^2 = 32.159$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.000$

⁴⁸⁷ rank in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	15	15	30 no
1.000	13	2	15 yes
TOTAL	28	17	45

$\chi^2 = 6.298$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.012$

⁴⁸⁸ Hero stated or implied to be Trickster

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	19	7	26 no
1.000	14	0	14 yes
TOTAL	33	7	40

$\chi^2 = 6.809$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.009$

Supreme God are mutually exclusive modalities of the Flood Causer

There is a statistically significant, positive association between DURASTAT ('duration of Flood stated?') and SNDRSUP,⁴⁸⁹ in other words, if the Flood Sender is the Supreme God, then the duration of the Flood tends to be precisely specified. I cannot readily see why this should be the case. But when we see in the Bible that *to set limits in space and time is considered to be a praiseworthy manifestation of divine power (Genesis 22:17)*, we are tempted to consider the precise confinement of the Flood in time terms simply a feature of the transcendent God.

Other variables lend, through statistically significant associations, further relief to the qualities of the Supreme God as Flood Sender.

There is a statistically significant, positive association between MLTHRSPO and SNDRSUP,⁴⁹⁰ in other words, if the Flood Sender is the Supreme God, there may be multiple Flood Heroes who are each other's spouses. I have no ready explanation for this surprising association, but suspect that it is merely because one particular version of an early Flood story (specifically: one featuring a husband and wife as Flood Heroes) may have been relatively widely circulated, becoming standard. One may perhaps read as implication that heterosexual marriage is the form of human (sexual?) relationship which is most favoured by the Supreme God and to which the latter extends most readily her or his protection – but this somewhat oldfashioned claim (now heavily contested in some North Atlantic circles and their cultural outlying dependencies) is rather beyond the letter of our Flood narratives data set.

By the same token, we find a statistically significant, positive association between HERO-ALLY ('is the Flood Hero an ally of the Flood causer?') and SNDRSUP,⁴⁹¹ in other words if

⁴⁸⁹ duration Flood stated or implied

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	TOTAL	Flood sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	26	4	30	no
1.000	9	6	15	yes
TOTAL	35	10	45	

$\chi^2 = 3.923; df = 1; p = 0.048$

⁴⁹⁰ multiple Heroes in evidence who are spouses

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	TOTAL	Flood sender said or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	14	0	14	no
1.000	5	2	7	yes
TOTAL	19	2	21	

$\chi^2 = 4.833; df = 1; p = 0.028$

⁴⁹¹ Hero stated or implied to be ally of god:

	no -1.000	yes 1.000	TOTAL	Flood sender stated or implied to be supreme god
-1.000	17	4	21	no
1.000	4	8	12	yes

the Flood Sender is the Supreme God, then the Flood Hero tends to be an ally of the Supreme God – basically a statement of the effective installation of transcendence at an advanced stage of cultural history.

But perhaps the last mentioned significant association may be read as a statement, not so much on divine transcendent powers, but on human powers becoming more and more at a par with those of the Supreme God – so as to become worthy of the latter's alliance. This at least is how I would interpret the next significant association, notably that of a positive association between RESCMNMD ('was there Flood rescue through a man-made vegetal product?') and SNDRSUP,⁴⁹² in other words, if the Flood Sender is the Supreme God, then the Flood rescue device tends to be man-made (rather than a ready natural produce or object). All this tends to a situation in which humans's increasing control over Nature is emphasised. The same is brought out when we find a statistically significant, positive association between FUDCROPS and SNDRSUP⁴⁹³ – again the suggestion that the High God is in the first place an idea at home in the Neolithic – and not (as in the work of Witzel, perhaps inspired by the early 20th century Roman Catholic clergyman (*i.e.* religiously biased) and historian of religion Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt 1926-1955) a perennial feature of human culture ever since the Lower Palaeolithic.

16.3.8. SPNATSUP

The variable SNDRSUP covers much of the same ground as our final variable to be considered in the context of possibilities of periodisation of the Flood narrative, SPNARSUP ('if there is a supernatural protagonist in evidence, this then is the one Supreme Being'). Again this variable SPNARSUP loads high on FACTOR(2) = GOD AS ALLY OF HERO. SPNARSUP yields precious few significant results in cross-tabulation, and the one that it yields, remains hard to interpret.

Not all Flood stories imply the involvement of a supernatural agent or agents, and if they do, it is not always possible to identify the nature of that supernatural agent, *e.g.* as that of the Supreme God.

TOTAL	21	12	33
1 = 7.535; df = 1; p = 0.006			

⁴⁹² rescue device said or implied to be manmade

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL Flood sender is stated or implied to be supreme god

-1.000	23	7	30 no
1.000	6	9	15 yes

TOTAL	29	16	45
1 = 5.787; df = 1; p = 0.016			

⁴⁹³ food crops in evidence

	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL Flood sender stated or implied to be supreme god

-1.000	29	1	30 no
1.000	10	5	15 yes

TOTAL	39	6	45
1 = 7.477; df = 1; p = 0.006			

Non-missing details on animal survival are only available for the 16 cases in which the nature of the supernatural involved in the Flood story can clearly be identified as that of the Supreme God; here there is survival in 10 cases, no survival in 6 cases. No statistic can be computed because there is only one variable, the ‘supernatural can be identified as the Supreme God’ (SPNATSUP) variable remaining constant; I find it difficult to interpret this finding (SPNATSUP / ANIMSRV):

TABLE OF SPNATSUP (ROWS) BY ANIMSRV (COLUMNS)			
animals survive			
	no	yes	
	-1.000	1.000	TOTAL

	6	10	16supernatural is the supreme god

TOTAL	6	10	16

Table 16.2. Cross-tabulation of ‘animal Flood survivors’ against ‘the supernatural agent in the Flood myth is the Supreme God’

This finding seems to boil down to the following. Only for those cases in which the supernatural agent in the Flood story may be identified as the Supreme God, do we have data on the survival, or not, of animals in the Flood, notably:

- No survival in 6 cases
- Yes, survival, in 10 cases.

16.4. Conclusion

A fundamental strategy in my several varieties of research over the decades, has always been: *take the minute details of your data set very seriously, try to interpret every detail, and be alert, for especially contradictions or totally unexpected associations tend to be growth points of insight for the researcher, and indicative of important transitions in the reality under study.* The apparently ridiculously close scrutiny to which we have subjected, in the present chapter, the data on Flood myth worldwide, is a case in point. *Our results may not be spectacular, but however modest, we can maintain that they have been reached by a consistent and painstaking methodology, on the basis of (a representative sample of) all available data.* Our main conclusions at this point are the following:

- Yes, detailed statistical analysis turns out to be a revealing instrument to probe deeply and effectively into the long-range history of myths, and offers details clues as to periodisation.
- Even in the absence of the historical actors’s own conscious statements as to their concepts, their meanings, cosmologies and cosmoclasms, our systematic perusal of the body of Flood myths worldwide offers detailed and systematic insights in the thought processes and conceptualisations of the most archaic times, even all the way back to the Middle Palaeolithic.
- Our approach is predicated on the bold but plausible assumption of *the underlying unity of humankind* (cf. van Binsbergen 2015: 8 f., 202f, and extensive references there) and, especially, of *the underlying unity of the culture of Anatomically Modern*

Humans ever since their emergence 200 ka BP, epitomised in the concept of Pandora's Box as a repository of the common cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans and of persisting universals of culture ever since the dispersion of AMH over all continents since the Out-of-Africa Exodus (80-60 ka BP); the high level of consistency in our statistical outcomes further confirms the plausibility of this point of departure and is in general a very important support for the validity of long-range comparative mythology as revived (albeit not by quantitative means) by the Witzel School.

- Against this reassuring background, from our analysis emerges again the suggestion (after it was already made in van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) that Flood myths (one of Anatomically Modern Humans's most prolific and widespread mythemes) might have originated from the New World – against the direction of the dominant Asia-America transmission that is implied in the Out-of-Africa model.
- Flood myths turn out to revolve largely on a limited number of central themes,
 - only a minority of which may be accommodated in the context of the hunting and gathering modes of production of the Upper Palaeolithic (where my earlier analysis situated the emergence of Flood myths on genetic grounds – their association with mtDNA Type B (which has been reconstructed by specialists in molecular genetics to have originated in Central Asia c. 30 ka BP)
 - whereas the majority of these central themes seems to belong to a much more recent phase in the cultural history of AMH, notably to the emergence of food production through agriculture and animal husbandry with the onset of the Neolithic (c. 12 ka BP).
- Among these Proto-Neolithic themes, the following take precedence:
 - The replacement of the Separation of Water and Land by the Separation of Heaven and Earth as AMH's dominant cosmogony from the Upper Palaeolithic onward
 - the rise of more advanced modes of production, especially agriculture and animal husbandry,
 - gender, and
 - the rise of transcendence⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁴ #16.4. LANGUAGE AND TRANSCENDENCE. the emergence of transcendence plays a major role in my recent books, and this is not the place to dwell at length on this most significant theme of cultural history. Important is to realise that transcendence is inherent to any articulate language; for the most obvious conception of words and their meanings is that articulate language allows us to make specific and detailed pronouncements (in terms of words that are repetitively re-usable in the sense that they can be used time and time again to refer to other situations than the strict here and now) about imagined entities that are not here and not now: a god, a political institution, a remote or deceased ruler, a mythical Hero and his attributes, kinship classifications and their implications for sexual eligibility, etc. While our quantitative analysis stresses the Early Neolithic as a context in which transcendence became particularly pronounced, it is obvious that the origin of articulate language must have been at least several tens of millennia earlier – otherwise we would not have been able to reconstruct *Borean as a language form supposed to have been spoken in Central to East Asia c. 25 ka BP, and for which well over 1,000 lexical forms can be convincingly reconstructed. To the extent to which articulate language depends on the ability to produce and perceive *distinctive features* (Jakobson 1941) in language's smallest constituent parts (phonemes, words, tones), such language is also already predicated on the capability of thinking absolute difference, in other words transcendence.

- As a result, Flood myths can be said to constitute an illuminating record of Anatomically Modern Humans's relatively recent steps on the way towards Modern thought processes and Modern thought contents.
- In the process, earlier and more archaic conceptualisations of cosmogony and cosmoclasm are thrown in relief, notably
 - Alternative, more archaic conceptions of the undomesticated powers of nature (the Trickster)
 - animals as the original inhabitants of the Earth and the original Flood Heroes),
 - the slow and relatively inarticulate growth (via an intermediate stage of the Demiurge) towards the concept of a god as Supreme Being ,
 - the gradual rise of humans's control over the processes of nature, which makes them both dependent upon a Supreme God and eminently eligible to be taken seriously (*i.e.* to be cherished and protected) by such a High God as the latter's most obvious ally.

By and large, such distinctions and relationships as itemised here were already perceived, thought out, and committed to comparative mythological scholarly texts well before they were confirmed by our statistical analysis – yet that statistical analysis, with its explicit and intersubjective methods and its firm statistical outcomes in terms of significance levels, lends an empirical, systematic basis to analytical ideas that otherwise would still have remained only conjectural, at the best plausible, but more likely highly contested.

difference, in other words transcendence.

**PART V. MISCELLANEOUS
STUDIES**

Chapter 17. Matthew Schoffeleers on Malawian suitor stories (2011)

A perspective from Comparative Mythology

17.1. Introduction⁴⁹⁵

The late lamented Matthew (Matthijs) Schoffeleers (1928-2011) was a prominent Dutch Africanist, who for many years worked as a Roman Catholic priest and missionary in Malawi, South Central Africa, and after studying anthropology in Oxford, United Kingdom, mainly under Rodney Needham, became a professor of religious anthropology at the Free University, Amsterdam, and Utrecht University, the Netherlands. The study of the remote history of African religion, and the application of a Needham (ultimately Lévi-Strauss) structuralist approach to Malawian folklore were among his main contributions to scholarship (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2011h). Schoffeleers's passion for retrieval of the distant past led him to look with a keen eye at village stories in the hope that they would reveal glimpses of religious and social institutions that had left few other traces in modern times. His reconstructions of South Central African protohistory are to a considerable extent predicated on attributing a histori-

⁴⁹⁵ This is the greatly revised version of a paper presented at my Africa Seminar, African Studies Centre, November 1979, where it formed a commentary upon Matthew Schoffeleers' Dutch-language paper: 'Malawiaanse vrijersverhalen' [Malawian suitor stories, which was subsequently published in English]. I am deeply grateful to Matthew Schoffeleers for inspiring the present argument and generously discussing its critical details with me when it was first conceived – shortly after I was the first to have to honour to obtain a doctorate under his supervision. In this argument I rely in part on extensive ethnohistorical and ethnographic research on the Nkoya people of Western Zambia from 1972 onwards; I am grateful for the love with which they have welcomed me in their midst and made me one of them. Moreover, I am indebted to my family for sharing the research with me; to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for offering a stimulating environment in which to conduct my Nkoya studies and extend them into global long-range comparison especially in the field of mythology; and to Michael Witzel and the Department of Indian and Sanskrit Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, for greatly stimulating, from 2004 on, my research into Comparative Mythology, and into Asian-African continuities, in the context of the annual Harvard Round Table meetings and of the International Association for Comparative Mythology.

cal core to local stories (Schoffeleers 1972a, 1973a, 1973b, 1978a, 1980a, 1985a, 1992a) – and it was in this pursuit that he and I worked closely together for years (cf. Werbner 1977; Schoffeleers 1979a; van Binsbergen 1981; van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985).⁴⁹⁶ And even apart from such ulterior historiographic motives, Schoffeleers has made interesting contributions to the study of Central African oral literature in its own right (Schoffeleers & Roscoe 1985; Schoffeleers 1972b), has brought to our attention narratives parallels with other parts of the world (Schoffeleers 1999a, 1999b, 2000a – with Malawian parallels to the stories of Jephthah (cf. the Biblical book *Judges* 11), The Three Brothers, and The Egg), and along the lines of a structuralist approach inspired by his supervisor Rodney Needham, has proposed a comprehensive analysis of the mutilated person, especially the Unilateral Being that has only one side to his body, as a world-wide epiphany of the sacred (Schoffeleers 1991a, 1991b).



Fig. 17.1. Two pictures of Matthew Schoffeleers in his last years

It was therefore on the basis of a sustained and theoretically informed study of Malawian stories that Matthew Schoffeleers, in his paper on ‘Malawian Suitor stories’ (1979a) presented an admirable pioneering attempt to penetrate as deeply as possible into the formal syntax and the symbolic structure of a limited number (ten) of twentieth-century folk stories from Malawi. In these entertaining and amazing stories, village women are wooed by lovers from outside, who take fantastic shapes especially those of Serpents or who may consist of nothing but a (White) head, and whose generosity tends to bring these women prestige goods usually far beyond these women’s original means. Schoffeleers is tempted to interpret these stories in terms of the historical expansion of long-distance trade, after the middle of the second millennium CE – a remote echo of Early Modern European expansion. He himself regarded this attempt as preliminary, and ‘patently inadequate’. The purpose of the present comments is therefore not to stress such deficiencies in Schoffeleers’ approach as he himself was already keenly aware of, but to try and contribute to the further development of his approach, on the basis of my personal acquaintance with Central African symbolic and social systems, and my own experience with similar types of analysis; when the present argument was first conceived, my relevant experience was still restricted by the almost exclusive interest in socio-political relations then prevailing in European including British anthropology, but in the meantime it has considerably developed in ways amply re-

⁴⁹⁶ Besides, Schoffeleers was the supervisor of my PhD thesis (1979); the Roman Catholic priest officiating at my second wedding (1984); and a life-long friend – it is with the greatest respect that, in the present argument, I venture to adopt a critical stance *vis-à-vis* his work.

flected in the present, final version (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2006, 2010; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, especially chapter 5).

My comments on Schoffeleers' stimulating and thought-provoking work on Malawian folk stories fall into the following sections:

- (a) Wider theoretical issues;
- (b) The possibility of formulating some kind of Deep-Structure for this corpus of material
- (c) Additional and alternative readings of these stories
- (d) The historical dimension, interpreted in terms of the South Central African region since Early Modern times
- (e) The question of whether the Malawian folk stories can be claimed to contain some genuinely (proto-)historical core (as assumed in the previous section), or alternatively must be considered mythical narratives from distant provenances and without bearing on local protohistory
- (f) The transcontinental connection.

17.2. *Wider theoretical issues*

With characteristic humility, Schoffeleers presents his analysis as primarily emanating from two sources:

1. a common-sense analysis of the texts themselves;
2. a general knowledge of the social and symbolic world of eastern Central Africa during the last few centuries.

For the reader who has no background in symbolic anthropology, structuralism, *etc.*, Schoffeleers's decoding of the Malawian material may seem, therefore, much more idiosyncratic and gratuitous than, in fact, it is. The tradition within which this tentative analysis becomes meaningful, is only very slightly indicated by our author, *e.g.* by reference to Hertz (1909 / 1960) and Durkheim (1912), and the use of Turnerian phrases as 'betwixt and between,' 'liminality', *etc.* (*cf.* Turner 1967, 1969).

Without a doubt, Schoffeleers's wish to 'understand', 'explain', the 'deeper' content (the deep-structure, perhaps) of a collection of folk tales is legitimate. However, one major problem that has to be faced in this context, is that of the relationship between a literary product (such as a folk tale), and the society in which it is found. Schoffeleers implicitly suggests that this relationship may be indirect in this sense that the stories reflect a certain time lag: although told in the 1960s CE, for instance, they may relate to a past phase (c. 17th c. CE) in the history of Malawi, when mercantile capitalism, long-distance trade *etc.* were still in the process of gradually penetrating towards the interior, and when such long-distance trading relations still represented the major links between local communities and the outside world. However, under what conditions can we assume that such fundamental symbolic and normative elements as are found in society, penetrate into the story without marked transformation? Or, to put it differently, what is the nature of the transformation of reality, that justifies, or even necessitates the existence of the story in itself? If the story is a comment, reflection, transformation, inversion, judgement, morale for reality, it is precisely because of

some subtle admixture between real-life elements (people who live in villages, pound maize, go mice-hunting *etc.*) and elements of systematically controlled imagination (White men posing as Snakes, women giving birth to heads only, *etc.*). Where, and why, do we encounter a record of real life, and where, and why, do we encounter mere products of the imagination? Without a rather sophisticated theory on this point, it is impossible to arrive at a 'common-sense' close reading of folk stories, in an attempt to 'explain' their 'deeper meaning'. And when we develop such a theory, we shall probably have to admit that the literary product has a lot of leeway, allows for free variation, for transmission across cultural and structural boundaries within and across geographic regions, and across historical periods, for individual alterations that tell us more (if anything) about the individual narrator than about her time and society, *etc.*

Perhaps underneath all this there exist fundamental contradictions, archetypal themes that are perennial and universal, but the problem is how to unearth these, and how to attach a, presumably world-wide, meaning to them when they finally appear before us, stripped of their anecdotal trappings. The question is not very different, in the case of folk tales, from the implications of attaching meaning and explanation to ritual and myths. Obviously these elements from the symbolic order are not just a set of simple and easily-decoded statements about the economic and political reality. What is interesting about them is not so much the ultimate message which they may be shown to contain in the end,⁴⁹⁷ but the very process of coding, decoding and transformation by narrators and participants, that becomes barely visible even when we try to analyse the stories. In Schoffeleers' analysis I found the section on 'The ultimate message' the least exciting, and I wondered why such a simple (and contentious) message had to be concealed, in the local cultural process, under so much narrative beauty and skill as the folk tales display. Even if his reduction of the symbolic structure of these stories, at the end of his complicated argument, to the simple formula of

<i>men can only achieve high status by being virtuous</i>	whereas	<i>women can only achieve high status by being non-virtuous</i>
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would stand up to critical scrutiny, one yet has the feeling that there is something more essential about these folk tales, that is left entirely untouched by this type of analysis. How is such a content possible in a society that respects, if not actively propagates, high status, and whose value system certainly tries to embrace both men and women? What is the point in concealing and coding such a content, while waiting only for the foreign anthropologist, missionary or student of oral literature to come along and dig it up – while the presumably culturally constitutive meaning remains hidden to the very participants in the local culture?

⁴⁹⁷ #17.1. COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY IS NOT ABOUT 'ULTIMATE LESSONS'. Even though comparative mythologists often feel obliged to make pronouncements in this sense, such 'ultimate messages' nearly always are disappointingly trivial. In the present book I repeatedly return to Fontenrose's (1980 / 1959) attempt, who after his masterly *tour de force* scanning the entire global comparative mythology of combat, can think of nothing better than that they are about *humans's eternal struggle in the face of death*. Numerous are the psycho-analytical reductions that can see no meaning to narratives but scantily adorned illustrations of the Oedipal Conflict or the Primal Scene. Recent media especially film and video have turned the centrality of the sexual impulse into the most worn-out and least interesting cliché of our times. Surely, the real meaning of any story lies, not in the story line, but in its mode of telling, its style, its virtuosity, its originality, yet recognisability, its integrity, its controlled pathos – in other words, *the extent to which it manages to convey a sense of what it is to be human*.

I would suggest that these stories (and probably all forms of art) are more about form, about the manipulation of recognisable elements, than about so-called content. This does not imply that looking for a deep-structure of content is a waste of time. But the plunge into deep structure does not sufficiently address what perhaps needs most to be analysed: the relation between a stylised, man-created symbolic content, and

1. the reality from which this content was borrowed;
2. the reality in which this content subsequently functions, as embodied in a work of art.

In other words, folk tales are not to be identified with the ethnographer's field notes on local behaviour and meaning; they are not documents generated in some identifiable social setting and to be read against the identifiable perceptions and interests of that setting's actors. We must be aware that the glimpses of social life which folk tales would appear to contain, are most likely the skilful artefacts of an imagination that may be more creative than systematic.

The approach Schoffeleers presents in his study of Malawian Suitor Stories implies a number of theoretical decisions on these points. By groping for common deep structure, he claims that there is in these stories an underlying systematic structure which may be so fundamental that it even eludes the consciousness of the individual narrator. He is right to a certain extent and has the whole of symbolic anthropology, myth analysis from Frazer to Lévi-Strauss, the eclectic Anglosaxon appropriation of structuralism in the hands of Leach and of Schoffeleers' own supervisor Rodney Needham, to back him up – yet many excellent anthropologists have remained unsympathetic to structuralist myth analysis, and they would need an elaborate, explicit theoretical argument to convince them.

17.3. *Towards a deep-structure*

Searching for a common deep-structure, Schoffeleers at times gives the impression of not having probed deeply enough – of having been too easily satisfied with apparent similarities and systemic oppositions which, on closer scrutiny, may turn out to vanish. Schoffeleers's set of ten folk tales, four having female protagonists, six male protagonists, is too readily treated as one corpus; and the same applies to the subsets, or to subsets of subsets. Many of the tentative generalisations Schoffeleers comes up with appear to be slightly overstated. The males, Schoffeleers tells us, invariably receive *local* wealth (e.g. cattle), along with a *local* bride, at the end of their quests. Yet Kansabwe ends up with 'fine clothes' (whereas cloth was, with guns and cooking pots, the major imported trade good in interregional trade in Malawi in the 16th-19th centuries CE); and the Cattle-Swallower temporarily appropriated local wealth (cattle) prior to his marriage, but only to surrender this wealth again as payment of bride-wealth. Males, we are told, invariably display exemplary behaviour as suitors; yet the same Cattle-Swallower steals cattle, which he exchanges for a local wife (so that he gets her practically for nothing). Likewise it is as if males always take the initiative in courting. Snake-man does take the initiative, but Matola's husband (who is nothing but a head) is dependent on his mother, and only shows his full sexual intentions when prompted by Matola's brother. Part of Schoffeleers' method therefore appears to depend on claiming similarity, even identity, of themes where in fact another analyst might claim difference. This tendency can also be detected in regard of female protagonists. Pre-marital promiscuity is said to represent 'a confusion of the social categories of married and unmarried women' as if married women not only legitimately engage in sexuality which is forbidden to unmarried

girls, but also engage so *promiscuously*; in a next step, promiscuous unmarried girls are treated at a par with a protagonists whose only sin appears to be that she goes mushroom-collecting.⁴⁹⁸ On of the dangers of structuralist myth analysis appears to be that the analysts, on the basis of an abstract intellectual discourse that has no empirical grounding in the local culture, may be tempted to project onto the narrative meanings of which the local narrators and recipients cannot be conscious. Take the story of a woman whose only stated transgression is that she went mice-hunting rather than pounding her maize, and who in the course of her expedition is forced to enter into a relationship with a Snake,⁴⁹⁹ in analysis, the lady is said to exhibit something as serious as disrespect of the moral order (defying her mother's

⁴⁹⁸ The human body tends to inspire parallel and converging practices and meanings in cultures world-wide, on the basis that all humans now living ('Anatomically Modern Humans') share the same (in certain respects gendered) anatomy and physiology. In this light one might explore the male sexual symbolism of the mushroom, which has been noted for several cultures (Allegro 1970). Is it the fleshy, swollen appearance of some mushrooms, that remotely calls to mind the aroused adult human *glans penis*? Mushroom collecting might then be symbolic narrative language for promiscuity. However, perhaps more relevant is that, at least in other parts of South Central Africa than Malawi, notably in Zambia and Uganda, the mushroom (*kyowa*) is the name of a clan and is intimately associated with the kingship – giant mushrooms growing on the royal graves of the Barotse. Could 'mushroom collecting' be a narrative idiom for the quest for power and status?

⁴⁹⁹ It is my contention that the Rainbow Serpent is one of the oldest mythemes of Anatomically Modern Humans, identifiable in Pandora's Box. In Ancient Mesopotamian and Ancient Greek mythology, Gilgamesh and Glaucus accidentally hit upon a snake in the course of their respective exploits, typically at a liminal point where they seem to enter the realm of the Underworld. Are we tempted to think in a similar direction here? Incidentally, Glaucus is a most interesting case. Extensively mentioned throughout the corpus of Graeco-Roman mythology (see von Geisau 1977), we would be hard-pressed to attach a plausible etymology to this name. All the authoritative database *Tower of Babel* (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008) has to offer on this point is

<p>Proto-Indo-European: *(s)kreik-, -g-, 'a kind of bird'</p> <p>Old Greek: *krigǎ̃ (i-ǎ̃) f.: krigḗ = hē glauks [Hesychios]</p> <p>Germanic: *xrik=, *skrik=; *x(r)ig-r=, *(r)raig-r=, *x(r)ig-r=</p> <p>References: Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 413 f</p>

Table 17.1. Proposed Indo-European etymology of the name Glaucus

Now, in a different context I have demonstrated (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: table 28.4, pp. 370-372) how several of the key names in the Ancient Mediterranean including Ancient Egypt can be plausibly given an Austric etymology, which of course underpins the Oppenheimer–Dick-Read–Tauchmann Sunda Hypothesis stipulating considerable demographic, linguistic and cultural influence from South East Asia upon the Western Old World from the Early Holocene onward (cf. van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c, and extensive references cited there). This offers a promising perspective on Glaucus, for his name can be considered an Austroasiatic reflex from *Borean *LVKV, 'to shine'; the prothetic g- surfaces in the Proto-Thai reflex from continental South East Asia.

<p>Proto-Austroasiatic: *lɔ:k / *lɛ:k, 'grey, white'</p> <p>Proto-Austronesian: *bilak, 'shine, glitter'</p> <p>Proto-Thai: TS *glo:k 'to bɔ:n'</p> <p>References: (...) Peiros 1998: 85.</p>

Source: Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Austric etymology'

Table 17.2. Proposed Austric etymology of the name Glaucus

instructions as to pounding), subsequently taking this disrespect to its extreme (mating with the unmatable). I submit that her mice hunting means rather a reverting to an earlier mode of production, that of hunting and gathering,⁵⁰⁰ at the expense of the much more recent, Neolithic achievement of agriculture, without which there would have been preciously little pounding of maize to do.

It looks as if Schoffeleers is in some hurry to reach the deep structure, and believes (somewhat at variance with the doyen of structuralist myth analysis Lévi-Strauss) that it is the easier reached, the sooner we attach an abstract and comprehensive label to the elements we are analysing. The analytical equation of mice-hunting with disrespect of moral order may still be acceptable in the light of the traditional significance of parental authority in Malawi. But when an unmarried girl takes a hunting initiative, or when a woman is a widow – do we then automatically have instances of inherently contradictory liminal positions, of Turner's 'betwixt and between'? By the same token, can we read inability to meet extravagant demands of bride-wealth, or illness of the chief's daughter, automatically as examples of a disturbance of the moral order, of the 'proper functioning of the community', even if the stories (in their condensed form as presented by Schoffeleers) do not indicate defective community functioning any further?

The stories show marked differences in the extent to which they are realistic. Even in its condensed form, the hunter story appears much more factual, without freaks or wonders, as compared to the Cattle-Swallower⁵⁰¹ or the head-marrying woman. Is this perhaps a reason to place this story in a different category? The question becomes crucial in the case of the Hunchback and the Blind Man. Only by considerable power of imagination can one construe such physical defects as being 'one-sided in the front/back sense'.⁵⁰² The danger in this sort of argument is that one stumbles from one *ad hoc* interpretation to the next. The attempt to explain the details of folk stories is laudable, but all explanation is generalisation, of which the *ad hoc* arguments is the worst enemy.

One problem in the analysis of the Malawi corpus is the relation between the stories with male and with female protagonists. Repeatedly Schoffeleers claims that they are on a different plane, at cross angles, yet at other times he compares them as if they are within the same dimension. This tempts him to overlook certain formal characteristics of the female stories. He claims that all female protagonists are depicted as physically inside the community (in contrast with the men). However, this is only true for Matola. All three others go mushroom collecting, *i.e.* roam around outside the boundaries of the village, much like the males on their quests.

⁵⁰⁰ Even among late 20th-c. CE Nkoya villagers, and especially among youngsters from that background attending boarding school, mice were a welcome addition to the everyday diet, free from any dietary prohibition.

⁵⁰¹ In the light of comparative mythological parallels, *e.g.* Graeco-Roman Hades, Geryon, and the retrieval of cattle from the Underworld in a well-known Angolan myth, the name 'Cattle Swallower' has unmistakable Underworld connotations.

⁵⁰² Admittedly, seen *en profile*, having a hunchback distorts the ideal body line, but shoulder blades and buttocks (back) as against nipples and genitals (front) already upset any notion of front/back symmetry in the human body, anyway. How blindness could even remotely be interpreted in such a light remains a mystery to me. Is this a case of the 'jujune cabbalism' Geertz (1966) reproaches symbolic analysis chided some anthropologists for?

17.4. *Additional and alternative readings*

Reaching so readily for common, abstract, general meanings behind what appear to be the symbolic elements in the stories, also has the danger that one overlooks the subtle but undeniable power dimensions that are built into them, and that render a human element to them. Schoffeleers rightly wonders why the White men in the story should have a secret, which can be revealed, betrayed or violated. But while this appears to put the White man in an unassailably superior (although vulnerable) category of his own, an equally important point is that in some of the stories the White man actually puts himself at the mercy of his African wife: she gains power over him, by knowing his identity and being able to disclose it publicly. The 'basic' female stories leave the wife successful, but helpless; the variants depict the wife as more powerful, but failing. In the Matola story it is the younger brother who forces the outsider's secret into the open; in two of the other stories it is a sister or young female friend who tries to infringe on the privacy of the Snake / White man, and is therefore severely punished. But what is the White man's secret? That he 'can fall in love as an ordinary human being', as Schoffeleers suggests?⁵⁰³ Or is the White man in himself only a symbol, and does he stand for something even more fundamental than race relations? When these stories were recorded in the middle of the 20th century CE, Malawi had known over half a century of colonial rule and had served as a migrant labour research for even longer; in these contexts, fundamental power relations were expressed in White-Black terms directly corresponding with the respective somatic appearances of those with and without power in the colonial context. However, in South Central Africa the colour *white* has been associated with death, the ancestors, and spirits, for probably much longer than the onset of

⁵⁰³ #17.2. ROMANTIC LOVE IS NOT A UNIVERSAL CATEGORY OF CULTURE. Perhaps I should be impressed by this capability attributed to the White man, but I am not. Love (in the sense of Greek ἀγάπη *agapē* rather than ἔρως *erōs*) and altruism may be fundamental, evolutionarily productive characteristics of all human life, yet romantic love, and the notion of 'falling in love', are not universals of culture, and not part of Pandora's Box. Arabian, Swahili, Portuguese, South African White, Dutch, and Biblical notions of more or less romantic love (which have been attested and mediated in abundance in world literature and to a lesser extent in anthropological and sociological studies) are likely to have had a certain, limited impact upon the Malawian village scene and the narratives in circulation there in the mid-20th c. CE. Yet in general my extensive exposure to the cultures and languages of South Central Africa over half a century has left me with the understanding that from a traditional African point of view, romantic love is, in that context, considered a rather childish or adolescent affectation, and certainly not an adequate measure of being human, across the intimidating social and political boundaries typical of colonial Africa. Still it is well known that essentially European constructs in terms of romantic love between two partners of African and European descent have generally served as a form of political defiance. When throughout British Central and Southern Africa in the colonial period a colour bar was enforced, love relations between individual Africans and Europeans constituted a major form of protest; as they have traditionally formed an interface to facilitate the North Atlantic anthropologist's transcontinental access to the host society. I submit that Schoffeleers's reading on this point is more personal, and possibly more ethnocentric, than he implies. Taken from the cover of *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion* (van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985), Fig. 17.2 shows a picture of the principal spirit medium of the Southern Malawi M'bona land spirit, on whose cult Schoffeleers's research has concentrated and whose main protector / officiant he gradually became. (As he proclaimed as the officiant during the religious service at Patricia's and my own wedding: 'It is my privilege to bring out my God in whatever form or shape he may manifest himself'; the three of us had joyfully bricolaged the service from fragments of African and Christian spirituality.) Schoffeleers was famous / notorious for the unconditional ways in which he 'went native' in his fieldwork and even already in the Roman Catholic missionary work that preceded it (joining the Nyau cult to the point of actual initiation, and reconverting renegade Christians from their temporary infatuation with Islam by ritually feeding them a piece of pork from his mission-station fridge); I suspect that the picture tells its own 'Malawian suitor story', complete with 'crack in the moral armature'.

European involvement, and it cannot be ruled out that this is also the original connotation of 'white' in these stories – upon which subsequently the colonial colour-caste relations were projected in reflection of modern times. I suspect that the stories are less about Black and White as modern (and regrettable) socio-political categories than about female power, creative and procreative functions, and the battle between male and female in general. If this is so, they are cosmological statements outside place and time, rather than decodable elements of historical information on Malawi's past.

It is impressive to see Schoffeleers carefully reduce the narrative symbolic content to abstract structure. Thus the Unilateral Being's one-sidedness becomes merely a vertical axis, and the Head / Python a horizontal axis. The Zebra-woman in the hunter story is very convincingly dealt with in this way.



Source: cover illustration of van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985. What to pom-pertverted Western eyes may look like a topless pin-up pose, merely reflects the time-honoured convention, throughout South Central Africa (cf. ritual nudity in the Ancient Near East) to the effect that, being semi-sacred carriers of life force themselves, women must approach the sacred with bare breasts (loci of nurturation and generational continuity)

Fig. 17.2. A Malawian suitor story: The principal spirit medium of the Southern Malawian land spirit M'bona, ca. 1960

Yet, before this structuralist transformation takes effect, I would like to dwell a little longer on the level where the Unilateral Being with only one side to his body, the 'halfling' (a term coined by Tolkien – 1975, 1990 – for a quite different purpose) is still considered a being of flesh and blood, albeit drastically reduced to one side only. In Western Zambia this halfling is one of the major spiritual beings, whose names (e.g. *Mwendanjangula*, 'Treetop-Walker', 'Who Goes at Exalted Height', or *Luwe*) are frequently mentioned in any context having to do with the deep forest, mysterious experiences, chance luck, healing and divinatory power, the status of priest-healer (*nganga*), and the sudden accidents – often leading to mutilation – during

hunting expeditions. Echoes of his presumed existence can be heard in Africa⁵⁰⁴ and world-wide. Many of the manifestations of this being are snake-like, and I am inclined to see him, among many other aspects, as a transformation of the Rainbow Snake which can be detected in the very oldest, Middle Palaeolithic layers of the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2010d, 2018, 2020c, chapters 5 and 6 below, and references cited there). This transcontinental perspective throws a very different light on the stories of the mutilated male suitors. Rather than having been reduced in their existence by being mutilated, they have passed onto a different, higher, order of existence, they became a local manifestation of Mwendanjangula himself (and as such eminently comparable to all those White men / Snakes / Heads). Little wonder that the Malawian narrators do not tell us that these transformed male suitors did not return to their normal physical condition. Being a halfling sums up, rather than destroys, their state of bliss. But if this is the case, then it becomes difficult to see in these halflings / Unilateral Mythical Beings, with Schoffeelers, merely a standard symbol of liminality, of 'betwixt and between'. Rather, or in addition, they seem to stand for the hidden, but hideous and capricious powers of the deep forest, out of which (in many African cosmologies) all vitality springs, which is the realm in and through which all extra-human forces manifest themselves, and which therefore is the proper recipient of human praises in the form of music. If these stories are about a gendered cosmology, the halfling as a symbol of vital force fit into this remarkably – the halflings of the stories are restored to, or tapped off by, deprived women through expeditions through the forest – the very place where some women meet White men / Snakes / Heads when mushroom collecting.

Drawing on cultural material from Western Zambia, I submit that more could be done with the Snake element that plays such a prominent part in most of the Malawian stories of our corpus.⁵⁰⁵ Just as the halfling is not necessarily a symbol of liminality, and may stand for a complex and widely-known body of ideas referring to the supernatural, and to Man's relations with Nature, it would seem meaningful to look at the significance of the snake in a wider cultural context than these stories alone. Snakes are feared, regardless of their being poisonous or not. They have, in addition to the connotations of masculinity and the sky which Schoffeelers mentions, strong connotations of *sorcery*. An important form of sorcery which people of Western Zambia believe to exist, is the raising of a Snake (*jilombo / lilombo*) with a human head in some hidden, dark place near a river; out of a secret combination of ingredients – to which the sorcerer gives his daily attention through secret visits to that place; after a diet of eggs and chickens the monster acquires a taste for human flesh, and the sorcerer (increasingly dominated by the ever growing serpent) has to feed it – through vicarious nomination – human babies and ultimately adults from his or her own village, in

⁵⁰⁴ #17.3. AGAIN THE UNILATERAL MYTHICAL BEING. Cf. Reynolds (1963), Melland (1923), Turner (1952), McCulloch (1951) and my own work (van Binsbergen 1981: ch. 4, 2010c, and 2010d, where – partly on the basis of von Sicard 1968-69 – I document and map out the distribution of the belief in this Unilateral Mythical Being, which is a hybrid hunting / weather / metallurgy / cattle god throughout the three continents of the Old World, and propose that, far from originating in South Central Africa, and despite its extensive distribution all over Africa, it emerged in Western Asia in Neolithic times, and even has connotations of the celestial axis around which the constellations appear to revolve). For further distributional and analytical argumentation, and empirical parallels e.g. in the distribution of the spiked-wheel trap, of mankala games, and geomantic divination, in terms of my Pelasgian Hypothesis, e.g. van Binsbergen, in press (a).

⁵⁰⁵ I regret that an exhaustive analysis of the snake / serpent mytheme is not yet among the many mytheme distributions that come to the fore in the present book. A first attempt is my 2010c text *Shimmerings of the Rainbow Serpent*, to be complemented with my study of an Nkoya statuette of Mwendanjangula (2010e).

order to save his or her own life, and to acquire the benefits (riches, political power, healing power) which the serpent has in stock for him or her. The snake is the most common sorcery familiar, and particularly married women are reputed to engage in this sort of sorcery when they want to get rid of a hated husband. (Some discussion on this in: Melland 1923.) This seems to conform Schoffeleers's ideas on the symbolic equation between snake and human head; it also suggests that in fact there is considerable continuity between the symbolic material employed in the folk tales, and that pervading the fantasies attending real, contemporary life. Meanwhile the sorcery connotations which are very manifest here, suggest that something more is involved than the structuralist abstractions of vertical or horizontal axis, even if the latter can be taken to be indicative of morality versus power. In the idiom of Schoffeleers' approach, the head / snake symbolism is rightly claimed to mean power; but the sorcery connotations now add, to the period-specific dimension of wealth, trade, and achievement, a universal one of wilful, reckless manipulation of human material, for evil individual aims.

Here again I submit that these stories are fundamentally about universal aspects of male / female relations, where non-human or extra-human elements, and Black / White relations, only come in to stress certain more universal aspects in a coded form. Here the roles of the younger brother (Matola's case) or the rival sisters/ age-mates may be further analysed. I suggest that the younger brother of Matola represents that side of her being that is male-orientated; the boy affords her access to that part of the world of female desires that can only be satisfied by men. Matola is psychologically prone, not to marrying a White man, but to experience the secret of male / female relations in a way remarkable enough to be worth a story.

I am therefore not convinced by Schoffeleers' moralising diagnosis that 'communities which invent and / or enjoy such stories show quite a crack in their moral armature'. Perhaps all communities have such a crack, as may be a precondition for their functioning as communities in the first place. Social life thrives by virtue of the contradictions that it encompasses, and many of these contradictions are of a moral nature. The rules of propriety and restraint Schoffeleers implicitly refers to, tend to be primarily male rules, which men try to impose on the women (without necessarily observing them themselves, as any research on Central African male patterns of sexuality may reveal). These rules define a cosy men's world, full of liberty, respect for being male, rights to women's sexual and labour power and products, children, *etc.* There seems to be considerable variation, within South Central Africa, in the extent to which the males can uphold this system without being challenged. In Western Zambia, there is a very strong counter- ideology among the women, who try and forge their own lives and to manipulate such claims and skills as their being female in that society accord them (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1987 / 2003; Rasing 2001; from the 1980s on, this situation has drastically changed again because of the AIDS epidemic: previously accepted forms of widespread promiscuity have given way – partly as a result of the preaching of Christian churches – to much greater emphasis on sexual reticence and fidelity). Women may be loyal to individual males, but certainly do not identify with the male world and its 'moral armature'. The almost worldwide stereotypical image (*cf.* Kaberry 2004 / 1939) of loose females as against virtuous males, or the other way around, is to some extent an artefact of the excessive generalisation to which structuralist analysis of oral narrative tends to be prone, and for the rest may simply be an aspect of the confrontation between male and female elements. An important dimension in this constellation is the extent to which women have their own independent access to cash income through salaried employment, trade, and the informal sector – during the colonial period and

in the decades immediately following, men used to monopolise such access, mainly granting women access in exchange for sexual favours. Perhaps it is wishful thinking on my part that I have the impression that this situation has considerably improved in favour of women in the most recent decades.

17.5. *The historical dimension*

Of course, I agree with Schoffeleers that we should also try to discuss and interpret the contents of these stories at a concrete historical level. However, here the problem presents itself of tying the universal (the ultimate message) to whatever is regionally and historically specific: the articulation between domestic and mercantile-capitalist modes of production as encroaching upon the social formation of Malawi, and South Central Africa as a whole, from the 16th century CE onward. Now, if we agree that there may be some retrievable core of historical information in these stories, how to bring out that core?

First, we should look for ways of dating the stories's contents. Perhaps some of them contain elements that definitely refer to archaic layers of early agriculture, or to the old hunting and gathering modes of production;⁵⁰⁶ evidence along the lines of historical linguistics pursued by Christopher Ehret and his associates might help us here (e.g. Ehret 1967, 1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1998; Papstein 1978).

Soon we will discover that, by and large, the stories with male protagonists and those with female ones refer to a fundamentally different process of articulation between modes of production.

1. The penetration (in itself suggestive of sexual symbolism) of mercantile capitalism into the local communities of Malawi (a process whose beginning is roughly to be dated to the mid-2nd mill. CE) seems to relate to the female stories, as Schoffeleers rightly observes. Here perhaps the significant differences between the variants (in the extent to which the females are passive, are assimilated to the status of their White partners, live happily ever afterwards with them, etc.) may reflect regional variations in this penetration process.
2. The male-protagonist stories are about a typologically very different, but in terms of periodisation adjacent, sort of articulation: about the superimposition of a tributary (chiefly or kingly) mode of production upon the domestic communities of South Central Africa, whose economies until that time revolved on hunting, gathering, agriculture and animal husbandry. It is amazing how strongly some of these male-protagonist stories resemble the myths of origin of the Luvale and Lunda peoples in Western Zambia.⁵⁰⁷ Once this parallel has become obvious, it becomes difficult to read the stories of Kansabwe and of the Cattle-Swallower in any other way than as mirror-images of the same process: a chiefly dynasty trying to link up organically, and in accordance with locally prevailing notions concerning morality, the land, legitimacy, the supernatural, with a local domestic community. Kansabwe plays a major role in sealing the relationship be-

⁵⁰⁶ On the theory of modes of production and their articulation, with special reference to South Central Africa and its history since Early Modern times, cf. van Binsbergen 1981; van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985; and extensive references cited there.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. Turner 1955, Papstein 1978; White 1949, 1962; for the general model of such accommodation between incoming royals and pre-existing acephalous communities, see van Binsbergen 1981: chapter 3, and 1979.

tween the chief (via his daughter) and the community. Cattle-Swallower himself acts as a raiding chief, who is accommodated within the local community at no other cost, ultimately, than a marriageable girl (the cattle is returned as bride-wealth).

From this perspective it is also clear why the male-protagonist stories must emphasise morality, whereas this is just not an issue in the female-protagonist stories. As I have argued elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1981, 1979, 1992, in press (b)), the rulers who tried to impose themselves upon the domestic communities of Central Africa from the 15th century onwards, often (in Zambia apparently: invariably) did so within the limits of the cosmology and ritual already prevailing locally at the time. The chiefly cults they created were exalted cults of (royal) ancestors. They did not deny that political authority ultimately depended upon ritual links with the land; instead, they claimed such links, in rivalry with pre-existing land priests. However violent, exploiting, a-moral the tributary mode of production might have grown at times (*cf.* Schoffeleers 1978; van Binsbergen 2003c) it needed an ideological basis in the morality of the local community.

Such conditions did not obtain in the case of the penetration of capitalism. Here the two confronting and articulating modes of production were too different, and the penetrating mode was too self-contained and self-reliant. Why this should be so, falls outside our present scope (*cf.* van Binsbergen 1992, 2012c) – in order to answer that question we would have to look into the nature of a money economy, the circulation of trade goods, the competition for monopolies, the reasons why domestic communities adopted the outside commodities and allowed themselves to be pillaged for local products and human personnel, *etc.* But certainly the penetration of capitalism did not lean on local cosmology and morality to the extent the penetration of the tributary mode did, and that is why women representing domestic / mercantile-capitalist articulation, can shed all moral qualms. The circle closes itself, to some extent, since it is here that sorcery, with all its Snake symbolism, comes in.

17.6. How to read Malawian suitor stories: As build around a genuinely (proto-)historical regional core, or as mythical narratives from distant provenances and without bearing on regional protohistory?

Meanwhile, exciting as the historical vistas opening up in the preceding sections are (and they seem even to go somewhat beyond the synthesis offered by Schoffeleers), I have now, nearly a quarter of a century later, substantial doubts about the validity of such an approach. Do folk stories circulating in modern South Central Africa, really contain identifiable and retrievable kernels of historical information concerning Early Modern history in that region? I now believe that these stories are mainly mythical narratives from distant provenances, on very general themes, and without bearing on local protohistory.

After specialising in North African popular Islam, from the early 1970s to the early 1990s I almost exclusively identified as an Africanist ethnohistorian, anthropologist and political scientist, engaging in regional comparison within Africa, but largely heeding the dominant Africanist ideology to the effect that things African are to be exclusively explained by refer-

ence to African conditions, and not by transcontinental connections⁵⁰⁸. However, extensive exposure to Assyriology, Egyptology, Biblical Studies, and comparative mythology in the first half of the 1990s⁵⁰⁹ made me realise that what I had considered, in my approach to Nkoya history (van Binsbergen 1981, 1992), to be a distorted traditional account of historical events in Iron Age South Central Africa up to half a millennium BP, apparently contained many highly specific parallels with the mythologies attested in the texts of civilisations extremely remote in space and time from Nkoyaland. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2010; the present book, chapter 8) I have offered a detailed discussion of these possible specific mythological correspondences with Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, South Asia, Central Asia, and even North America. So I had to face the possibility that my historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain* (1992), however acclaimed by the doyen 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: 52, 58). I now fear that at the time 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.

Let me give one example of what this concretely means for proto-historical analysis in the South Central African context.

#17.4. THE NKOYA KING KAYAMBILA AS DEATH DEMON. The legendary Nkoya king Kayambila's throne name boasts that he thatched his palace with the skulls of his enemies. This cruel practice has extensive resonances in comparative mythology,⁵¹⁰ but in the first place may be interpreted in local terms. For it is part of a violent skull complex that was quite central to Nkoya culture before modern times, and elements of which have persisted at least in the form of rumours – e.g. the rumour (as late as 1973 leading to a grim court case; van Binsbergen 1975 and 2003c, in press (b)) to the effect that the king routinely sends out his henchmen to kill stray children, because his life force – and that of the country – depends on his consumption of their brains. Is Kayambila only an a-historical evocation epiphany of an Underworld demon? And does the same apply to his overlord the Lunda king Mwaat Yaav, whose name means literally the 'Lord Death' and whose very real though distant court at Musumba, far north of the Zambezi-Congo Watershed, has long been known as the scene of great cruelty (cf. Frazer 191-

⁵⁰⁸ Exploding that ideology has been a central purpose of my work on transcontinental relations between Africa and Asia, van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c.

⁵⁰⁹ In the context of the Working Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Wassenaar, 1994-1995. I am indebted to this institution, and to my colleagues in the Working Group, for stimulating the expansion of my Africanist horizon both in space, in time, and in scholarly discipline.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Fontenrose 1980 / 1959: 29, 54: the community house of the Phlegyan nation (which identified as the Lapiths of mythical reknown) was adorned with skulls; Cygnus sought to build a temple for Apollo out of the skulls of travellers whom he had ambushed. Further examples appear in van Binsbergen 2010, reprinted in this book als chapter 8.

1915).⁵¹¹ Or could Kayambila yet have been historical? The political events in Western Zambia 1820-1950 make us read as a counter-hegemonic claim, and hence as potentially mythical, the account of Kayambila graciously extending Nkoya regalia to his alleged poor relative the Barotse king Mulambwa (let us remember that ever since the Kololo conquered the Zambezi Flood Plain in 1845 and radically changed the Luyana State towards their own, Sotho / Southern African political institutions and language, the Barotse state has been a source of repression, not a recipient of condescending benevolence, from the part of the Nkoya kings). 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.⁵¹² This grandson was explicitly claimed to be still alive in the early twentieth century CE, when Rev. Shimunika – his close kinsman, who offered a description of the birth scene – was in his teens. I was therefore persuaded, in my book *Tears of Rain* (1992), to consider Kayambila as a historical figure, and to situate his rule shortly after 1800 CE. However, the skull motif makes him more than life-size. He has effectively taken on the features of a King of the Underworld. The popular consciousness of common Nkoya villagers has retained this terrifying conception of the kingship to a great extent – in this society where sorcery and counter-sorcery constitute the routine imagination and discourse of the ongoing social process (cf. van Binsbergen 1981, 2001), the king is considered the greatest sorcerer of all. This also 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 humiliation⁵¹³ they were allegedly suffering at the court of Mwaat Yaav. Now, when we consider the myth of Nkoya kings leaving Musumba, 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, timelessly, about man's eternal struggle with death? (Cf. Fontenrose 1980, who considers this the underlying motif of all combat myths worldwide.) Must we reckon, here and in the other cases of extensive ancient parallels in modern Nkoya traditions and institutions, with the possibility that old mythical themes were deliberately revived and enacted – by what were truly 18th and 19th century CE political actors in Nkoyaland – in an atavistic bid to create continuity with, and legitimacy in the light of, the very remote past of several millennia ago? (Much like, in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, kings of the late periods claimed legitimacy by reviving the memory of their very distant, legendary predecessors, and sometimes namesakes: Sargon II (early 8th century BCE) naming himself after Sargon of Akkad across 16 centuries; and Sargon II's contemporary the 25th-dynasty Nubian pharaoh Shabaka claiming, likewise across one and a half millennium, a 6th-dynasty throne name for himself.) Or does the Nkoya skull complex have genuine Eurasian parallels, to be explained by Nkoya and Western Eura-

⁵¹¹ In Frazer's truncated and second-hand descriptions the Mwaat Yaav's court becomes especially the scene of a cruelty of which the Lunda king is not the perpetrator but the victim: at the end of his allotted period of rule (a handful of years) the king's body is to be torn apart by his councillors – which still makes the subject 'king of death'. On the wider comparative significance of such a custom, cf. Simonse 1992; Adler 1982; Vaughan 2008; Vitebsky 1985.

⁵¹² #17.5. DEDICATING A NEWBORN CHILD TO THE MORNING SUN. Cf. van Binsbergen 1992; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d. The same birth custom existed in Ancient Egypt, cf. Stricker 1963-1989; Renggli 2000. But also among the Hopi people of Arizona, United States of America (Nietherhammer 1995); in general, the girl's solemn coming-out dance in widespread Native American female puberty rites may be considered a dedication to the morning Sun (Sapir 1913; Brown 1970; Driver 1941; Driver *et al.* 1950; Opler 1972. The custom existed especially in traditional Hinduism (*Institutes of Vishnu*, in Jolly 1988: 14), which (given the general abundance of Sunda / South and South East Asian traits among the Nkoya; van Binsbergen 2020: ch. 5) I take to be the origin of the Nkoya custom. In the Ancient Near East a morning prayer to the Sun was not uncommon; it was represented in the famous Sit Shamshi bronze model, and left traces in the rites of the Palestinian Essenes around the turn of the Common Era (Wilson 1969: 37, 42). Cf. van Binsbergen, in press (e). Incidentally, if we need not take the accounts concerning the Nkoya kings at Musumba literally, we might as well see these accounts as remote echoes of a process that is far removed from Musumba in space of time: the flight of Hindu / Chola / Proto-Gypsy rulers and their court orchestras away from mainland India in order to escape the advancing Moghul rulers with their insistence on Islamic circumcision.

⁵¹³ Pig herding. Tame pigs (*Sus domesticus*) are no longer part of the Nkoya village scene. In much of Bantu-speaking Africa, like in the world of Judaism and Islam, pigs are the subject of dietary prohibitions. Essentially a people of hunters, the Nkoya however have a predilection for wild pig (*ngulube*; *Suidae*)

sia sharing a common cultural source (as is readily explained by my Pelasgian Hypothesis)?⁵¹⁴

Although it had escaped my attention at the time, a similar objection (concerning an essentially a-historical nature of Malawian mythical materials under consideration) had been brought by Wrigley against the work of Matthew Schoffeleers, who engaged in similar proto-historical research in Malawi in the 1960-1980s.⁵¹⁵ Wrigley's summary reads (1988; cf. Schoffeleers 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 rain-shrine 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 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.'

Seeking to retrieve the recent proto-historical past of sub-Saharan Africa was much *en vogue* among historians and anthropologists from the late 1960s onwards (cf. Ranger & Kimambo 1972), and both Schoffeleers and I myself were core members of that movement. Confident in our use of a (we thought) systematic method for identifying and extracting fragments of historical fact in local myth,⁵¹⁶ we did not heed such considerations as were, two decades later, at the heart of Wrigley's criticism. Meanwhile, however, I have come to consider Wrigley's point as eminently well-taken. Yet even Wrigley's position still displayed the familiar, main-stream limitation of considering – in a splendid tradition of which Luc de Heusch (1958, 1972, 1982) has been the principal exponent – the Bantu world as the *exclusive* realm within which any mythological interpretation of South Central African oral-historical narrative would have to be set. From the perspective of mainstream Africanist disciplinary ideology, one of the greatest sins⁵¹⁷ that a modern Africanist can commit is to try and explain

⁵¹⁴ Another reason why we should doubt the validity of Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy is the following: while the Back-into-Africa movement was already going on, the original trickle of Pre-Out-of-Africa African mythemes (around puberty rites, the veneration of the Earth – also through the Tree cult of sacred forests and land shrines –, maskerades, beggar processions, perhaps also circumcision) towards the adjacent continents Europe and Asia must have continued. This resulted in obscuring, in the destination regions, the neat postulated Laurasian typology that might have been forming there. Traces of such initially Pre-Exodus African continuity are virtually ubiquitous in Asia and Europe during historical periods. They suggest not a clear-cut North-South dichotomy, but on the contrary extensive North-South continuity, on top of such a feed-back mixture as must have resulted from the Back-into-Africa movement. Probably even linguistic and genetic traces of the postulated South-North continuity may be brought to light, *eg.* in place names (the case of extensive Afroasiatic – notably Cushitic, according to Karst – etymologies of many toponyms deep into Europe), in African genes in European populations (notably in Greece; Arnaiz *et al.* 2001), etc. It is my impression that such continuities are particularly manifest in the context of Pelasgian cultures and their modern transformations; which impression, if confirmed, would stand to reason, given the postulated subsequent Pelasgian impact on much of sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Schoffeleers 1985a, 1988, 1992; Wrigley 1988; van Binsbergen 2010.

⁵¹⁶ Vansina 1965, 1985; Schoffeleers 1979b, 1985; van Binsbergen 1981, 1985.

⁵¹⁷ The sin lies not only in the assault on the (theoretically ill-grounded, and in the face of globalisation increasingly counter-intuitive, anyway) edifice of African Studies as a regional specialty, but also in the attack on the average Africanist's comfort zone: engagement in the study of Africa-centered transcontinental connections requires a whole lot of additional interdisciplinary world-wide reading, for which the standard Africanist library does not in the least cater. Whatever my achievements, in half a century, for the sake of African Studies and the African Studies Centre, Leiden – in the course of the years 2000 I completely lost all support and sympathy from my colleagues there for committing this particular sin.

things African by reference to phenomena outside the African continent (cf. van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c, for an elaborate critique of this ideology). However understandable in the light of the hegemonic modern history of North Atlantic involvement with Africa and of African Studies's need to dissociate from that history, the condescending futility of this position becomes clear when we try to apply it, *mutatis mutandis*, to the study of Christianity as a largely European (but not Europe-originating) religious expression, or to the explosive question of the autochthony of Indian languages and of the Vedic scriptures, etc.⁵¹⁸ *African societies and cultures cannot be studied meaningfully 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.*

The evidence of transcontinental comparative mythology is there to suggest that also in the case of Schoffeleers's approach to Malawi folk stories, what he interpreted in terms of cores of historical information concerning Malawi from the middle of the second millennium CE onward, may in fact have ended up in modern Malawi from provenances thousands of kilometres and thousands of years removed from that setting. To conclude my argument, let me substantiate that claim by looking at the impressive body of transcontinental elements in East and Southern African stories as adduced by the linguist and folklorist Alice Werner – one of the recognised authorities on the mythology of the Bantu-speaking peoples of Africa.

17.7. *The transcontinental connection*

Under the chapter heading 'stories that travelled', Werner in her classic *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (1933 / 1968; cf. Abrahams 1983; Giddens & Giddens 2006) offers very extensive data, which I have summarised and tabulated in Table 17.1, and mapped in Fig. 17.3:

no.	plot / title	from...to, according to Werner
1	many African stories about the hare	not imported from India
2	Amazon valley tales of the Jabuti tortoise and his wives	not borrowed from trans-Atlantic involuntary migrants from Africa
3	Uncle Remus's stories	from Africa but Americanised
4	Aesop's fables in Africa	derive from vernacular translations, which have circulated extensively since the 19 th c.
5	Grimm's stories in Africa	manifestly taken from Grimm or similar European collections
6	'The Story of the King's Daughter and the Frog.'	appearing a manuscript collection written by a Nyanja-speaker in the early 20 th c., amidst authentic African material, unmistakable copied from European sources, probably in English
7	Cinderella / 'The Story of Siyalela and her Sisters,' in the Swahili collection Kibaraka ⁵¹⁹	'the compiler either failed to recognize the Swahili text as Cinderella, or thought it sufficiently naturalized to pass muster with the rest of

⁵¹⁸ Cf. Witzel 1989, 1997, 2003.

⁵¹⁹ #17.6. CINDERELLA AS A PELASGIAN THEME. However, the Cinderella story is so widely distributed in the Old World that Werner's conclusion appears to be premature; cf. Bascom 1982 (Africa); Dundes 1982 (general); Waley 1947 (China); Rooth 1980 (general); Mulhern 1985 (Italy, Japan); Cox, 1893; Ting Nai-Tung 1974 (China, Indo China), to which (as the very extensive literature brings out) could easily be added Korea, the Philippines, Moroccan Jewry, etc. Although further discussion on this point is beyond our present scope, the Cinderella theme deserves to be added to the long list of 80 Pelasgian cultural traits I have listed elsewhere (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011).

		Kibaraka
3a	'Uncle Remus' stories	from Africa via America back to Africa, and now being translated into Swahili (<i>Mambo Leo</i>), where they may be confused with the more authentically local narrative material
9	'The Blind Man and the Hunchback' / 'The Man and his Blind Brother.' ⁵²⁰	From Assam to Nyasaland, India-East Africa trade providing the possible link, ⁵²¹ but considerably altered in transmission
10	The Washerman's Donkey / 'The Monkey who left his Heart in a Tree' ⁵²²	the Buddhist <i>Sumsumara Jātaka</i> (also found in the Sanskrit collection of stories called <i>Panchatantra</i> , under the title of 'The Monkey and the Porpoise.'). from South Asia to the East African coast
11	The Swahili story 'The Heaps of Gold' ⁵²³	the Buddhist <i>Vedabha Jātaka</i> , from South Asia coming down to us in the shape of Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale.' It was probably brought to Europe from the East by some returned pilgrim or crusading soldier, and embodied in that queer compilation the <i>Gesta Romanorum</i> . From South Asia it also reached the East African coast via Persia, undergoing Islamic and perhaps undergoing Christian influence on the way
12	The Ingratitude of Man (Kibaraka Velten) ⁵²⁴	from India to both the <i>Gesta Romanorum</i> and to the East Asian Coast; there is a Persian story: 'The Colt Qéy-tas,' ⁵²⁵ quite close to 'Kibaraka'
13	The Composite Tale of Kibaraka: Common motifs such as the treacherous travelling companion, encounter with a demon (<i>zimwi</i>), cannibal feast Forbidden Chamber. ⁵²⁶ , the captive horse as the protagonist's unexpected ally, treasure, containers with useful magical substances, flight; parallels with 'Orange and Citron Princess,' ⁵²⁷ stroll into town disguised as beggar; and announcement of imminent marriage of princesses; rival protagonists marked by the latter; further Persian parallels e.g. 'The Colt#Qéy-tas,'; protagonist effects sultan's cure.	Parts of this story seem to have spread wherever the Arabs have carried their language and their traditions (the final thirteen words of the story are pure Arabic). The lime-throwing incident occurs both in Somali and in Fulfulde (the language of the Fulani, in West Africa). The Somali story of 'Lame Habiyyu' begins like 'The Colt Qéy-tas,' and goes on very much as 'Kibaraka'
14	The Merry jests of Abu Nuwás.	Harūn-al-Rashid (765-809), a certain poet at Baghdad, named Abu Nuwás, who entered Swahili literature as a Trickster figure and mixed up with the hare; Junod's claim of Portuguese influence rejected, although the Portuguese are depicted as his victims
15	The Three Words, a motif in a Swahili story called 'The judge and the Boy,' ⁵²⁸ where it is combined with parts of several other stories, imperfectly told.	no definite origin and path of diffusion are explicitly suggested, but Werner's next entry implies that she considers this story, too, to be 'imported from the East-whether from Arabia, Persia, ⁵²⁹ or India.'

⁵²⁰ Werner adds at this point: 'Rattray, *Chinyanja Folklore*, p. 149; cf. Posselt's *Fables of the Feld*, p. 6; and MS collection of Walters Saukila; the Assam version in: volume XXXI of *Folk-Lore* (1920), with, of course, considerable differences of local colouring. It was told to J. D. Anderson by a Kachari in Assam.'

⁵²¹ Werner: 'See Ingrams, *Zanzibar*, p. 33.'

⁵²² Werner: 'Steere, *Swahili Tales*, p. 1.'

⁵²³ Werner: 'Kibaraka, p. 89.'

⁵²⁴ Werner: *Märchen und Erzählungen*, p. 144.'

⁵²⁵ Werner: 'D.L.R. and E.O. Lorimer, *Persian Tales*, pp. 38-42.'

⁵²⁶ Werner adds on this point: 'See The Folk-lore Journal, vol. iii (1885), pp. 193-242. The incident is found in several Swahili stories, in very different settings: e.g., "Hasseebu Kareem ed Din" and "The Spirit and the Sultan's Son," in Steere (*Swahili Tales*, pp. 353 and 379), and "Sultani Zuwera," in *Kibaraka*, p. 5.'

⁵²⁷ Werner: 'D.L.R. and E.O. Lorimer, *Persian Tales*, p. 135.'

⁵²⁸ Werner: 'Kibaraka, p. 35: "Kadhi na Mtoto".'

⁵²⁹ Werner: 'D.L.R. and E.O. Lorimer, *Persian Tales*, p. 269.'

		The story has parallels in the <i>Gesta Romanorum</i> , as well as in some old French <i>fabliaux</i> , and in A Cornish tale (SW England), ⁵³⁰ and was made use of by Schiller for his ballad <i>Der Gang nach dem Eisenhammer</i> ; also in a Persian story, ⁵³¹ 'The Man who bought Three Pieces of Advice'
16	The Magic Mirror, the Magic Carpet, and the Elixir of Life, published by Junod [2] ⁵³² under the title of 'Les Trois Vaisseaux'. It is also found on the Congo ⁵³³ and the Ivory Coast although these Western African versions may be independent from the East African one	Another story imported from the East-whether from Arabia, Persia, or India
17	The Angolan story of Fenda Madia: ⁵³⁴ one of the 'False Bride' class, involving a magic mirror-a distinctly non-African element.	the minority of narratives in Chatelain's <i>Folk-tales of Angola</i> must certainly have come from Portugal, while most are unmistakably of African growth. The story is current both in Portugal and in Italy, but in all probability originated farther east. Parts of it resemble the latter portion of the Persian 'Orange and Citron Princess.' [2]
18	A magic wishing mirror figures in a story collected by Father Torrend at Quelimane ⁵³⁵	Portuguese and African elements mixed
19	'La Fille du Roi' (Mozambican Ronga but from colonial urban labour migration provenance) ⁵³⁶	Junod took this to be a Portuguese story, and there are Grimm-derived elements in it ('Shoes danced to pieces', notably in 'Satan's House'), but other elements are untraceable, not recognisably African
20	'The Merchant of Venice' motif, written by Swahili teacher at Ngao, who said he had heard it from an Indian at Kipini (Kenyan coast)	perhaps directly from Shakespeare via colonial influence, but more likely from Oriental/Indian source - appears also in <i>Gesta Romanorum</i>

Table 17.3. Werner on obvious transcontinental connections of selected African stories

When we map the information in this Table in the Figure 17.3 below, we end up with the very strong suggestion that many of the motifs constituting modern African folk stories in fact have been drawn from a world-wide pool, whose contents can often be demonstrated to be of considerable antiquity. The overwhelming pattern is that of motifs entering into Africa, with only one (Uncle Remus) emanating from Africa. However, this may reflect the Eurocentric and implicitly anti-African views of cultural initiative during the hightide of European colonialism, when Werner wrote (even though she herself clearly did not subscribe to that trend).

⁵³⁰ Werner: "John of Chyanorth" . See J. Morton Nance, *Cornish for All* (Lanham, St Ives, n.d.), pp. 38-48 - I am indebted to Mr Henry Jenner, of Bospowes, Hayle, for directing my attention to this book'.

⁵³¹ Werner: 'D.L.R. and E.O. Lorimer, *Persian Tales*, p. 269.'

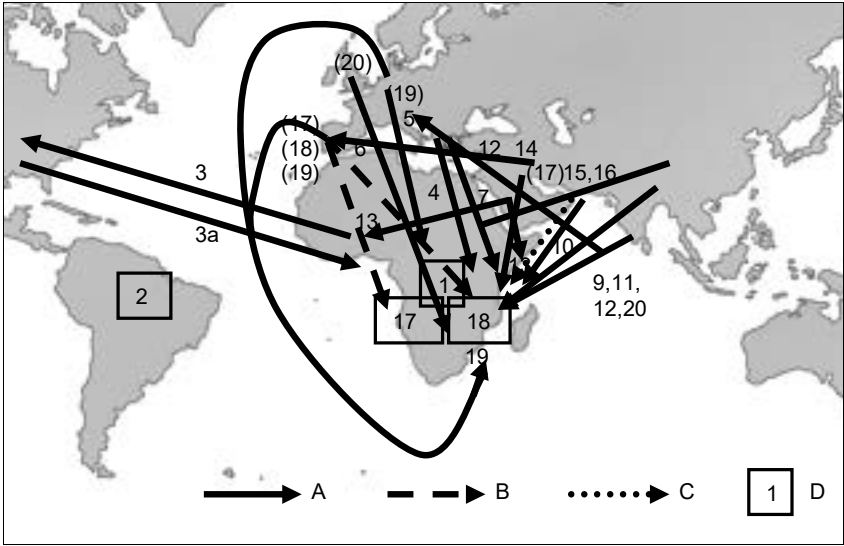
⁵³² Werner: 'Chants et contes, p. 304'.

⁵³³ Werner: 'Dennett, Folk-Lore of the Fjort, No. III.'

⁵³⁴ Werner: 'Folk-tales of Angola, pp. 29 and 43'.

⁵³⁵ Werner: 'Seidel, in *Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen*, vol. i, p. 247'.

⁵³⁶ Werner: 'Junod Chants et contes, p. 317.'



A: proposed direction of borrowing; B: only partial borrowing; C: conjectural; D: local motif; numbering as in Table 17.3

Fig. 17.3. African stories that have travelled: proposed directions of borrowing according to Werner

Although, inevitably, the overlap between our Malawi corpus and the stories considered by Werner is only partial, it will be difficult to deny the transcontinental nature and great historical time depth of the Malawi corpus.


17.8. Conclusion

In this paper we have seen Matthew Schoffeleers at work as a pioneering analyst of the deep structure and historical message of Malawian folk stories. Taking the Malawian corpus very seriously, and addressing it on the basis of a profound knowledge of the relevant language and culture, we can only admire the force of his scholarship and of his eclectically structuralist, analytical mind. His work on folk stories raises important questions of theory, method and data, and will continue to inspire. Yet we cannot escape the conclusion that, partly as a result of his own endeavours, our approach to oral literature in Malawi and in Africa as a whole has meanwhile considerably advanced beyond the intuitive, narrowly structuralist principles applied by Schoffeleers, and has developed a more prudent and subtle approach both to deep structure, to history, and to transcontinental connections.

Chapter 18. The Leopard and the Lion (2003)

An exploration of Eurasianic and Bantu lexical continuity in the light of Kammerzell's hypothesis⁵³⁷

*18.1. Introducing Kammerzell's allegedly ubiquitous roots *pr/*prd and *lw, and sketching our itinerary in this chapter*

In a brilliant analysis, the historical linguist Kammerzell (1994) set out to establish the etymology of the Ancient Egyptian divine name of  Mafdet, a feline goddess attested from remotest times: her emblem appears on the famous fifth-dynasty Palermo stone⁵³⁸ where it refers to a first-dynasty context. Rejecting a number of alternatives that have the names of splendid Egyptologists associated with

⁵³⁷ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, 'The Leopard and the Lion: An exploration of Nostratic and Bantu lexical continuity in the light of Kammerzell's hypothesis', at: http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/ancient_models/leopard_lion_nostratic_bantu_kammerzell.pdf. In line with the conventions adopted throughout my recent work, I have altered 'Nostratic' into 'Eurasianic'. In practice the two terms are equivalent in the perspective of the Russian / Tower of Babel school of long-range historical linguistics. From this point of view, Eurasianic and Afroasiatic, as modern macrophyla, are sister branches, reflexes of disintegrating *Borean. However, the North Atlantic school, which Bomhard and Kerns represent, sees Afroasiatic not as sister but as daughter of Nostratic / Eurasianic. When this chapter's argument was first drafted, in 2003, I relied mainly on Bomhard and Kerns, but later, at the expert advice of the prominent Czech linguist Vaclav Blažek, opted for the Russian approach. I regret if not all traces of the earlier orientation may have been weeded out of the present version. In this chapter, I will use the terms 'Eurasianic' and 'Nostratic' interchangeably (with a preference for the former); when Nostratic is meant in Bomhard and Kern's extended sense, *i.e.* including Afroasiatic, I let the term be accompanied by '%'.
⁵³⁸ Cf. Seidlmayer 1998: 24, third double register from top, second cell from the left.

them, Kammerzell arrives at an etymology in terms of a root **pr/*prd*, which primarily means ‘to rip, to tear’, and (since a feline rips with a claw containing four nails), ‘to [give one a taste of the] four’; hence the numeral ‘four’ (4) attaches to this root, and the feline becomes the ‘four-animal’.



Fig. 18.o. A typical leopard: An Amur panther in its then obsolete housing at Artis (Natura Artis Magistra) Zoo, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2014

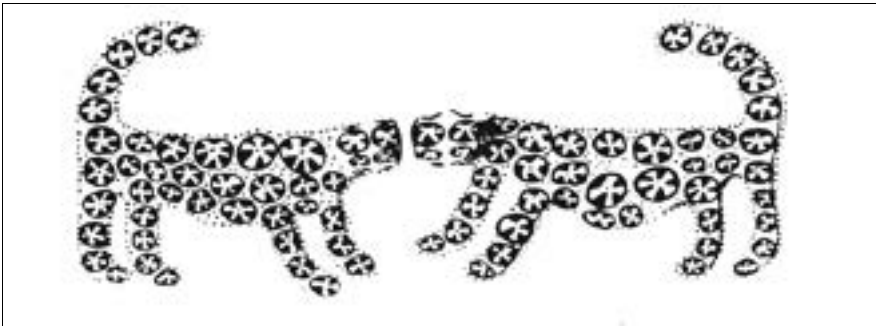
This surprising identification can be developed further, for it is my impression that the numerical association has gradually been dissociated from the ripping movement, and has instead imposed itself on the perception of the pattern of the leopard skin in Ancient Egypt. Both the pattern and the colour of the leopard skin are highly variable, but the basic structure is a light fond, on which many irregular dark rings are found with a reddish-brown centre. There is not one general convention for rendering this pattern in Egyptian art through the ages, but one may notice a tendency for the rings and the centre to be rendered by dots. What would be more natural, in rendering a four-animal, than to produce a pattern of four black dots for each ring, or of three black dots around a central red one? Although no representation follows this tendency entirely consistently, it is noticeable in a considerable number of representations (e.g. Fig. 18.1).



detail of wall painting from tomb-chapel of Rekhmira⁶, no. 100, Thebes; Houlihan 1996: 101 pl. XVI.

Fig. 18.1. A leopard as Nubian tribute, Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt

The tendency to acknowledge iconographically the leopard as a ‘four’ animal can perhaps already be spotted in Çatal Hüyük (Anatolian Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, Turkey). For instance, Kammerzell (1994: 56) shows from this site an image with two leopards; without himself spotting the ‘four’ tendency in this representation. These leopards’ spots consist of irregular dark disks in which, in a lighter colour, there is an irregular cross with spokes widening from the centre. Together the leopards display nearly a hundred such disks, on more than half of which the crosses have four spokes, about a quarter have five spokes, and the remainder have three, six, or an uncertain number. Throughout the Ancient Near East, from Egypt to Mesopotamia, the iconography of stars (and gods) is very similar to such multi-spoked crosses (Labat 1988; de Mecquenem 1949).



Recently the integrity of Mellaart’s archaeological reports has been called to question, but I see no reason to consider this well-known graphic compromised

Fig. 18.2. Two leopards from Çatal Hüyük; Mellaart 1966.

Kammerzell's etymological explorations reach much further. Radically departing from the (recently much criticised Romantic imagery of the Tree, with stem and branches, as the representation of linguistic relationships underlying most early work in Indo-European linguistics, he comes to the amazing conclusion that throughout Afroasiatic (which includes Ancient Egyptian, Semitic – for example Arabic, Hebrew, Akkadian, Phoenician, Ugaritic – Cushitic, Berber, Chadic, and Omotic) *as well as* Indo-European languages the 'leopard' tends to be called by the root **pr* or **prd*, and 'lion' by the root:

*rw/lw-/*LB'/*leu*

(the English word *leopard*, composed of a combination of both words, is in itself an excellent illustration). It proves impossible to decide whether there has been any borrowing here from Afroasiatic to Indo-European, or the other way around. The wide distribution of these animal species across the Old World makes the case very different from that of domesticated animals and plants, where long-ranging etymological connections have simply followed the diffusion of Neolithic food-producing skills; for example, cattle are called by words deriving from the same root **guou* in Central Africa, Western Europe, India, and China.

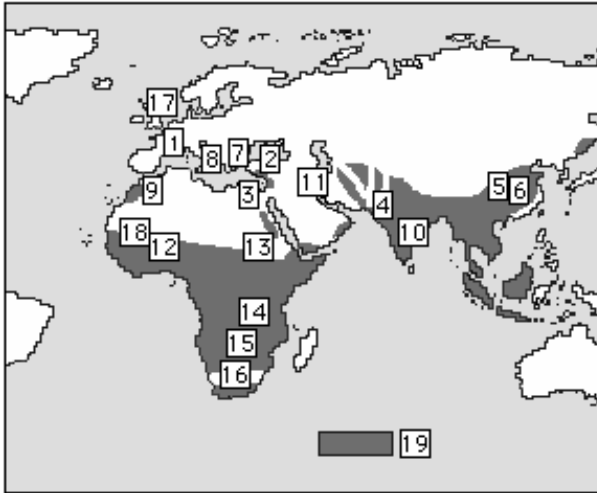
Kammerzell does not attempt to *explain* the continuities that he finds throughout the Afroasiatic and Indo-European material. He does not seriously consider the possibility of a third, more comprehensive, language family underlying the language families of Afroasiatic and Indo-European, because that would take him back to the dendric model just left behind. Yet, as a result of research over the past two decades, such a super-family has now been widely recognised under the name of Nostratic⁵³⁹ or Eurasiatic, to bring out the common linguistic material in huge language groups comprising many of the Old World's languages and some of the New World's: Indo-European, Kartvelian, Uralic-Yukaghir, Elamo-Dravidian, Altaic, Sumerian, Chukchee-Kamchatkan, Eskimo-Aleut and Etruscan. I shall argue below that extension to the Eurasiatic level would have enhanced the relevance of Kammerzell's argument for our present purpose.

In the present chapter I will try to make sense of the widespread pattern of distribution that Kammerzell identified for us. I will do so at a number of levels, some of them linguistic, others in the realm of intercultural comparison across time and space. The intercultural perspective will in the first place suggest an answer, derived from Lévi-Straussian structural anthropology, to the following two questions:

1. Why should such a widespread lexical complex consist of names of animal species? and
2. Why should these names be paired?

Such widespread and constant nomenclature of animal species suggests the existence of a widely distributed system of animal symbolism as a central part of a cosmology informing systems of meaning and social organisation in many parts of the Old World and over a very long period (a dozen millennia, since the beginning of the Neolithic). The wide distribution of this cosmology may be gathered from Fig. 18.3, which presents a number of attestations of Leopard symbolism throughout the Old World from very different periods.

⁵³⁹ Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994.



1. Leopard skin allegedly worn by Mousterian man at Hortus, 60,000 BC
 2. Great Mother goddess depicted giving birth supported by two leopards, and other Leopard representations at Çatal Hüyük, 8000 BP
 3. Ancient Egypt second millennium BCE: Sem priest wears Leopard skin in the Opening-of-the-Mouth ceremony; Leopard skin in *imut* moveable shrine; Leopard skin major tribute from sub-Saharan Africa; leopard as the ‘four-animal’; ubiquitous **pw/*pyd* root for leopard in Afroasiatic and Indo-European languages first attested
 4. Leopard skin decoration on mantle of priest-king in Mohenjodaro, second millennium BCE
 5. Fu Hsi, Chinese culture hero credited with the invention of the *eight luā* (eight trigrams) supposed to have worn a Leopard skin, and depicted thus in the thirteenth century CE
 6. Leopard skin with lunar and imperial connotations in Chinese classical culture
 - 7, 8. Cybele, Dionysus, Eros, Orpheus, and various Greek and Trojan heroes associated with Leopard skin, Archaic and Classic Greece
 9. North-west African horsemen use Leopard skins as saddle, Hellenistic times
 10. Great Mother goddess (under the manifestation of Kali) associated with Leopard and Leopard skin, India, 1st-2nd millennium CE
 11. Sufis wearing Leopard skins
 12. West and Central African secret societies and totems featuring the leopard
 13. Nilotic Leopard-skin Earth priests
 14. East and South Central African kings wearing the Leopard skin
 15. Leopard skin in the Mwali/*Sangoma* cult
 16. Leopard skin as academic dress, Witwatersrand, South Africa
 17. Leopard heraldic animal of England
 18. West African *yeeli* (‘griots’, i.e. bards/heralds) wearing Leopard skins
 19. Approximate distribution of the panther/leopard (*Panthera pardus*) in modern times; sources: Garman 1997; Leopard Fact Sheet *n.d.*
- Note. Up to c. 10,000 BP the species also occurred in Europe; up to 5,000 BP also in Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa; up to the nineteenth century CE throughout South Africa

Fig. 18.3. The geographic distribution of the leopard today, and historical Leopard-skin references.

Besides Kammerzell’s distributional data, the next step in my analysis introduces the mythological complex of the Luwe divine figure, which the Swedish comparative religionist von Sicard⁵⁴⁰ has attested in numerous African contexts and elsewhere in the Old World. My equation of Luwe’s name with the **lw* component in Kammerzell’s linguistic pair again does two things:

⁵⁴⁰ von Sicard 1968-69.

1. it makes us look for a **pr/*prd* component in the Luwe complex; this we find in the divine figure of Mwali, paired to Luwe in various ways); and
2. it suggests a massive sub-Saharan African extension of the distribution of Kammerzell's paired roots.

I then undertake an extensive analysis of the names for Leopard and Lion in more than two hundred Nigercongo, more specifically Bantu, languages. It does in fact confirm

1. a considerable presence of Kammerzell's roots also in sub-Saharan linguistic contexts, as well as
2. a considerable continuity of the semantics especially of the **pr/*prd* root (ubiquitous in terms of 'scatter', 'variegated', 'dappled') and finally
3. the concomitant wide distribution of the 'Ancient Cosmology of the Leopard and the Lion' throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the last four or five millennia.

However, in the face of the extensive Eurasiatic continuity of Kammerzell's roots, the African evidence is not enough to conclude to a primarily sub-Saharan African origin of these roots. Instead, I prefer to suggest that the complex originates in South West Asia / North East Asia not more than ten millennia BP, in the early Neolithic.

18.2. Why names of animal species, and why a pair of such names?

Since the early twentieth century, with the work of Durkheim on the *Forms Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*,⁵⁴¹ a debate has been going on within cultural anthropology concerning the principles underlying the selection of specific natural givens (e.g. animal species) to become religious / social symbols: was their selection entirely arbitrary (as Durkheim maintained) or was it inspired by ecological and economic interest (as other protagonists in the debate, e.g. Malinowski and Worsley maintained).⁵⁴² As his highly original contribution to this debate, Lévi-Strauss formulated a selection principle for natural symbols that was neither economic nor totally arbitrary: *they did not have to be good to eat, as long as they were good food for thought*.⁵⁴³ When Lévi-Strauss largely turned away from kinship studies and for decades applied and refined his concepts and methods in the analysis of myths and symbolism, he shaped a toolkit that allows us to pinpoint the underlying formal structure of a system featuring natural symbols, and to formulate that structure at such a level of abstraction, and with such precision, that far-reaching comparisons may be made between such systems, while underneath their dazzling variety we may begin to detect converging underlying deep structures – not by literary, psychoanalytical or intuitive methods, but with a strategy of identification and abstraction not dissimilar, in its rationality, transparency and intersubjectivity, to the Periodic System used by Modern chemistry. For Lévi-Strauss (and in an argument directly indebted to de Saussure's and Trubetzkoy's structuralist linguistics of the first half of the twentieth century CE), a natural symbol could never articulate its meaning in isolation, but only by offsetting its *distinctive features* (a key linguistic concept ever since Jakobson 1941)

⁵⁴¹ Durkheim 1912.

⁵⁴² Malinowski 1954; Worsley 1956, 1968.

⁵⁴³ Lévi-Strauss 1962a, 1962b.

against those of another such symbol, within a specified context that systematically defines the issue. Lévi-Strauss taught anthropologists to recognise that speaking about pairs of natural objects in juxtaposition is an effective discourse for the articulation of social, political and ideological relationships. It constitutes a world view and a system of social organisation.

Of course, binary oppositions as evoked here are crude and deceptive instruments of human thought, inviting a Derrida (1967a, 1967b) deconstruction that will show that they imply their own opposite, so that our intellectual gain lies not in the opposition, but in its deferment, its *différance*. But even though Modern specialist philosophical thought for the past few decades has thrived on the attempt to surpass structuralism, yet as a key to the initial description and analysis of non-specialist, non-academic thought, of ‘untamed thinking’, structuralism is still unsurpassed, and a vital instrument of intercultural description and analysis.

With these structural anthropological insights in mind, we can begin to make sense of two sets of data: Kammerzell’s ubiquitous pair of animal names, and von Sicard’s extensive study of the Luwe divine figure.

Kammerzell’s has presented us with the well-documented finding that, ever since Neolithic times, both in Afroasiatic and in Indo-European languages (in other words, throughout a stretch of the Old World ranging from the North Cape to West Africa and India, and from Mauritania to the deserts west of China where Tocharian was spoken), the root **pr/*prd* has been in use to denote ‘leopard’. But not only that: the same extension in space and time is manifest for the root **lw* for ‘lion’. Apart from domestic animals which form an entirely different case, this spectacular distributional phenomenon is peculiar to the two roots **pr/*prd* and **lw*. They form a unique pair. The kind of pair that our digression into Lévi-Straussian structuralism made us expect to find.

The uniqueness of the pair **pr/*prd* and **lw* will be realised when we inspect the common repertoire of animal names in Afroasiatic, Indo-European and in general Eurasian languages. In this connection, I have already mentioned

- ‘Hawk, Falcon’,
 - the basic form of whose name (**ḥur-/*ḥor-*) extends even far beyond Proto-Afroasiatic and Proto-Indo-European, to encompass Proto-Eurasian. The only other cases cited by Bomhard and Kerns⁵⁴⁴ are:
- ‘animal’ (= any animal in general);
- ‘Bee’;
- ‘hoofed animal’;
- ‘hoofed, cud-chewing animal’;
- ‘insect, worm’;
- ‘Partridge’;
- ‘wild animal, wild beast’.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Bomhard & Kerns 1994.

⁵⁴⁵ Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 865 f: ‘animal = any animal in general’ (**ḡar-/*ḡər-*, no. 437); ‘Bee’ (**bay-/bəy-*, **k[ʰ]junʷ-/*k[ʰ]onʷ-*, nos. 27, 251); ‘hoofed animal’ (**k[ʰ]lab-/*k[ʰ]əb*, no. 253); ‘hoofed, cud-chewing animal’ (*ḡil-/*ḡel-*, no. 452); ‘insect, worm, maggot’ (**kʷ[ʰ]ur-/*kʷ[ʰ]or-*, no. 332); ‘partridge = plump-bodied game bird’ (**kʷakʷ-*, no. 291); ‘wild animal, wild beast’ (**Guw-ir/*Gow-ir-*, no. 236).

With the exception of ‘Falcon, Hawk’, none of these names refers to one specific species or cluster of closely related species. One might suppose that the corresponding list for Proto-Afroasiatic and Proto-Indo-European together, although implied in the above list, would be longer since these language families are at least geographically closer than some of the other members of the Eurasiatic super-family, but Bomhard’s⁵⁴⁶ extensive list of cognates between the reconstructed proto-forms of these two language families yields only two more items:

- ‘to fly, bird’; and
- ‘a kind of bird, Eagle’.⁵⁴⁷

That is all. Obviously it is very rare for animal names to extend over great stretches of space and time, unless they are supported by the cultural history of domestication; and only in the case of **pr/*prd* and **hw* does such extension occur pairwise.

Meanwhile it is a sobering fact – indicative of the fact that Nostratic studies are still in their infancy – that Bomhard,⁵⁴⁸ claiming to list all plausible Proto-Afroasiatic/Proto-Indo-European cognates, does not list Kammerzell’s roots **pr/*prd* and **hw*, although the latter’s account of their distribution in Afroasiatic and Indo-European is exhaustive and convincing.

The second set of evidence consists of the symbolic complex centring on the divine figure called Luwe, as extensively analysed by von Sicard.⁵⁴⁹

18.3. *The Luwe complex and the limitations of von Sicard’s work*

The name Luwe is widely attested, throughout Africa south of the Sahara, as the designation of a primordial hunting / herding / atmospheric / blacksmithing god with very specific characteristics and attributes (a dwarfish shape, often only a left side or a right side to his body, an axe or club as weapon, Master of Animals of the wilds, herder also of immense

⁵⁴⁶ Bomhard 1984.

⁵⁴⁷ Bomhard 1984: ‘to fly, bird’ (Proto-Afroasiatic ^cəw-/*aw-, Proto-Indo-European ^chəw-i, p. 265), and ‘a kind of bird, eagle’ (Proto-Afroasiatic ^cər-/*ar, Proto-Indo-European ^cjar-/*jar-, p. 267). We have already noted that the Ancient Egyptian word for ‘falcon, hawk’, and hence the name of the major god Ḥorus that attaches to every king, derives from an identical Proto-Nostratic root. The latter being one of the very few common Nostratic animal names, suggests that the Ḥorus cult in Ancient Egypt from earliest dynastic times reflects a far more general Old World feature. Is it by sheer coincidence that the Zambian Nkoya put two primordial birds, i.e. Hawk and the Eagle, identified with the High God and her child the Demiurge Mvula / Rain, at the beginning of time? Or (given the fact that the word for ‘Partridge’ is also one of the very few Proto-Eurasiatic animal names) that the myth of the Tunisian local saint Sidi Mḥammad speaks of partridges that alighted on the sleeping saints when he was supposed to herd his master’s cattle – after which these birds were forever sacred to him? Or that the myth of origin of the North African ^cArfāwi clan (the original adepts and cognate kin of Sidi Mḥammad) serves to explain that clan’s shibboleth:

‘the [partridge’s] head is burned in the Fire’?

Cf. van Binsbergen 1992, and in press (b).

⁵⁴⁸ Bomhard 1984.

⁵⁴⁹ Von Sicard 1968-1969.

herds of cattle, etc.), and with extensive ramifications into the rest of the Old World. Besides Luwe, other name variants attach to the character of this old god, for example Runda, Kube, Sumba, Gurub, Karumbi, Mutanga, Dara, Gale, Nape/Nyambe, etc.⁵⁵⁰

We should be careful not to put ourselves completely at the mercy of von Sicard's approach, however persuasive his ideas are, and however much they appear to be corroborated from a recent and unsuspected direction – the work of the Egyptologist and linguist Kammerzell. In circles of Zimbabwe scholars, von Sicard has long been discarded as a hopeless arch-diffusionist whose disbelief in any linguistic, cultural and ethnic boundaries made him claim the most fantastic intercontinental continuities, such as suspecting a localising transformation of the *Old Testament's* Arch of the Covenant to underlie the drum symbolism of East and South Central African kings.⁵⁵¹ It is difficult to determine to what extent such dismissal has been merely paradigmatic, in other words, inspired by the general rejection (springing more from paradigmatic doggedness and interdisciplinary and interregional ignorance than from well-informed state-of-the-art scholarship) of diffusionism in the anthropology of the second half of the twentieth century, and how much of it addressed genuine factual errors on von Sicard's part. The same anthropologists who reject his linguistic and mythological arguments may be suspected of fighting a somewhat spurious battle of rival disciplines with him (von Sicard was a comparative religionist and theologian by training). Moreover, these anthropologists probably derive localising (even essentialising) blinkers from their own fieldwork-based anthropological habitus, and (like most social anthropologists in the second half of the twentieth century) tend to lack all comparative and theoretical linguistic knowledge – they would seldom be competent to prove von Sicard wrong through a detailed scholarly argument. But even so, we must admit that von Sicard's comparative religious and mythological knowledge and method are generally of better quality than his linguistics.⁵⁵² The latter frequently adduce far-fetched etymologies without stopping to spell out the correspondence rules (of *systematic*, and both empirically and theoretically underpinned, phonetic and morphological change over time) on which such etymologies ought to be based; and without considering alternative and often more established etymologies. Thus, from von Sicard's perspective the Hebrew אַרִי/אֲרִיָּה *ari(h)*, 'lion', would appear to be a cognate of the divine name Luwe, and if Ari happens to be an alias for the Northern European god Odin, that (among other indications) would implicate the latter in the transconti-

⁵⁵⁰ Inevitably, the form *gurub* brings up associations with the g-r-b root as a metathetical variant of Kammerzell's prg / prd 'leopard / scatter' root. Probably the same applies to the name Karumba <? *k/g – r – p/m/b. Nyambi, with numerous variants, is a widespread name of the High God in West Africa and Western Central Africa; we have touched on it elsewhere in this book, and there referred to my earlier discussions elsewhere. Meanwhile note that the accumulation of special associations mentioned for Luwe makes it extremely difficult to periodise in terms of modern of production, which range from hunting and gathering (available since the Lower Palaeolithic) to animal husbandry and rain-fed agriculture (Neolithic) to metallurgy (not a mode of production in its own right, but associated with the Neolithic and Bronze Age, if not more recent periods.

⁵⁵¹ Von Sicard 1952. Clearly, such eccentricities in my eyes are merely prepossessing positive characteristics. Although inevitably dated, I still count von Sicard's work among a few inspiring scholarly sources of transcontinental inspiration.

⁵⁵² I am grateful to T. Schadeberg (former professor of African linguistics, Leiden University) for pointing this out to me. Similar shortcomings often (despite a number of very convincing hits) attend Bernal's proposed Afroasiatic etymologies of Ancient Greek words, especially the Athena/Neith etymology, as I argued in: van Binsbergen 1997a / 2011a, largely on the strength of Egberts 1997 / 2011.

mental Luwe mythical complex – where, as a one-eyed Trickster, he would scarcely be out of place anyway. Implicitly there is an appeal here to Kammerzell's root **lw*,⁵⁵³ but according to Bomhard and Kerns a more established etymology for the Hebrew word *ari* is to see it as an application of the root **ʔar-/*ʔər*, which in Afroasiatic and in fact throughout the Nostratic% realm stands for 'animal'.⁵⁵⁴ This one example may serve to indicate that von Sicard's work may be obsolete. It can be quarried for inspiring hypotheses, but these must then subsequently be substantiated by more recent and more methodological scholarship. The following discussion must be seen in the light of these reservations.

Von Sicard explored this mythical complex in the mid-1960s, when Africans were throwing off the yoke of colonialism, American Blacks were in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement in order to reclaim the constitutional rights they were entitled to, and Afrocentrism was a little-known minority option. Africa was thought to have been totally aloof from global cultural history or, at best, to have been merely a passive receiver. This was particularly expressed in the Hamitic Thesis, which was the accepted wisdom in the first half of the twentieth century: major processes of cultural, productive and political change in African pre- and proto-history were attributed to the influx of 'Hamites' from West Asia, who were thought to be culturally and somatically distinct from standard sub-Saharan Africans.⁵⁵⁵ The earliest history of humankind was then still largely projected onto Asia rather than onto Africa, on the basis of such early palaeoanthropological finds as Java Man (*Homo erectus*) and Peking Man / Sinanthropus / *Homo erectus pekinensis*; the Southern African *Australopithecus*, roughly a contemporary of these two Asian finds, had been known for decades, but the Leakey's more recent East African finds that would extend the history of humankind back by several million years further into the past, and firmly establish Africa to be humankind's cradle, were still to make their greatest impact. Therefore, although von Sicard was a diffusionist who – in a very liberating and historically conscious manner, ahead of his time – saw Africa deeply, and for millennia, engaged in worldwide linguistic and cultural processes, he obviously remained on the safe side by stressing the likelihood that the Luwe complex diffused from South-west Asia into Africa. However, its great antiquity, ubiquity, and (as splendidly documented by von Sicard – we cannot do justice to his wealth of data in the scope of this chapter) its variation, *within Africa*, might just as well suggest the reverse direction, from Africa into Eurasia. Animal skins, the quality of being Master of Animals, a dwarf-like build, an abundance of cattle, the use of the club as a weapon – these traits show significant parallels with mythological characters from the Ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman Antiquity possessing likely African connotations: Bes, Heracles and Gilgamesh, all of them donning a *lion* skin⁵⁵⁶ and in addition displaying some of Luwe's attrib-

⁵⁵³ It would certainly be an irony of modern history if an alias of the Nordic deity that was atavistically venerated by the German Nazis, would become understandable, after all, in the light of Hebrew / Jewish language use. Whatever von Sicard's surname suggests, he was Swedish, not German.

⁵⁵⁴ Bomhard 1984: 253; Bomhard & Kerns 1994: no. 437. The Tower of Babel etymological database happened not to be available to check an alternative approach.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Seligman 1913; Sanders 1969; Zachernuk 1994.

⁵⁵⁶ Most significantly a *lion's* skin, and not a leopard's. Ancient Graeco-Roman mythical characters donning leopard skins have been conspicuous enough, though: they include the god Dionysus and the heroes Jason, Menelaus, Orpheus, Antenor – often closely associated with prominent goddesses likewise with leopard connotations, such as Cybele, Hera, Aphrodite, and Circe; also cf. ch. 3, above; and van Binsbergen 2004b in press (h).

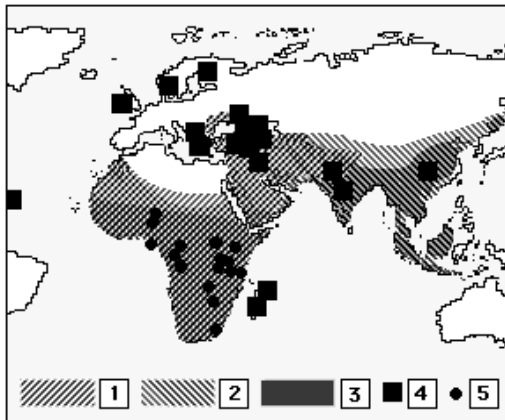
utes. The word *luwe* may have meant both the god and his most obvious manifestation or companion, the lion (Kammerzell's **lw* root) with only the species designation (i.e. **lw* as near-ubiquitous name of *Panthera leo*) clearly surviving, with much attending heraldic and literary symbolism, whereas the Luwe character himself is much more difficult to make out now in Eurasia. Let us suspend judgement and keep – at least, in this phase of our argument – both possibilities (from Africa, and into Africa) open, where Luwe's origin is concerned.

As we have seen, in order to be 'good for thinking' about the world, society, and the self, a symbol cannot very well stand on its own but is preferably juxtaposed to at least one other. Kammerzell's root **lw* is accompanied by the root **pr/*prd* (and **prg*). But where, in the Luwe cosmology, is the counterpart of the **lw* root? It stands to reason that, in the Luwe cosmology, the Leopard should be the counterpart of the Lion.

In his identification of occurrences of the Luwe complex, von Sicard allowed himself to be guided by typological considerations concerning beliefs, attributes, iconography, and not primarily by lexical criteria. As a result, in a continent with such enormous linguistic diversity, the Luwe character and his companion turn out to occur under a large number of different names, which, on the basis of *unspecified* linguistic criteria, von Sicard classified in seven groups. Group 6 is the most interesting for our purpose. It contains the names:

Gale, Ngali; Yangare; Mungala; Mungalo; Mwari, Mwale, Munyari; Njala-Gobe; Nyalic; Amala; Agar; Gara; Geli, Angeli; Eri; Ari; Gayere; Wa-Mwelu; Kyamweru; Umveli Ngqangi; Mwili; Mvidi; Mrile.

The provenances of these names (cf. Fig. 18.4) are scattered over entire sub-Saharan Africa, from Northern Nigeria to Zululand, with a certain degree of clustering on East Central Africa, specifically Tanzania.



1. Geographic distribution of the lion, c. 5000 BP
2. Geographic distribution of the leopard, c. 5000 BP
3. Geographic distribution of the leopard today
4. Attestations of the *Luwe* complex outside Africa
5. Geographic location of attestations of members of von Sicard's Group 6: *Mwari, etc.*

Fig. 18.4. The geographic distribution of the Lion and the Leopard species, and von Sicard's attestations of the *Luwe* complex outside Africa.

Von Sicard extensively presents as many as 65 attestations of the *Luwe* complex in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

Mwali (or in its Shona form Mwari; Shona is a major language spoken in Zimbabwe), the name of the High God venerated throughout Southern Africa, turns out to be part of the *Luwe* complex! Mwali may display all of *Luwe*'s traits, but more important is that Mwali frequently occurs as *Luwe*'s companion, although the nature of the mythical partnership may vary from that of lover, priest, mountain supporting the partner's holy Fire, or opponent in a magical contest.

Favouring a Eurasian origin for *Luwe*, von Sicard doubts the possibility of *Luwe* and Mwari being an original pair, some sort of Adam and Eve, on African soil.⁵⁵⁷ If *Luwe* and Mwari are found to be united in the more recent African material, to form a Lévi-Straussian pair hinging on binary opposition, this probably means – he argues – that they travelled very different individual trajectories through Old World cultural history, and accidentally ended up together.⁵⁵⁸ Von Sicard surmises that Group 6⁵⁵⁹ (epitomised by him in the root *gal* – 'young woman')⁵⁶⁰ has an origin in North-eastern Africa, in the Afroasiatic language region:

'But in that case the origins of the *gal* belief would have to be sought in northern Africa, from where it spread across the [African – WvB] continent along various route and at different times (...); already very early on it came into contact with the *Luwe* belief of the Eur-African hunters so that the two characters were subsequently to be linked in very different ways. Much later also the dynamics of the Palaeo-Mediterranean culture (which some researchers⁵⁶¹ date back as far as the middle of the second millennium BCE) will have contributed to this intertwining. How far the correspondences between *Luwe* and

⁵⁵⁷ Ironically, we even encounter the Biblical Adam as a transformation of a name in Group 7, featuring names like Zabi, Nyambe, etc.; von Sicard 1968-1969: 704. The discussion on 'African Eve' is of course a very different matter. It was only started in the late 1980s, on genetic grounds. Meanwhile our archaeological evidence on early Anatomically Modern Humans in Africa has greatly increased; cf. Shreeve 1996; Anati 1999.

⁵⁵⁸ Von Sicard 1968-1969: 703. In principle, the idea appeals to me, of two mythical characters each traversing very different individual trajectories before they find themselves ultimately united within the same constellation. Not only is it an eminent image of human marriage. It also has parallels in my own recent analyses, e.g. the Chinese primal gods Fu Xi 伏羲 and Nü Wa 女娲 have been argued to have rather different provenances before finding themselves, in the late 1st mill. BCE, as flood heroes / cosmogonic gods in the emerging Taoist context. Also, when seeking to reconstruct the global cultural history of geomantic divination (a sustained project nearing its completion), I found it increasingly useful to divide up the historical process in the separate trajectories each of the components of the geomantic system had gone through, so that their combined history emerged as the patchwork of the individual histories of geomantic symbolism, astrological concepts and symbolism, the attending mathematics, material devices for the construction of random generators, wood blocks, tablets, leather patches etc. as carriers of individual geomantic tokens, etc.

⁵⁵⁹ Von Sicard 1968-1969: 702. All the names listed for Group 6 have been attested in sub-Saharan Africa with the exception of Ari. The latter is, as we have already noted, an alias of the Northern European Odin, who also appears as Rinda, one of the names under which *Luwe* appears in Africa in von Sicard's Group 1b.

⁵⁶⁰ The etymology of English 'girl' is still undecided. The 'girl' complex as identified by von Sicard is highly significant from a point of view of comparative mythology – with its remarkable intersection of virginity, prowess, skills at weaponry, domestic skills of spinning and weaving, sexual independence. The range of virgin goddesses with such characteristics has extended from West Africa to China.

⁵⁶¹ Kammerzell's linguistic analyses, and my own reconstructions of the Palaeo-Levantine element in the earliest Egyptian state formation, suggest a much earlier date: the fourth millennium BCE at the latest.

Gale/Mwari in fact reach may finally be suggested by a board game that is connected with the cult of the dead, and that we have got to know, *inter alia*, under the name of *fuwa* (*fuva*). The same game occurs in the Western Sudanic region under the name of *ware*, *wale* and *mwali* and in Angola as *wela*.⁵⁶²

18.4. The Luwe complex as throwing light on Kammerzell's roots *lw and *pr/prd

While above we had reasons to equate Luwe with Kammerzell's ubiquitous root *lw, we may now go one step further and equate Mwali, and the latter's typological equivalents, with the equally ubiquitous *pr/*prd root. And we have learned to surmise, under the apparently modest disguise of a young maiden, the features of major goddesses, associated with the Leopard, Heaven, fate, spinning, spiders, and wielding the spindle-whorl as their main attribute.⁵⁶³

Why should Kammerzell's paired roots be so widespread and persistent? Probably because the concepts to which they refer are persuasively central to a fundamental and widespread world view. Luwe and Mwali, *lw and *pr/*prd, conjure up a cosmology in which the structure of the entire world is summed up and can be brought to life in a way that allows people subscribing to that cosmology effective access to the life force that is contained both in the non-human world around them, and in their own bodies and minds. The flow and distribution of their life force apparently was governed by the complementarity, not the subordination, between the two elements forming the *Luwe / Prd* pair. That complementarity may be expressed in gendered terms (as when Luwe and Mwali appear as lovers or spouses), but apparently the first model that has been employed to express their complementarity is in terms not of a human reproductive division of labour,⁵⁶⁴ but in terms of animal species whose positive or negative productive value may be limited, but which are 'good to think of' because they express the most striking modalities of natural power: the Lion and the Leopard.

⁵⁶² Original:

'Dann aber würden auch die Anfänge des *gal*-Glaubens im nördlichen Afrika zu suchen sein, von wo aus sich dieser auf verschiedenen Wegen und zu verschiedenen Zeiten über den [afrikanischen – WvB] Kontinent verbreitete (...), wobei er schon sehr früh mit dem *Luwe*-Glauben der eurafrikanischen Jäger in Berührung kam und die beiden Gestalten in der Folge auf sehr verschiedene Weise miteinander verbunden wurden. Viel später haben sicher auch Wellenschläge der altmediterranen Kultur, die von einigen Forschern bis in die Mitte des zweiten vorchristlichen Jahrtausends zurückdatiert wird, zu dieser Verflechtung beigetragen. Wie weit die Entsprechungen zwischen Luwe und Gale/ Mwari gehen, möge zuletzt ein Hinweis auf das mit dem Totenkult verbundene Brettspiel zeigen, das wir u. a. als *fuwa* (*fuva*) kennengelernt haben. Dasselbe Spiel kommt im Westsudan als *ware*, *wale* und *mwali* und in Angola als *wela* vor.' (Von Sicard 1968-1969: 703, my translation, with original reference to Baumann 1956: 120; Bonnefoux 1941: 179).

The literature on this board game (commonly known as *mankala*, in Africa often under the names *wari*, *nsolo*, or *baò*) is very extensive. Cf. van Binsbergen 1996a, 1996b, 1997b / 2011a, and references cited there. Glimpses of the ancient cosmology of complementarity as it is mediated through female puberty ceremonies in South Central Africa may be gleaned from Rasing 2001.

⁵⁶³ Probably the Chinese lunar mansion 女 *nu* as discussed above manifests an eastern extension of this complex, as does the famous Chinese story of the cow-herd (Altair) and the spinning maid (Vega); Williams 1974: 373f.

⁵⁶⁴ Leopard and Lion have been known to produce offspring together under captive conditions (Wendt 1974), but such a rare occurrence could hardly have informed the ancient cosmology which I have given the name of these two species.

Kammerzell's linguistic analysis demonstrates that the joint distribution of **lw* and **pr/*prd* throughout Afroasiatic and Indo-European goes back to the Neolithic. The Neolithic archaeological evidence we have for Çatal Hüyük⁵⁶⁵ clearly shows the leopards in place, but it is an anthropomorphous deity, not a lion, that leans upon the two leopards.



The head of the goddess and of at least one leopard is a recent reconstruction

Fig. 18.5. Representation of a mother goddess giving birth while leaning on two leopards, Çatal Hüyük, Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, Anatolia, Turkey

Even so we are led to conclude that already at this Early Neolithic stage, the complementarity of the Lion-and-Leopard Cosmology is present in essentially the same form in which we encounter it several millennia later, *e.g.* in the temple frieze at the Neolithic site of Tell el Uqair, Mesopotamia.⁵⁶⁶ The mother goddess's leaning upon the two leopards is *not as a sign of identification but one of superiority, as if she represents the lion term in our equation, and her leaning on the leopards is a gesture of elation.* The passive, static leopards support (in a subservient stance that from the subsequent Bronze Age onwards, was seldom to be employed for the expression of maleness) the *active woman giving birth*, much as the celestial pole supports the revolving heavens. The divine woman's leaning appears to be a gesture of superiority comparable to Ancient Egyptian Tut-^canḥ-Amun's triumphantly sitting on a seat with a Leopard-skin pattern, standing on a leopard, and sleeping in a bed with Leopard-

⁵⁶⁵ 8,000 BP; Anatolian Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, Turkey – meanwhile much older Neolithic finds from the same region have eclipsed Çatal Hüyük as a type site, and considerable doubt has been called on the scientific integrity of Mellaart as its main excavator.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Böhl 1948: 14, and numerous depictions all over the Internet.

shaped supports. It amounts to an act of domestication. Almost certainly there is a close parallel between the Egyptian Sem priest annually officiating before the central goddess Isis (mother of the major god of royalty Horus), and the Anatolian leopards supporting the mother goddess in the act of giving birth. *Significantly, and as a source of puzzlement to Egyptologists,*⁵⁶⁷ *most of many Lion-associated divinities in Ancient Egypt were female (for example Matit, Mehit, Mentit, Pakhet, Sakhmet, Menet, and especially Tefnut),*⁵⁶⁸ *which is in complete agreement with the point I am making here.* Meanwhile we have found another confirmation of extensive symbolic continuity in time (across four millennia) and place, and of the unmistakable parallels between Ancient Egypt and Ancient Anatolia. These parallels have hitherto largely been ignored, for several reasons: in order to maintain the disciplinary and institutional boundaries between Egyptology and Hittitology; but also because the Palaeo-Levantine language element in both has not been exhaustively explored.⁵⁶⁹

So already in Early Neolithic Anatolia we find Leopard and Lion united in a powerful cosmology saturated with meaning. Even so von Sicard may still be right in his claim that – prior to the Neolithic – Lion and Leopard traversed different trajectories before being unified into the LéviStraussian binary opposition in which this pair of animal species has been ubiquitously attested. Considering the great promise of von Sicard's mythical explorations (however defective these may appear today from a methodological and linguistic point of view), it would be of considerable importance to trace the earliest history of the cosmology of the Lion and the Leopard in space and in time. Archaeological, iconographic and documentary sources largely fail here, but given the intimate link between von Sicard's Luwe mythology and Kammerzell's paired roots **lw* and **pr/*prd*, a linguistic approach might yet allow us a glimpse into the remotest past of the system.

18.5. An exploration of the linguistic antecedents of *lw and *pr/*prd in the Bantu realm

I do not share Kammerzell's reluctance to probe into the antecedents of the roots **pr/*prd* and **lw* before they appear throughout the Afroasiatic and Indo-European languages. If, as he demonstrates, the two roots cannot be considered borrowings from either of these language families to the other, only a limited number of possible explanations can be advanced for the pattern he so cogently demonstrates.

The two roots could be local innovations within the Afroasiatic and Indo-European families, produced jointly during the Neolithic. This is unlikely, because in that era without instantaneous mass-communication technology (such as the newspapers, television and the Internet of today), one could not account for such a rapid spread of a linguistic innovation over such a very large area, that – despite the wealth of historical linguistic material available for these two families – the direction of spread can no longer be detected.

Another and more attractive possibility is that the two roots belong to an ancient linguistic complex from which both language families emerged: the Nostratic% super-family. Considering that

⁵⁶⁷ Bonnet 1971: 427.

⁵⁶⁸ Tefnut's central myth moreover gives her southern, sub-Saharan African connotations (Bonnet 1971: 770), as if to remind us that the question as to the geographic origins of Luwe can not yet be decided.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. Ray 1992; Kammerzell 1994; van Binsbergen, in press (h).

Bomhard did not even list them in his comparison of Proto-Afroasiatic and Proto-Indo-European, we would not expect them to be included in the very extensive list of nearly two thousand Nostratic% roots, that were claimed and argued by Bomhard and Kerns. Our earlier inspection of Nostratic% animal names did not yield anything relevant, beyond stressing the unique nature of the **pr/*prd* and **lw* pair. But perhaps it is not necessarily animal names we are after. Investigating the names of animals in a Pre-Neolithic situation (*i.e.* where hunting and gathering dominated as modes of production), we are reminded that the names of wild animals are surrounded by magical notions and taboos, and may euphemistically circumscribe external characteristics instead of directly naming taxonomic categories. Along these lines the Proto-Nostratic vocabulary does have a few promises for us in store:

- ‘hide, skin, to hide’ (= conceal), **p[h]al-/*p[h]əl-*,⁵⁷⁰ a possible candidate as prototype for Kammerzell’s root **pr/*prd* especially considering the fact that the leopard is mainly coveted and represented for its pelt, and is moreover noted for its stealth
- ‘to scatter’, **p[h]ar-/*p[h]ər-*,⁵⁷¹ also a possible candidate as prototype for Kammerzell’s root **pr/*prd* especially considering the fact that the leopard is universally seen as spotted or variegated – a condition that may easily be conceived as resulting from scattering pigment, mud, blood, *etc.*
- ‘to shine’, **law-/*lew-*,⁵⁷² a possible candidate as prototype for Kammerzell’s **lw* root, designating the lion with its elaborate diurnal and solar symbolic connotations – with especially an even, not variegated nor speckled, skin.

So there are reasons to consider Kammerzell’s roots as belonging to a North African / Eurasian complex, which, if found in sub-Saharan Africa at all (as von Sicard’s analysis suggests it is), was probably introduced there from the Nostratic% realm (as von Sicard suggests it was, by postulating an origin for Luwe outside Africa).⁵⁷³ On the other hand, the Cosmology Of The Lion And The Leopard is widely distributed and deeply integrated in African societies. Current African habitats of the lion and leopard largely coincide with the region where Nigercongo is being spoken today. We cannot conclude our argument before investigating the possibility of a sub-Saharan African origin for Kammerzell’s roots. And what is more: since Anatomically Modern Humans originated in Africa (Anati 1999; Shreeve 1996), and before c. 80 ka BP never left that continent, the semantic and lexical traits captured by Kammerzell’s roots may have belonged to a Pre-Nostratic%, Palaeo-African language almost certainly originating in Africa, in the Middle Palaeolithic.

But let us concentrate on contemporary African languages. The Nigercongo language family extends immediately south of the Afroasiatic-speaking belt, although the latter’s interface with Nigercongo is interspersed with large Nilosaharan-speaking regions of the Niger valley, Chad, Sudan,

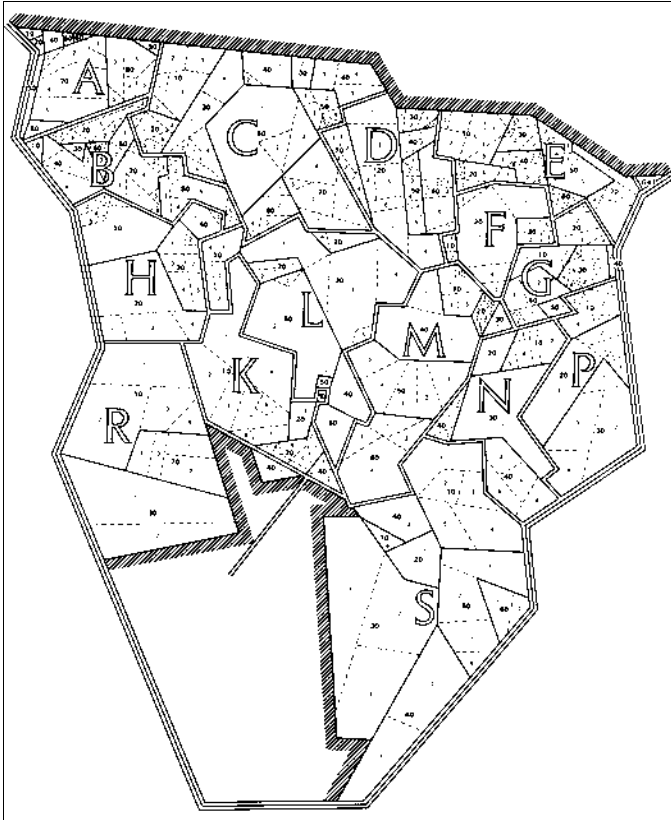
⁵⁷⁰ Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 889, no. 60.

⁵⁷¹ Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 907, no. 46. Similar roots, conceivably related and also capable of producing the ‘variegated’ effect, mean ‘to shake’: **p[h]il-/*p[h]el-*, **p[h]ir-/*p[h]er-*; Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 909, nos. 64, 68.

⁵⁷² Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 910, no. 580.

⁵⁷³ In this connection we should heed the claim, by Kaiser & Shevoroshkin 1988, to the effect that Nigercongo (in their terminology Niger-Kordofan) and Nilosaharan), together with the usual components of Nostratic (%?) *i.e.* most of the languages spoken in Eurasia in a contiguous area from Bretagne (France) to the Bering Strait and beyond (Chukchee-Kamchatkan – on whose mythology, *cf.* Bogoras 1913), and Eskimo-Aleut), constitute what they call Super-Nostratic(%?).

and Kenya. Nigercongo is the obvious place to look for older evidence of Kammerzell's roots. The most widely spread and best studied cluster within this family is that of the Bantu languages, reaching all the way from the Sudanic savannah to the Eastern Cape, South Africa. An examination of Bantu lexical patterns might be a profitable approach to identifying the earlier history of our roots.



Source:<http://www.cbold.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/Maps/Maps.html>, with thanks

Fig. 18.6. Principal provinces into which linguistic specialists have parcelled up the predominantly Bantu-speaking region of sub-Saharan Africa

At first sight our exploration appears to be doomed. The high degree of homogeneity of the Bantu linguistic family (which also reveals it as relatively young) has allowed linguists, foremost Malcolm Guthrie, to reconstruct *Common Bantu* and *Proto-Bantu* with a certain (albeit far from uncontested) degree of plausibility. This has yielded the roots listed in Table 18.1.

	word							
	<i>cimba</i> (1)	<i>cimba</i> (2)	<i>cUbi/cUbi</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>goyi</i>	<i>gUe</i>	<i>cUmpa</i>	<i>koci</i>
Guthrie number	357	355	399	834	862	866	-	1102
region	D: 4; NW, East	SW/NE	D:1; East, NE	D:4; N. & C. West., N. & C. East or North., Cent.	D: 2; North	D: 3; S.W, N. & S. East. or South., NE		D: 1; West
species designated by this word	lion (= <i>Panthera leo</i>)	leopard (= <i>Panthera pardus</i>)	leopard	leopard	leopard	leopard	leopard, lion	lion

The capital letters refer to the main provinces of the Bantu-speaking region, as in Fig. 18.6

Table 18.1. The words for Lion and Leopard in contemporary Common Bantu.⁵⁷⁴

Meanwhile other authors⁵⁷⁵ have added to this common repertoire the words *gida* (lion; gorilla), *podogoma* (lion), *kodi* (lion), *kopi* (leopard, lion, any feline), *koki* (lion), *tamboi* (lion), and *tade* (lion), but these do not resemble our two roots any closer, perhaps with the exception of *podogoma* (a word found in Tanzania and northern Mozambique, and listed to mean ‘snorer’), where the consonantal structure of **prd* might be suspected to shimmer through. Also Proto-Bantu fails to bring out our two roots in any recognisable form, as Table 18.2 demonstrates. We note in passing a trait that is familiar among local systems of natural classification all over the world: the semantic application of the names of animal species often ignores such distinctions as North Atlantic scientific taxonomy since Linnaeus would consider this as self-evident. Thus, in Common Bantu, *cimba* or *cUmba* may be used to designate a lion (*Panthera leo*), but also a Leopard (*Panthera pardus*); *cimba* is even in use for the wild cat (*Felis sylvestris*).⁵⁷⁶ These three species are very different in size, colouring, fur patterning, behaviour, food habits, and relationship with humankind. Even animals from outside the feline family (the hyena, *i.e.* a canine), and even outside the mammal order (the vulture, a bird) may be denoted by the word *-cubi*, which however is also widely used for the cheetah.

author	lion	leopard	other felines
Guthrie 1967-1971 ⁵⁷⁷	-*cimba -*kOci	-*gO; -*cobe, cobi; -*gOji; -*go; -*gOê	-*tungO = civet cat -*cimba = wild cat
Meeussen ⁵⁷⁸	-*cimba -*kodi -*koki	-*cubi -*goi	-*cimba = wild cat -*cubi = cheetah, hyena(!), vulture (!) -*paka = wild cat -*tungo = civet cat

Table 18.2. Lion, Leopard and other felines in Proto-Bantu.

⁵⁷⁴ Source: http://www.cbold.dcl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/CommonBantu.Guthrie1967a/FileMaker/. Retrieved March 2003. Here and below lack of linguistic competence has forced me to omit all reference to tones.

⁵⁷⁵ Notably A. Coupeze, Y. Bastin and E. Mumba of the Musée Royal de l’Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium, at: http://www.cbold.dcl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/BLR2.Tervuren1998/FileMaker/. Retrieved March 2003.

⁵⁷⁶ Taxonomic names after Whitfield 1984.

⁵⁷⁷ http://www.cbold.dcl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Proto-Bantu.Guthrie1967b/MSWord5/. Retrieved March 2003.

⁵⁷⁸ http://www.cbold.dcl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Proto-Bantu.Meeussen1967/MSWord5/. Retrieved March 2003.

We conclude that our roots **pr/*prd* and **lw* do not constitute an integral part of Bantu, and that it is unlikely that they derive from the wider phylum of Nigercongo, where we have already encountered *inchwe*, *ngbe*, etc. as very widespread designations for the leopard, well in line with Proto-Bantu. It is certainly not from Nigercongo that Kammerzell's roots have entered and conquered Afroasiatic, Indo-European, and in fact the entire Nostratic realm. Nor could we expect that they did considering the relative youth of the Bantu linguistic family.

But so far we have been arguing from the underlying general basic lexical structure of Bantu. Is it not possible that throughout the hundreds of languages belonging to the Bantu family, lexical traces of our two roots may be found as alien intrusions or as remnants of an older substratum, which do not belong to Proto-Bantu and have not achieved systematic widespread incorporation into the Bantu lexicon?

With this question in mind I have scrutinised the lexicons of over two hundred Bantu languages, identifying the words for Lion and Leopard and if possible for other felines there, and trying to ascertain if these words could be considered manifestations of the roots **pr/*prd* and **lw*. Engaged in a mere exploratory digression, as a non-specialist in Bantu linguistics, I did not draw up explicit correspondence tables between our two roots and such altered forms under which they might manifest themselves in specific Bantu languages. Instead my approach has been largely intuitive, and as such extremely provisional; the entire analysis will have to be repeated under much stricter conditions and with more specialised methods and expertise. Methodologically, my rule of thumb is to consider a word a *possible* – and certainly no more than that – manifestation of Kammerzell's two roots, if

- it semantically refers to a feline but without clearly corresponding with the Common Bantu and Proto-Bantu forms listed in the above tables;
- it resembled the proper names featuring in von Sicard's mythical analysis;
- its consonantal structure is reminiscent of our roots:
 - l(r, d, ...)+u/w for **lw*;
 - p(mp, mb, m, n, ny, ng, ...)+r(l, d, ...) [+ d(l, r, ...)] for **pr/*prd*.

I realise that tonal and vocal structures should also have been taken into account, and that my identification rules remain far too implicit, unsystematic and unsupported by the etymological possibilities and impossibilities of Bantu historical linguistics to yield anything coming near to definitive and convincing results.

With all these reservations, the results of this complex and time-consuming exercise are presented in Table 18.3. Although I tried to refrain from wishful thinking, the number of possible manifestations of the **pr/*prd* root is surprisingly high. Considering that I worked with a sample (the recognised number of Bantu languages is several times larger than represented in my corpus), the number of *possible* manifestations might even be higher if the entire population (*i.e.* 'all different' Bantu languages) had been taken into account – with all the notorious taxonomical and political problems of demarcation that that would have entailed. The number of possible hits for **lw* is much smaller, and may depend more on similarity with the mythical names cited by von Sicard, than on real linguistic criteria. We notice again a lack of taxonomic precision which has long been recognised as a feature of 'undomesticated thought' as distinct from Modern, logocentric, scientific thought: words more frequently denoting the Leopard yet are also in use for the Lion, and the words for smaller felines echo those for larger felines. Thus the same overall lexical repertoire is used to desig-

nate the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), various species of civet cat (*Viverridae*), and the serval (*Leptailurus / Felis serval*). Even a what Modern scientists would consider a totally different taxonomic family – the cane rats (*Thryonomyidae*, large rodents) may be denoted by the same lexical material used for leopard and lion.

The Bantu lexical elements possibly reminiscent of Kammerzell's **pr/*prd* root occur throughout the southern half of the African continent, over expanses of thousands of kilometres. In Fig. 18.6 I mapped the distribution of the material presented in Table 18.3.



Fig. 18.5. Two Leopards flanking the tree of life in an Etruscan tomb painting

	<i>possible manifestations of the root:</i>	
	<i>*pr/*prd</i>	<i>*lw</i>
meaning 'Lion'	<i>indare</i> (Kilegi°); <i>ngare</i> (Kiseri°, Mkuu°); <i>inyaruli</i> (Masaba); <i>inyalupala</i> (Wanji°, Bena°); <i>thiburi</i> , 'honorific title for lion' (Venda)	<i>ikul ongana</i> (Ngoli = N.W. Bantu); <i>se-lau</i> , 'like a lion' (Tswana); <i>tshiluvhelo</i> , 'chief's lion cloth' (Venda); <i>isilwane</i> (Ndebele)
meaning 'Leopard'	<i>suwi endala</i> (Kerebe°); <i>ngari</i> (Kikuyu°); <i>waru</i> (Kibosho°); <i>oluwaru</i> (Kibosho.unn°); <i>indara</i> (Kilegi°); <i>irumu</i> (Kimochi.unn°); <i>ahavara</i> (Makhua); <i>nrupici</i> (mi-), 'male leopard' (Makhua); <i>nkari</i> (Merutig°); <i>nyalugwe</i> (Chewa); <i>ngulamu</i> (Kiseri°, Kiseri.unn°); <i>ngulam</i> (Mkuu°); <i>inkampu</i> (Namwanga°); <i>kambuku</i> (Chewa); <i>(i)nkampu</i> (Wanda°); <i>kampulu</i> (Nkoya); ⁵⁷⁹ <i>enzumula</i> (Zinza°); <i>nyamanru</i> (Siha°); <i>nyamandru</i> (Siha.unn°); <i>imbwili</i> (Bemba); <i>tambola</i> (Bobangi); <i>ibole</i> (Nyakyusa°); <i>-bado</i> , 'spot, e.g. of leopard' (Sukuma); ⁵⁸⁰ <i>mbada</i> (Shona); <i>empala</i> (Lusoga°)	<i>zolongoi, loowa</i> (Bobangi); <i>rungu</i> (Vunjo°)

⁵⁷⁹ Source: the author. For all other languages, see Legend to this table.

⁵⁸⁰ Sukuma was included in the Tanzania Language Survey, but in the data presented there no obvious manifestations of the **pr/*prd* and **lw* roots were found; the information on *-bado* derives from Mann, http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Sukuma.Mann1966/MSWords5/. Retrieved March 2003.

meaning any other feline or similar mammal	'(wild) cat'	<i>ulembe</i> (Malila°); <i>kembhore?</i> (Ikizu°); <i>kembulu</i> (Shashi°); <i>kimbulu</i> , <i>kimbulu</i> (Sukuma°); <i>ci-ivulu</i> , 'spotted wild cat' (Yao); ⁵⁸¹ <i>imaro</i> (Kinga°); <i>mwambala</i> (Bakweri); <i>ibarananda</i> (Mkuu°); <i>iraami</i> (Siha°); <i>ukharamula</i> , 'scratch, esp. Wild cat family' (Makhua); <i>ndeke</i> (Nyaturuwil°); <i>ebala</i> (Sonjo°)	
	'cheetah'	<i>mpala</i> (Gwere°, Lusoga°); <i>rigendamweri</i> (Ikizu°); <i>ivalavala</i> (Kimbu°); <i>dibalabiila</i> (Tshiluba); <i>ngare</i> (Machame°); <i>narocho</i> (Merutig°); <i>nyalubwe</i> (Mwera°); <i>iruthi</i> (Tharaka°)	<i>inuluva</i> , <i>ilituluva</i> (Hehe°); <i>ilituluva</i> (Bena°); <i>mlula</i> (Gweno°); <i>rungwi</i> (ya ngoe) (Vunjo°)
	'civet cat'	<i>-mbala</i> (Ipunu, Sangu); <i>kemboro</i> (Ikizu°); <i>umbulu</i> [ombo:lo] (Wungu°); <i>chivulu</i> (Yao°); <i>ulembe</i> (Nyihā°); <i>dzambarananga</i> (Venda)	<i>rongi</i> (Nyaturuwil°)
	'serval'	<i>mbale</i> (Mambwe)	
	'cane-rat'	<i>elisiyabale</i> (Bukusu, Masaba)	

Between parentheses: names of Bantu languages for which positive attestations were made. In total, I have analysed the lexicons of 89 languages from all over the Bantu-speaking region, and in addition the languages included in the Tanzania Language Survey (TLS), which again comprises 122 Bantu languages.⁵⁸² The TLS languages are marked thus: °. The orthographic rendering of the words is unsatisfactory: the more than 200 languages in the corpus have been described, usually by professional linguists, following a great variety of orthographic conventions for phonemes and tones, which was impossible to unify in the present scheme.

Table 18.3. Possible manifestations of the roots **pr/*prd* and **lw* in a corpus comprising more than 200 languages of the Bantu family

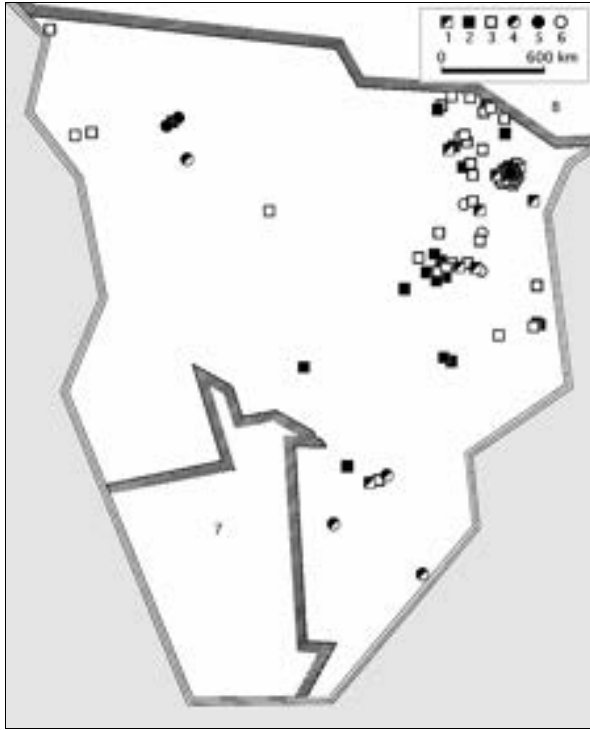
Caution is needed here: the excessive clustering in the north-east Bantu region inevitably reflects the fact that the Tanzania Language Survey alone, with its consistent recording of the same fairly extensive lexical material for more than a hundred languages, contributed more languages to our corpus than the rest of the entire Bantu-speaking region.

However, we are reminded that also in von Sicard's mythical data a clustering on Tanzania occurred. Yet Tanzania can hardly be said to be the part of Bantu-speaking Africa best covered by mythographers and students of religion. In other words, although the Tanzanian linguistic clustering is partly an artefact of the composition of our corpus, it probably also reflects a genuine clustering in reality – always assuming that my identification rule of thumb for the identification of possible manifestations of the **pr/*prd* and **lw* roots, although admittedly defective, is not totally invalid. Outside Tanzania, the distribution of possible manifestations of the **pr/*prd* root is sparse but fairly constant, with the exception of the central west of the Bantu region (Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Angola), where no cases were found. The south-west corner of the African continent is historically (up to the nineteenth century CE) the area where not Nigercongo but Khoisan was spoken, so no Bantu occurrences were listed here.

The above analysis, however lacking in terms of specialist linguistic methods, seems partially to confirm our initial impression based on cultural historical analysis: the root **pr/*prd* has a firm footing in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the north-eastern part of Bantu-speaking Africa. For the **lw* root the outcome is almost negative, which confirms von Sicard's idea of a northern origin of the Luwe / Lion-associated elements, as distinct from the Mwali / Leopard-associated elements.

⁵⁸¹ Yao was included in the Tanzania Survey of Languages, but it is also available in a lexicon by Ngunga: http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Yao.Ngungazoo1/FileMaker/. Retrieved March 2003.

⁵⁸² I mainly used the splendid collection of on-line Bantu dictionaries at: http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr:6080/CBOLD_Lexicons/. Retrieved March 2003. The Tanzania Language Survey is located at: <http://www.cbold.ddl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr:6080/Docs/TLS.html>. Retrieved March 2003.



1-6. Possible contemporary manifestation, in the Bantu-speaking region, of the root

1. *pr/*prd with the meaning of 'Lion'
2. *pr/*prd, with the meaning of 'Leopard'
3. *pr/*prd, with the meaning of 'any other feline' (see table 3 for details)
4. *lw, with the meaning of 'Lion'
5. *lw, with the meaning of 'Leopard'
6. *lw, with the meaning of 'any other feline' (see table 3 for details)

7. Khoisan speaking region (as in the eighteenth century CE)

8. The linguistic belt North of the contemporary Bantu-speaking region. Here in the west the Nigercongo super-family is continued to which also Bantu belongs. In the east, Nilosaharan is spoken. The Afroasiatic-speaking region forms a belt north of the Nigercongo region, interspersed with large Nilosaharan-speaking regions of the Niger valley, Chad, Sudan, and Kenya.

Geographic location of language areas according to Guthrie numbers as on a map provided by T. Schadeberg.⁵⁸³

Fig. 18.6. The geographic distribution of possible manifestations of the roots *pr/*prd and *lw in a corpus comprising more than 200 languages of the Bantu family.

The linguistic record thus partly matches the mythico-religious record analysed by von Sicard. But we must realise that this is not a case of totally independent corroboration. Von Sicard also used lexical material and imputed etymological relationships between mythological and divine names (without substantiating these by explicit correspondence tables and an underlying theory of phonetic and morphological change) in order to construct his

⁵⁸³ At: <http://www.cbold.dcl.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr:16080/Maps/AssortedMaps/CompBantu65.gif>. Retrieved March 2003; cf. Fig. 18.6.

various categories for the nomenclature of the Luwe figure and his companion, while my identification of possible attestations of Kammerzell's roots was inspired by the mythico-religious proper names featuring in von Sicard's study.

Still assuming that the entire approach has some validity, how can we explain the pattern that is emerging from Table 18.3 and Fig. 18.6? Kammerzell's roots clearly do not belong to Proto-Bantu, so we must take them to be alien elements in the Bantu region: either introduced from elsewhere, or the remnants of an old Pre-Bantu (Palaeo-African?) substratum locally.

Let us first consider the possibility of introduction from elsewhere. The north-eastern Bantu region borders on the Afroasiatic-speaking region and, considering the ubiquitous distribution of our roots in the latter, they might derive from Afroasiatic or from Nostratic% in general. The closeness of the Indian Ocean in the north-eastern Bantu region, and the attested influx of immigrants from the Persian Gulf in Eastern and Southern Africa, allows moreover for the possibility of lexical material being introduced from other Afroasiatic, Indo-European and general Nostratic (for example Elamo-Dravidian, Sumerian) lexical material. We may even think of Austronesian lexical material voyaging to Africa (along with xylophones and other musical instruments, cowries, *Conus* shell ornaments, woodcarving techniques, selected myths, cosmologies, forms of kingship, and – I submit – important elements towards the Bantu lexicon and semantic)⁵⁸⁴ from Indonesia via Ceylon and Madagascar. The striking fact that the essential, eponymical Bantu root *-ntu*, 'human' has semantically and phonetically a match in Proto-Austronesian *taw*⁵⁸⁵ suggests that here lies an analytical potential that we should certainly not overlook. What might however mitigate our enthusiasm on this point is that, contrary to the leopard, the lion did not occur in South East Asia or anywhere else in Asia to the east of Central India during the last seven millennia (Fig. 18.4).

However, a stronger case could be built for an explanation in terms of an ancient substratum underlying the relatively recent (first few millennia BCE?) introduction of Bantu in East Africa. Here, as my analysis bears out, the **pr/*prd* root is rather popular as a designation for the lesser felines – as if this root does indeed represent an older substratum of lexical material, continued to be cherished in the specialist and taboo-ridden language of hunters and doctors (the two professions most interested in lesser felines), and was not allowed to disappear completely even though the intrusion of the general Bantu lexicon (probably from the northwest) introduced new, soon common, words for the larger felines. The clustering of possible manifestations of our two roots in Tanzania may be related to the fact that here pockets have survived of Khoisan-related click languages (Hadza and Sandawe), which of course, not being Bantu languages, did not contribute to our data in Table 18.3 and Fig. 18.6 above. Linguists are no longer prepared to wholeheartedly classify these two languages as Khoisan;⁵⁸⁶ yet there are striking similarities between the Tanzanian and certain Southern African Khoisan speaking groups both in phonetics and in hunter-gatherer modes of production. There is a general consensus that Khoisan, the language of the earliest African pastoralists leaving their traces in rock arts from the Sahara to Southern Africa, have constituted an earlier, largely superseded, linguistic, cultural and demographic / genetic presence in much of what is today Bantu-speaking Africa. The genetic composition of Bantu-speaking populations of Southern Africa is known to derive

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Adelaar 1994. The Austronesian family comprises many languages in South-East Asia and Oceania.

⁵⁸⁶ Blench 1993: 134f.

much from Khoisan speakers (not only pastoralists but also hunter-gatherers) who (whatever their geographic origin) have been known to live in this region for millennia; and the same applies to their languages. The Nkoya of Zambia, a hunting people loosely organised in rather ephemeral bilateral local groups without a strong or consistent lineage element, also have a certain cultural affinity with the Khoisan living not too far south of them just across the confluence of... the Zambezi (= Lyambāy, 'Lion') and Chobe (= 'Leopard') rivers:⁵⁸⁷ For other South Central and Southern African cultural groups the Khoisan affinity is far less marked. Yet several languages from this part of Africa (Nkoya, Chewa, Shona, Tswana, Ndebele, Venda) have yielded several positive scores in Table 3. This may be due to a Khoisan element in these languages, and reinforces the suggestion contained in the Khoisan-related pocket in Tanzania.

As Fig. 18.7 demonstrates, the cosmology of the lion and the leopard is strangely projected onto the landscape in one of the finest parts of South Central Africa, where the Lyambay (i.e. Zambezi, 'lion') and Chobe ('leopard') river join a few dozen kms upstream from Victoria Falls; interestingly, further upstream the Chobe river is known as Linyati ('buffalo'), which reminds us of the bovine extension or alternative of the dual Lion-Leopard cosmology



From: a PowerPoint presentation on leopard-skin symbolism, cf. van Binsbergen 2004b, in press (h); = Lyambay = 'lion'; Chobe = 'leopard'

Fig. 18.7. The Cosmology of the Lion and the Leopard at work in the landscape of the confluence of the Zambezi and Chobe rivers, Southern Africa

In Nama, one of the first Khoisan languages to be studied linguistically (Rust 1969 / 1889) the word for 'leopard' is *[garub]*, 'the variegated one', in reference to its fur pattern. The name

⁵⁸⁷ It is most significant that the mightiest system of rivers in South Central Africa, the Zambezi river joined by the Chobe only a few score kilometres before the magnificent Musi-a-Tunya ('Thundering Smoke', i.e. Victoria) Falls, should have been named indigenously after the pair of the Lion and the Leopard with, of course, the leopard being assigned to the junior element in this system. Such toponymy in itself confirms the validity of my general symbolic analysis of the ancient Cosmology Of The Lion And The Leopard. However, our euphoria on this point is dampened by the fact that more common name of the major Zambezi tributary at the point is Linyanti (i.e. Buffalo River) rather than Chobe.

is merely a specific application of the adjective *|garu*, ‘variegated’, for example *|garu gūs*, ‘herd of variegated cattle’.⁵⁸⁸ Another Nama name for the leopard is *ǀhûiseb*, ‘distributor of food’, for it tends to leave part of its kill for others (including humans) to eat. In a manner found among hunters all over the world, in this case also the animal species is not directly mentioned by a unique proper name (which tends to be taboo, in order not to jeopardise hunting success), but is alluded to by reference to the species’s material or behavioural characteristics. Nama nomenclature for the leopard has the ring of a hunting culture, and brings out a central theme in the genesis of humankind which we will discuss shortly: the latter’s early dependence on the great predators.

We should be careful lest we revert to the same a-historical essentialism chided repeatedly (Wilmsen 1983, 1989) with regard to ‘Bushmen’ studies: contemporary Khoisan speakers are actors in a modern context, and neither cultural nor linguistic remnants from the Upper Palaeolithic. The **pr/ *prd* root, with its ramifications all over the huge Nostratic% realm and its insistent apparent manifestations in Bantu languages, does not necessarily derive directly from Khoisan, although the Neolithic herdsman of the fertile Sahara may well have spoken languages close to Khoisan. However, the identity of the Khoisan and the Nostratic% semantics involved in the naming of the leopard is striking: throughout, the leopard appears as ‘the spotted one’ or as ‘the skin animal’. Here also lies the link with Common Bantu and Proto-Bantu. After all, it is immaterial whether my rule of thumb for the identification of lexical forms reminiscent of the **pr/*prd* root in Bantu is permissible by the norms of state-of-the-art linguistics; of course it is not. The important thing is that, while the lexical forms in Tables 18.2 and 18.3 differ greatly from the Nostratic% and Khoisan ones, and from each other, most still have the same underlying semantics in terms of ‘the spotted one’ or ‘the skin animal’ (Table 18.4).

18.7. Conclusion

Conceptually, we are attesting a semantic complex extending from the Cape of Good Hope to the North Cape and the Bering Strait and from there again to Greenland, even though, given the enormous linguistic variety over that huge stretch of land covering most of the Old World, we could never hope, of course, to reduce all the attending lexical forms to one common root and argue their derivations in detail.

Guthrie ⁵⁸⁹			Meeuwesen ⁵⁹⁰	
word	Guthrie number	semantics	word	semantics
-cob-	398	to skin	-cubi	hyena (<i>Hyaenidae</i>), leopard (<i>Panthera pardus</i>), tiger cat (<i>Leopardus tigrinus</i>)
-gobO-	873	skin, garment	-koba	skin, piece of skin
-bad-	18	spot, speckle		
-bada-	18	to speckle	-bada	spot, speck

⁵⁸⁸ Not having noticed that the juxtaposition between Lion and Leopard is the backbone of the mythical system he described under the name of Luwe, von Sicard lists Gorob (unmistakably the Khoisan name for leopard) as a variant of Luwe.

⁵⁸⁹ http://www.cbold.dclsh-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Proto-Bantu.Guthrie1967b/MSWords/. Retrieved March 2003.

⁵⁹⁰ http://www.cbold.dclsh-lyon.cnrs.fr/CBOLD_Lexicons/Proto-Bantu.Meeussen1967/MSWords/. Retrieved March 2003.

Note that the *-bad-*, *-bada-* form rather closely approaches, both semantically and phonetically, the **pr/*prd* form in Afroasiatic, since $b \approx p$ and $d \approx r, rd$

Table 18.4. The semantics underlying most of the Leopard's names in Proto-Bantu and Common Bantu

While it has been Kammerzell's merit to spot the unique near-ubiquity of his two roots and thus inspire the present analysis, we have considerably advanced upon his semantic analysis. In his approach, **prd* remains a name that is in itself semantically void and from which, in its turn, other semantic elements are merely derived: such associated meanings as 'four-animal', 'ferocious animal', 'tearing apart' all refer, secondarily, to specific characteristics of an animal already supposed to be named **prd* in the first place. Particularly his remarkable point about the 'four' connotations of the Leopard turns out to be a rather secondary feature, limited to the Ancient Near East / Egypt, and rendered less significant by the immense spatial and temporal distribution of the **pr/*prd* root beyond that region and period, throughout the Nostratic% realm. Both the ramification of this root throughout the Eurasian realm with the meaning '*spotted and / or skin*' well supported by Proto-Nostratic% and the Khoisan evidence, suggest that Kammerzell's emphasis on the Leopard as four animal concerns a relatively local, ephemeral trait in the Ancient Near East, that did not permanently eclipse the original, Proto-Nostratic% or even older, semantics.

Whereas we have thus attempted to thresh out some of the historical problems attending the **prd* root, it is impossible to claim an African ancestry for the **lw* root on the basis of our linguistic analysis in this chapter. The Bantu evidence is negative. The Nama word for 'lion' is *xami*, which probably means 'the hunter' (cf. *xama*, 'luck when hunting'; *xamaren*, 'quarry, prey'), but this does not match at all with the **lw* root phonetically, yet tallies semantically with Luwe as, in the first place, a hunting god. We would do well to retain von Sicard's idea that the two components of the Luwe/Mwali pair reached their joint position in African mythology and religion at the end of very different paths, only a few millennia ago.

Appendix 18.A: Leopard and horse

Assuming (on methodological and empirical grounds of cultural comparison which I have presented at length elsewhere⁵⁹¹ but which are outside our present scope) that there is in fact an Old-World⁵⁹² system of Leopard symbolism extending from Africa, Ancient Egypt, and European Antiquity right into classical Chinese culture, interesting lexical perspectives open up in the context of the myths surrounding the Chinese culture hero 伏羲 Fu Hsi / Fu Xi in modern *pinyin* transliteration. In a famous late Sung dynasty (mid-thirteenth century CE) Fu Xi is depicted wearing a Leopard skin around his knees, and an antelope skin around his shoulders.⁵⁹³ Allegedly, he had the 八卦 *pa kuā* (the eight trigrams, traditionally consid-

⁵⁹¹ Cf. van Binsbergen, in press (h), chapter 8.

⁵⁹² The system is not even limited to the Old World, as the name of the Central American leopard / jaguar / panther god, Balam, indicates (Love 1992; Brinton 1882: an unmistakable specimen of our *prd* root. That Balaam is also the name of *Old Testament* oracles is another part of our puzzle, still to be solved (*Numbers* 22-24).

⁵⁹³ Cf. Christie 1968: 39 (where Sung is antedated by 800 years!); Great National Treasures of China, *n.d.* The portrait is a conventional item in the present-day Taoist iconographic repertoire; a greatly enlarged, crude re-

ered the first writing signs, and the basis of 易經 *yì jīng* (*I Ching*) correlative system of cosmological symbolism) revealed to him by an animal that emerged from the Yellow River, displaying the designs on its back. According to one tradition this animal, commonly considered a 'dragon' or a 'dragon-horse', was specifically a 'horse'.⁵⁹⁴ In a picture⁵⁹⁵ from the Tang dynasty (late first millennium CE) a horse-hoofed Fu Xi is depicted confronting a horse-hoofed dragon! All this might associate Fu Xi, and the trigrams of his alleged invention, more with a context of horse-riding in Central Asia than in China where horse-riding appears to have been a somewhat later introduction.



SOURCE: Cherry 1995: 26, with thanks

Fig. 18.8. Fu Xi and the river horse

There is yet another possibility. In contrast with the horse's skin, which tends to be unpatterned or at most vaguely dappled, the Leopard's skin and the tortoise carapace are characterised by a composite pattern of distinct, more or less circular, basic shapes while the trigrams are also traditionally organised in a circular pattern. Although there is both phonetically and orthographically a great difference, in Chinese, between 'horse' (*ma*, 马; classic form 馬), and 'Leopard' (*bào*, 豹), Ma Lin's drawing (Great National Treasures of China,

production can even be found as a billboard on the premises of the White Cloud temple in Beijing, headquarters of the Chinese Taoist association.

⁵⁹⁴ *Li Ki* VIII, iv, 16 as quoted in Legge 1988: 14.

⁵⁹⁵ Cherry 1995: 26.




n.d.) might allude to a hypothetical, otherwise unknown or suppressed tradition according to which the trigrams were originally found on the back, not of a horse, but of a leopard. If the story had been told in Dutch instead of Chinese, we might have invoked the affinity between the former language's word for 'horse', *paard*, and the **pr / *prd* root for 'leopard'; *paard / horse* could then be taken to mean 'terrifying beast' (cf. leopard), as it may certainly have appeared to non-equestrian West European populations first confronted with horsemen, some time in the second, or early first, millennium BCE. But all authorities give for *paard*, German *Pferd*, the etymology *paraveredus*, from Greek *para-* and Latin *veredus*.⁵⁹⁶ On the surface this has nothing to do with the root **pr/*prd* underlying *Leopard*. Yet an appeal to the Greek prefix *para-* in order to explain an old West European word is suspect. Could we not, instead, discern, in the originally Gallic word **voreidos*, and *a fortiori* in the Cymric (Welsh) *gorwydd*, Kammerzell's **prd*, 'the terrifying beast'?



Fig. 18.9. Fu Xi and the tortoise

The possibility of reading 'Leopard' in place of 'horse' also occurs in another source: Plutarch's famous *De Iside et Osiride*. Here (ch. 19) Osiris returns from the Underworld in order

⁵⁹⁶ C. Tucker 1985 s.v. 'verēdus'; de Vries 1967 s.v. 'paard'; Kluge 1934 s.v. 'Pferd'.

to help prepare his son Horus for the battle with Seth. Osiris asks Horus what animal he considers most useful for those going to battle. Osiris expects him to answer 'a lion', but instead Horus answers: 'a horse'. When the father expresses his surprise at this answer, the son explains, hardly convincingly, that a lion merely enables one to defend oneself, while a horse allows one to pursue the enemy and to vanquish him. This Greek passage is cryptic and probably corrupt; just over a century ago, the Dutch professor of Greek, Hartman, for instance, translated Plutarch's text and had his translation checked by the renowned specialist in ancient religions, and Egyptologist, Brede Kristensen; Hartman proposes as many as three fundamental emendations before settling for a translation.⁵⁹⁷ The horse was only introduced in Egypt in the middle of the second millennium BCE, and therefore is an anachronism in the supposedly prehistoric times when Osiris lived. My analysis in the course of this chapter would suggest that underlying the far-fetched juxtaposition of lion and horse is a far more obvious one, attested for three continents and five millennia, namely, that between Lion and Leopard. But how could Plutarch, or his Egyptian or Egyptianising spokesmen in the early Common Era, have introduced 'horse' in the place of 'leopard'? The answer is not difficult to find. The usual Ancient Egyptian word for horse is  *ssmt*, which does not help us. But the word for 'stallion' is  *ibr*, and that has a close phonetic similarity with the Ancient Egyptian word for leopard,  *bʒ* or *ʒby*.⁵⁹⁸ What is more, in all probability both *ibr* and *bʒ* / *ʒby* derive from Kammerzell's root **pr* in the sense of 'formidable animal'. Gardiner⁵⁹⁹ adduces a parallel with the Hebrew *abir* in the sense of 'stallion', which is also interpreted as a form of the verb *abr*, 'to soar', and in that form means 'bull, angel, mighty one, God'.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁷ Hartman 1912: 368; that book contains a full Dutch translation of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride* on pp. 360-398.

⁵⁹⁸ Kammerzell 1994; Ward 1978; Gardiner 1994; the phonetic value of *ʒ* is *a*, *ar*, *er*.

⁵⁹⁹ Gardiner 1994: 459, under E6.

⁶⁰⁰ Strong 1989. The web of intercontinental prehistoric connections should not be allowed to expand infinitely lest it fractures, and the whole credibility of my approach with it, but it is tempting to add that the original name of Horus, *hor*, 'falcon, hawk', with the semantic implication of 'being high, being free, soaring', is one of the very few names of wild animals to be included (as **hur-/ *hor*) in the Proto-Nostratic% vocabulary; cf. Bomhard & Kerns 1994: 889, no. 406.

Chapter 19. The South and East Asian *Homa* Fire ritual, and the Southern African *Sangoma* cult (2010 / 2022)⁶⁰¹

19.1. Introduction

In the first two weeks of October, 2010, I participated in three conferences at Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA. One of these was: *Variations of Homa: From Vedic to Hindu and Buddhist*, Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard University, convenors Payne, Richard K., & Witzel, Michael (cf. Payne & Witzel 2015).⁶⁰² The impressions presented in this chapter do not really build up to a balanced argument, yet do not seem out of place in this book on comparative mythology.

19.2. How Homa touches on my own work over the years

My keen interest in this topic was prompted by my extensive recent work on the transcontinental mythology and ritual of Fire and of the transformative cycle of elements, pursued in a book draft on the Greek Fire god Hephaestus and his alleged Egyptian counterpart Ptah (van Binsbergen, in press (g)), on the Birth of Fire in Japanese mythology (van Binsbergen 2009, 2017: ch. 11), and on the widespread (including African) distribution of the transformative cycle of elements as an unsuspected, but crucial, worldwide background of the Ionian Pre-Socratic philosophers, whose claim to fame as the founding fathers of (Western) philosophy therefore is to be recon-

⁶⁰¹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2010, 'Note on South and East Asian Fire ritual, and the Southern African Sangoma cult', at: <http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/topicalities/20102011.htm>

⁶⁰² The other two were the Radcliffe Conference, reported on in chapter 9 of this book, and the Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, where chapter 15 of the present book was read, as well as the newly published proceedings were launched of the 2nd Annual Conference of that association (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010).

sidered (van Binsbergen 2012). Moreover, the relevance of this study in the context of my recent research projects (particularly my book *Sunda Pre- and Protohistorical Continuity between Asia and Africa* (2020)) is as a test case of the extent to which apparent continuities between South or South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa may be attributed to specific cultural transmission between either region, or *alternatively derive from a common prehistoric substrate*.

A somewhat unexpected benefit from this *Homa* conference was the confirmation, detailed and on several points, that the Southern African *Sangoma* ecstatic cult, which has been at the focus of my research and writing since 1988 and of which I am an initiated and leading member, is in fact a greatly distorted *localising transformation of Homa* – as I have already argued, with less detail, in my chapters on the cult’s transcontinental ramifications in my books *Intercultural Encounters* (2003: ch. 8); and *Commodification: Things, Agency And Identities: The Social Life Of Things Revisited* (2005, van Binsbergen & Geschiere 2005, especially my own specific contribution there: van Binsbergen 2005b).

The term *Homa* is not used in my various papers as cited above, yet many details confirm the closeness of *Homa* to the Southern African cult – even though among the Southern African adepts not the slightest conscious awareness of these South Asian connections can be detected:

- the meticulous collecting, and piling up in five courses, of specific, rare and precious types of fire wood as the central part of the Sangoma shrine especially upon initiation;
- the drinking of blood from the neck of sacrificial animals in their death pangs – apparently the *Sangoma* takes over the action which e.g. in Nepali royal Homa-based ritual, and in Sri Lankan popular ecstatic cults,⁶⁰³ is attributed to the goddess Kali;
- the *Sangomas*’s dressing in black cloaks and
- calling their god Mwali (cf. Kali), of undetermined gender;
- the regulations for the kind of sacrificial animal / animal skin belonging to each segment (caste) of society (Southern African society does not recognisably have castes but kings and warriors obviously count as equivalents of *Kshatriya* – as is brought out by my ethnography: in the *Sangoma* context, the status of warrior was repeatedly imposed upon me as adopted son of a Zambian king); in this context I encountered the literal application of a South Asian ritual prescription for the initiation of *Brahmin, Kshatriya etc.*;⁶⁰⁴
- the application of the *Heart Sutra*;⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ During short fieldwork which my wife and I conducted in Southern Sri Lanka, 2011, a somewhat detailed study was made of the syncretistic spirit medium Kirti, his cult, and the cult members, and extensive footage was shot for a film on the subject. Any definitive publication or film has not materialised so far, but see: van Binsbergen

⁶⁰⁴ Cf. Jolly 1988 / 1880-1910: *Institutes of Vishnu*, XXVII, 15-17, where it is specified that a novice for initiation should be dressed in a different animal skin according to his caste: black antelope (*Brahmins*), tiger (*Kshatriya*), or he-goat (commoner); cf. van Binsbergen 2003: 310 f. In the absence of tigers in Southern Africa, a leopard is to make shift.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Kaviratna 1997; Anonymous, ‘Heart sutra’, 2012; Conze 1958; Nattier 1992. The *Heart Sutra* is considered to derive from a sermon by the Buddha, which brings out the Buddhist antecedents of the *Sangoma* cult. The core of the Sanskrit / Pali (?) text is:

...Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate
bodhi svaha!...

...Gone, gone, gone yonder [to the other shore]. O enlightenment!
So be it! Hail!...

In the *Sangoma* context, chanted in the Southern African languages of Ndebele and Kalanga, this becomes (practically with the same prosody as in the Sanskrit or Pali original!)

- the general structure and social organisation of the *Sangoma* lodge as an *ashram*.



Fig.19.1. The syncretistic spirit medium Kirti in trance manipulates a live cock and a fire-brand, Unawatuna, Sri Lanka, 2011

All this leaves little doubt as to the *Homa* affinities of Sangomahood as studied by me in Francistown, Botswana – although we seem to have here a piecemeal mixture rather than a very specific and systematic borrowing from one concrete and unequivocally identifiable source.

Meanwhile, even though the contemporary forms of *Sangoma* are demonstrably alien to the logic of Kalanga and Tswana culture in Botswana, and are popularly recognised by Batswana to be so (although they are considered as local, and identified with, among the Southern African Nguni cultures *i.e.* Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi of South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe – from one hundred to over a thousand kms removed from Francistown), we

Sala, salani, salani madoda nokutura
Ndoye ndoyenda ndoyenda madoda
nokutura

...Greetings, greetings my brothers, I am taking my leave from you
I am going, going, my brothers, I am taking my leave from you

I am indebted to my Italian student Luca Domenichini who in 2000, when I was still fairly ignorant of the details of Buddhism, drew my attention to the correspondences between the *Sangoma* and the Buddhist text. True to the editorial principles followed in the present book, I would have preferred to reproduce the relevant sections of the *Heart Sutra* here in the original Sanskrit or Pali redactions, but I found them only available in calligraphy or in Chinese transliteration – which is probably the principal form in which the text has circulated anyway.

must not overlook the very extensive localisation which the (presumably) South Asian material has apparently undergone on African soil. Here it has unmistakably adopted the format, recognisably widespread throughout Bantu-speaking South Central and Southern Africa, of *ngoma*, i.e. of a cult of affliction⁶⁰⁶ whose rituals are predicated on the dramaturgy of music, dance, and often possession trance. While there are thus many indications of *Sangoma* having selectively adopted elements of South Asian Buddhist and Hindu *Homa*, *Sangoma* has shown the same capability of selective incorporation *vis-à-vis* other cultic and ritual elements circulating in the Indian Ocean region. Thus, although *Sangoma* is an ecstatic cult venerating ancestors through possession trance and healing in their name, it has massively adopted the royal (ancestral) cults of South Central and Southern Africa (in which, in its turn, several South Asian elements of royal cults especially royal enthronement, royal orchestras, royal capitals and royal magic have demonstrably been incorporated). Whereas trance divination attributed to ancestral intercession would typically be the *Sangomas*'s principal divination technique, in fact in the course of the past century the stark competition over the lucrative therapeutic market in Southern Africa has brought *Sangomas* to adopt forms of cleromantic divination (i.e. with the use of material tokens, lots, serving as random generators) that have for centuries belonged to the standard divinatory repertoire of non-Nguni groups in this part of the world (in outhern Africa, the lots oracle's first documented attestation second half of the 16th century CE; the oldest archaeological attestation a century later; Robinson 1959). Nor does this exhaust the extent of transcontinental connections in Southern African divination: outside the domain of *Sangoma* proper, the divination bowls of the Venda of Transvaal and Zimbabwe are highly reminiscent, not only of West African Ifa divination bowls, but also of 1st millennium CE Chinese divination bowls adorned at the rim with 36 zodiacal symbols, largely animal. A South African, Bantu-speaking diviner without any conscious knowledge of Chinese culture even turned out (Hook 1975) to be aware of the Taoist Lo Shu 洛書 number symbolism associated with the tortoise's carapace; whereas in general the Southern African herbalist's pharmacopaea shows considerable affinities with the traditional Chinese one.⁶⁰⁷ Painstaking transcontinental research has brought to light that the Southern African forms of cleromantic divination and divining bowls are not only strikingly similar (in terminology, astrological affinities, and basic structuring on the basis of 2ⁿ different and named divinatory configurations) to divinatory forms in Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, and West Africa – but that they also go back to a common literate prototype in late 1st-mill. CE Islamic, ʿAbbāṣīd Iraq, علم الرمل ʿilm al-

raml ('Sand Science') or خط الرمل *khatt al-raml* ('Sand Calligraphy'), which in turn dis-

⁶⁰⁶ #19.1 DEFINING CULTS OF AFFLICTION. A cult of affliction – especially in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, and there *a fortiori* in South Central and Southern Africa – is a healing cult where the standard route to healing for one suffering is to join the cult and thus to assist in the recruitment of yet others again. Cf. Carter 1972; van Binsbergen 1977, 1981. *Ngoma* means 'drum, collective musical session, dance' in Bantu languages; could there be a connection with South and East Asian *Homa*? Often San ('Bushmen') healing rites in Southern Africa are considered the prototype of Bantu-speaking *ngoma* – but I fear this attribution is based on the false mystique of extreme primordiality that North Atlantic scholarship has come to project onto the San – as chided in Wilmsen's work.

⁶⁰⁷ This is not an idle claim. Principles of the Southern African traditional pharmacopaea were taught to me during my training as traditional healer, 1988-1991, under Dr Smarts Gumede and Mrs MmaShakayile Mabutu; on the Chinese counterpart, cf. Pharmacopoeia Commission, 1995; Li 1977; Jiang 2005; Huang & Williams 1998.

play considerable similarities with the well-known Chinese wisdom oracle of 易經 *yi jing* ('*I Ching*'), and which (as *Geomantia*, *Astrologia terrestris* or *Ars Punctatoria*) has also greatly informed West European scholarly and popular magic ever since the Middle Ages).



Fig. 19.2. Michael Witzel at the Harvard Square recording a performance of the *Homa* Fire ritual at the onset of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Cambridge MA, USA, 2010

As a loosely organised healing cult in a competitive therapeutic market which has undergone tremendous changes over the past century, *Sangoma* is almost by definition innovative and idiosyncratic, with each individual practitioner adding his or own personal touches to a widespread common pattern. The *Sangoma* scene in Francistown around 1990 was dominated by three lodges each run by a middle-aged leader: one male from Ndebele / Zimbabwe background, two female (and each other's first cousins *i.e.* classificatory sisters) from local, Kalanga / Ndebele background; the male leader made his women adepts impersonate royal Nguni ancestors but in divination besides trance and cleromancy he also used a crystal ball which his father, also a *Sangoma*, had received as a gift from a satisfied White client – the two female leaders boasted common descent from a White grandfather, allegedly from Durban, a South African city which has had a large concentration of Indians since the late 19th century CE, where Gandhi worked as a lawyer for more than twenty years, and where a constant stream of visiting *pandits* from India must have assured that *Homa* rituals were performed regularly. *Sangoma* is really a bundle of transcontinental themes and influences. While all this opens up the possibility that the *Homa* affinities in *Sangoma* are less than a

century old and are only tied to the specific biographies of individual leaders, the close association of *Sangoma* with the widespread Southern African Mwali (/Kali?) cult, the manifestation of *Homa* affinities not only in Francistown but throughout the Southern African *Sangoma* complex, and *Sangoma's* apparent continuity with the Zulu *isanuzi* court diviners (Griffiths 1989; Jackson 1923), suggest a time scale of at least a few centuries for the South Asian influences on *Sangoma*.

In such a transcontinental cultural environment as *Sangoma* clearly is, one would not be surprised to find elements of South Asian Fire ritual, but one would expect the South Asian elements to appear in fragmentary state, and transformed almost beyond recognition – as is in fact the case.

19.3. Glimpses of Homa at Harvard (2010)

Prompted by the *Homa* conference, on the morning of 2nd October 2010, a three-hour Fire ritual was staged on Harvard Yard, with a senior Nepalese priest (*cum* American professor) as officiant: Prof. Naresh Bajracarya. On the basis of the printed ritual guidebook edited by one of the great modern masters, the late Pandit Amoghavajra Bajracharya (Kathmandu: Sankhata Press, 2nd ed. 1977?), Professors Bajracarya and Lewis prepared a highly condensed but full description of the *Homa* ritual performed at Harvard Yard; see Bajracarya & Lewis 2010.

In the Nepalese Buddhist *Homa* ritual as performed at Harvard Yard, on the lawn in front of the Harvard Sciences Building, the central shrine is a simple *mandala*⁶⁰⁸ temporarily constructed out of industrial concrete bricks, bound together with rope, the crevices smeared over with cement, and the ensemble adorned with red and yellow powdered lines and little flags. The priest sits east of this structure, in front of a small burner, whose flame will ultimately be transferred to the *mandala*. Left and right of the priest and one or two metres west of the mandala (where an altar has been erected covered with red cloth), large amounts of offerings have been piled up, to be committed to the flames by the priest at strictly prescribed moments in the ritual. The standard exegesis is that the Fire god Agni, by consuming the offerings, conveys these offerings from the humans to specific gods addressed in the ritual (*cf.* *Old Testament* 'sweet smell', *Genesis* 8 21; Ancient Greek κνίσθη *knisē*, Arabic / Islamic بركة *baraka*); however, in view of the later subjugation of all earlier gods to the Buddha hence Agni's demotion to subaltern status, it cannot be ruled out that in much earlier, Pre-Buddhist phases of the Fire cult, the Fire god himself was considered the principal object of the offerings. Continuous recitation of strictly prescribed texts is another of the priest's duties throughout the ritual. The priest (dressed in a white garment with red and yellow shoulder cape, and at the height of the ritual a golden headdress) is assisted by an acolyte in traditional Nepali dress.

⁶⁰⁸ A mandala is a South Asian devotional device, usually with multiple symmetries and of a basic circular shape.





Notes to the preceding photographs in order of their appearance:

1. Early stages of the ritual
2. part of the collection of firewood, and other paraphernalia
3. representing a common style of China-manufactured textiles, Chinese characters are woven into the officiant's garment
4. More or less traditionally dressed people with Nepali connections form the ritual audience, seated North of the mandala in the first phases of the ritual, and South in the final phase, when they are holding a sacred thread that links them, finally to step forth one by one in order to present their financial offering (in the order of 5 to 10 US\$ each) and receive the priest's blessing, made visible by a sacrificial red dot in their face the size of the priest's fingertip, and by a sacrificial flower to be stuck behind the ear. Behind this inner circle, an outer ring of onlookers was formed, consisting of conference participants and passers-by – some of whom also partook of the final blessing. Towards the middle of the ritual, the original brick mandala is built up with additional loose bricks and assorted prescribed types of firewood, to be kindled from the priest's small burner. It is here that the sacrifices are to be committed to the fire.
5. Two ritual participants lift a heavy piece of firewood onto the burning mandala; note the Modern Harvard architecture and sun panels in the background

6. Ritual participants and acolyte near the end of the ritual; note the sacred thread
7. Towards the end of the ritual, the acolyte touches all ritual participants with the fire thongs
8. Kneeling for the priest's blessing towards the end of the ritual
9. At the end of the ritual, all firewood has been duly consumed; note the small burner protected from the wind by upright bricks, just in front of the priest
10. After the ritual, the officiant Prof. Naresh Bajracarya assumes the role of Modern scholar and explains the ritual's details during the *Homa* conference

Fig. 19.3. *Homa* at Harvard 2010

19.4. Proposed *Homa* / *Sangoma* parallels

Above a few striking *Homa* /*Sangoma* parallels were already indicated. Let me end this brief note by looking at two parallels specifically,

- The *Homa* priest's headdress and that of the senior *Sangoma*
- The carefully constructed wooden altar for the *Homa* ritual as compared with its striking parallel in the *Sangoma* cult

1) The *Homa* priest's headdress and that of the senior *Sangoma*

We can scarcely overlook the parallels between the *Homa* priest's headdress (with five petal-like or flamelike segments, each of which carries the image of a major Vedic / Hindu / Buddhist god), with the headdress of the senior *Sangoma* MmaShakayile in Francistown, 1989 – even though the latter lacks all iconography. (Selected images from my initiation as *Sangoma* may be found in: van Binsbergen 2004.)



headdress worn during the height of the *Homa* ritual at Harvard Yard, 2010



The Botswana *Sangoma* leader MmaShakayile posing in state (1989)

Fig 19.4. Parallel headdresses in *Sangoma* and *Homa*

2) The carefully constructed wooden altar for the *Homa* ritual as compared with its striking parallel in the *Sangoma* cult



photo (c) Barbara Meadows 2009, with thanks

Fig. 19.5. A donkey cart such as commonly used for fire-wood delivery in Botswana townships

In urban Botswana c. 1990, much cooking and heating was on the basis of firewood (although paraffin, gas and electrical stoves are increasingly important). Most urbanites had no direct access to firewood (the town is surrounded by the extensive and unaccommodating, if not forbidden, lands of the, originally colonial, Tati Company) and therefore urbanites have to rely on firewood deliveries by enterprising youngsters using donkey-carts. This firewood however is certainly not what the *Sangomas* use for their rituals. On the eve of every major *Sangoma* ritual, special types of firewood have to be collected, discretely and often under cover of night, from fellow *Sangomas* and other ritual specialists, and intricate rules govern the use of these bundles, indicating a significance far exceeding that of ordinary firewood.⁶⁰⁹ Incidentally, a similar pattern attends the (un)availability of sacrificial goats in town – although goats are indispensable in *Sangoma* sacrifice (the vegetarian emphasis of South Asian *Homa* offerings is completely absent here), the acquisition of each goat requires an arduous, time-consuming and often inconclusive journey deep into the countryside, beyond the Tati lands. It is an indication of the transregional, non-local nature of *Sangoma* that its sacrifices and paraphernalia (beads, cloth, divination tablets) usually come from the market, and are not drawn from the sacrificer's own local produce.

⁶⁰⁹ One is reminded of the extraordinary significance which was attached, in the Ancient Indo-European-speaking world ranging from Rome to India via Iran, to bundles of wood (*fascis*, *barsamen* – ultimately represented as metal rods, *barsom*; Mills & Gray 1915): as signs of office, epiphanies of the sacred (ultimately going back to NarCom 12: 'From the Tree'), and (as among the Ancient Germans, and Celts) as instruments of divination.



The construction is rationalised as a platform on which to present sacrificial meat, and has few counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa; however, the specialist in European cultural history Ginzburg (1992: 298) claims that such platforms are reminiscent of Central Asia, but also suggestive of African continuities (here he cites Küsters 1921-1922), perhaps (but I could not access Küsters's article) in regions where South Asian influence has been strong.

Fig. 19.6. The male ancestors' shrine at the *Sangoma* lodge in the outlying village of Mashelegabedi, 20 km from Francistown, Botswana, 1991.

Meanwhile, with all this emphasis on ecstasy, we should not overlook the fact that in the *Homa* ritual as cursorily described above, ecstatic elements are absent.

19.5. Sangoma parallels and further explorations into the transcontinental connections between Africa and South East Asia

Given the many indications of a South Asian background of the ecstatic *Sangoma* cult of Southern Africa, one would expect, in principle, parallels between *Sangoma* and the religion of the isle of Bali, Indonesia, whose culture and religion has been recognised to be largely South-Asian-derived. While in the course of the last few centuries, especially the 20th, much of the Indonesian archipelago has come under the sway of Islam, throughout the Common Era especially Java and Bali have been the scenes of the succession, of Hinduism and Buddhism, in complex interaction with substrate local religious forms such as surface in Javanese mysticism and other forms of animism.⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ The literature on Indonesian religion and related topics is very extensive. A selection, with special emphasis on Bali, may include: Basset 1995; Bateson 1949; Beatty 2003; Bensa & Otlin 1969; Brinkgreve 1997; de Zoete & Spies 1939; Geertz 1966, 1969, 1972; Geertz & Geertz [year]; Goris & Dronkers n.d. [1950]; Hobart 1990, 1995; Howe 1981;

The prominence of an ecstatic cult on Bali is one such indication. After temple dances that enact the central drama of the classic Indian *Ramayana* epic, a typical sequel is a 'Fire dance' in which an entranced medium, inspired by the sacred atmosphere engendered by the *Ramayana*, wields a hobby-horse mask and tramples, without getting hurt, in glowing embers of burnt coconut as a sign of sacred election and of the presence of the gods. On other occasions, not personally witnessed in Bali, the dancers allegedly pierce themselves with knives.

These two proofs of sacred invulnerability under trance have detailed parallels in the ecstatic cult which I studied in the 1960s-1970s in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (van Binsbergen 1971, and in press (j)). Such proofs of sacred invulnerability were absent in the forms of trance ritual in sub-Saharan Africa that were the central topic of my 1979 doctoral dissertation, cf. van Binsbergen 1981; here the fact – typical of *cults of affliction* – that the suffering patient / would-be adept responded, by apparently irresistible spasms and urges to dancing, to very specific ritual tunes but not to any others, was considered sufficient diagnostic proof that the patients was in fact possessed by the cult's specific spirit and would have to join the cult (often even to the point of attaining leadership there – as I did myself in the *Sangoma* cult, which I joined in 1990) in order to get cured.

Is it possible to design a convincing, scholarly intersubjective connection between South East Asia and North Africa so as to explain these parallels? They appear to be far too specific to attribute simply to that old spoil-sport, 'the innate tendency of the universal human mind'. But how can we be more specific on this point? I propose a number of intermediate steps towards an answer, some admittedly more convincing than others. In the first place, we have to ask ourselves if ecstatic religion may be considered a form of shamanism; on this there is general agreement among the specialists.⁶¹¹ There has been an inkling among some specialists (to most others, however, the search for origins is anathema) that all these forms of ecstatic religion might derive from a common source.

In this connection I find it useful to cite my 2012: 256 *f.* discussion of the original context of pardivesture – the human donning of leopard skins – as a likely possible aspect of shamanism.

'Perhaps the very notion of a transformation cycle of elements is shamanic in origin, and, like shamanism as an institution, could be argued to go back to the Upper Palaeolithic of West to Central Asia (c. 20-15 ka BP). This implies two questions:

1. what was the origin of shamanism in space and time? and
2. can element thinking, cyclicity and transformation be argued to be inherent aspects of shamanism?

The first question can be answered provisionally, although it would be the work of a lifetime to substantiate the answer exhaustively and satisfactorily. It is a widely-held view that shamanism [– with alleged expressions in rock art, cf. Carr 1995; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989)] already existed in Upper Palaeolithic Eurasia⁶¹² [and

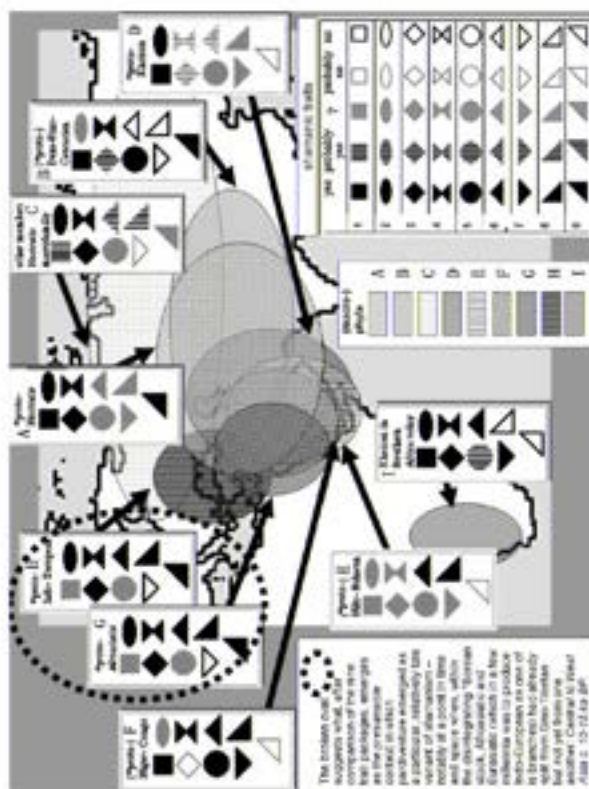
Jay 1963; Karafet *et al.* 2005; Mead & Bateson 1942; Pringle 2004; Purwo 1993; Rassers 1959; Staal 1995; Stöhr & Zoetmulder 1966; van Binsbergen 2010a, 2010b, 2011c; Wayan Dibia & Ballinger 2004; Belo 1960; Howe 1981.

⁶¹¹ Perhaps with the exception of Hamayon: Blain 2002; Eliade 1968 / 1951; Furst 1986; Goodman 1989, 1990; Hamayon 1993; Hultkrantz 1998; Levy 1993; Lewis 1971; Siikala 1982; Sullivan 1994; Vitebsky 1995; Wallis 2003; Wilbert 1972.

⁶¹² #19.2. ECSTATIC RELIGION. Apart from the tendentious and inherently uncertain interpretations of rock art, the documentary evidence on ecstatic religion is not older than the Bronze Age Mediterranean: Abusch 1995; War-

Southern Africa (e.g. Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996; Layton 2001) although I have doubted the validity of such fashionable claims on ethnographic and methodological grounds, 2018: ch. 8. Likewise, in the course of my world-wide comparative research into leopard-skin symbolism (often associated with shamanism), I developed (van Binsbergen 2004b / in press (h)) a typological and diachronic argument suggesting that (the leopard-skin associated form of) shamanism emerged in West to Central Asia 10-20 ka BP (...) There are also other indications that shamanism dates from the disintegration phase of *Borean: the (...) movement up and down the celestial axis is a basic idea in shamanism, which presupposes the development of naked-eye astronomy, yet against a profusion of terms to denote 'Earth' and 'Water' (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142 f., 406 f.), reconstructed *Borean has, as we have seen, scarcely just one term for 'Sky' – so it appears as if Heaven as a transcendent concept had scarcely been invented by *Borean times, nor could it have, in the light of my discussion [2012: Section 6.3] of modes of thought, transcendence and absolute distinctions (...).' (van Binsbergen 2012: 256 f.)

ren 1981. The Greek god of ecstasy, Dionysus, is mainly an Iron-Age belief (Evans 1988). I realise that my insistence on the relatively recent appearance of ecstatic religion is surprising in the face of the consensus (brought out e.g. by Lewis-Williams, and in popular stereotype of the San, San healing cults, etc. – e.g. Katz 1982; but also to be found in Witzel's work) according to which ecstatic cults constitute a very ancient and ubiquitous layer of human spirituality. I have studied ecstatic cults all my adult life, dabbled (at the invitation of my research hosts in 1968) in the North African popular Islamic version, studied the *Bituma* cult at very close quarters during several years in Zambia, and – once the Botswana *sangomas* recognised me as a kindred spirit / as a well an-informed and intrigued colleague on the strength of my previous Zambian experience – joined the *Sangoma* ecstatic cult and for decades was active in this connection. This does not, of course, make me the ultimate authoritative oracle as to such cults's remote past, but at least it is likely to protect me from facile, ignorant stereotyping. The question as to the nature of trance behaviour as learned and performative has been central to my research into ecstatic religion from the very beginning (van Binsbergen 1981). We are dealing here with specific *altered states of consciousness*. In order to attain such states, minimum requirements of consciousness must be met, most probably of a consciousness whose historical development and expressive articulation has been thoroughly shaped by the expert use of articulate language (as the main vehicle of transcendence!) over many generations. That is why intuitively I reject the idea of ecstatic religion as belonging to a Lower to Middle Palaeolithic environment, and am not too convinced by the Lewis-Williams School of reading shamanism into rock art. That in our time and age, massively collective forms of ecstatic music and dance are increasingly the favourite (and facily adopted) pastime of large sections of the younger North Atlantic population and its overseas dependencies, merely pretends to be as an atavistic return to time-honoured 'primitive' expressions, and ostentatiously embraces repetitive bodily rhythms allegedly enabling us to find our true, apparently Palaeolithic and transcontinental, human roots. But in fact such modern forms of pseudo, performative routinised shamanism amount to a deceptive over-emphasis on the human individual as if existing on his own, *sui generis*, detached from others, functioning away from others, – and in a bizarrely un-African way) owes much to a technology of communication that has replaced direct and personal, sense-based human communication by machine contact (through the cell phone, the computer, or at least via text) – it is machinic in the illuminating sense which Deleuze and Guattari have given to this term (Deleuze & Guattari 1972, 1980; van Binsbergen 2008a).



symbols indicating aspects of shamanism:
 1. speckled ornamentation for leopard
 2. speckled ornamentation for other species
 3. ecstatic rish
 4. therianthropy

figures posing as animals) atoned
 5. leopard therianthropy
 6. leopard-skin symbols atoned
 7. Enlil's insider
 8. Sacerd/Outsider
 9. Mother goddess

letters indicating linguistic macrophyly:
 A. Proto-Neostatic / Eurasianic
 B. Proto-[Dene]-Sino-Caucasian
 C. other members of the Neostatic / Eurasianic macrophyly except

Indo-European
 D. proto-African
 E. proto-Nilo-Saharan
 F. proto-Niger-Congo
 G. proto-Afroasiatic
 H. proto-Indo-European
 I. Khazian in Southern Africa today

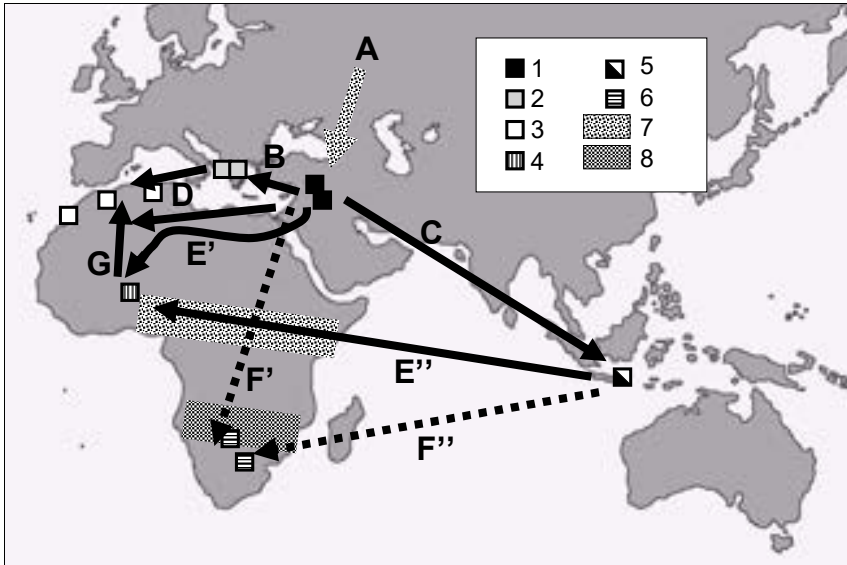
hovering above the geographical plane (which renders is a map of the Old World), also in the case of this also applies to the reconstructed Indo-European / Afroasiatic proposed origin of pandivesture, which would be not in Western Europe but in West Asia. The broken oval suggests what, after comparison of the nine trait packages, emerges as the presumable content in which pandivesture emerged as a particular, relatively late variant of shamanism – notably at a point in time and space when, within the disintegrating 'Borean stock, Afroasiatic and Eurasianic' (which in a few millennia was to produce Indo-European as one of its branches) had already split from Sino-Borean but not yet from one another: Central to West Asia 30-45 ka BP. Source: van Binsbergen 2012 Fig. 8a.

Fig. 19.7. Linguistic and comparative-ethnographic reconstruction of the emergence of the ritual use of leopard skins (pandivesture) as an aspect of shamanism.

Two sources for ecstatic cults in North Africa are commonly mentioned in the literature:

- on the one hand (Brunel 1926) the ecstatic cults for Mediterranean Antiquity, around such gods and goddesses as Dionysus, Cybele, Sabazius, Dumuzi
- on the other hand the influence of the *Bori* cult brought by West Africa Haussa slaves (Tremearne 1914, 1915).

Therefore, for the explanation of the South East Asian / North African ecstatis parallels, we may take recourse to the interpretative alternatives clearly set out in the following Fig. 19.8.



LEGEND:

- 1 Ecstatic cults satsteted, Ancient Near East
 - 2 Ancient Greece.
 - 3 North African popular Islam.
 - 4 Haussa *Bori* cult.
 - 5 South East Asian ecstatic cults.
 - 6 ecstatic cults as presumably expressed in Southern African rock art .
 - 7 Northern Sunda corridor in Africa, Somalia to Western Grassfields, Cameroon.
 - 8 Southern Sunda corridor in Africa, Mozambique to Angola (see van Binsbergen 2019a)
- A influx of shamanism on the wings of uralic / Altaic expansion, Early Bronze

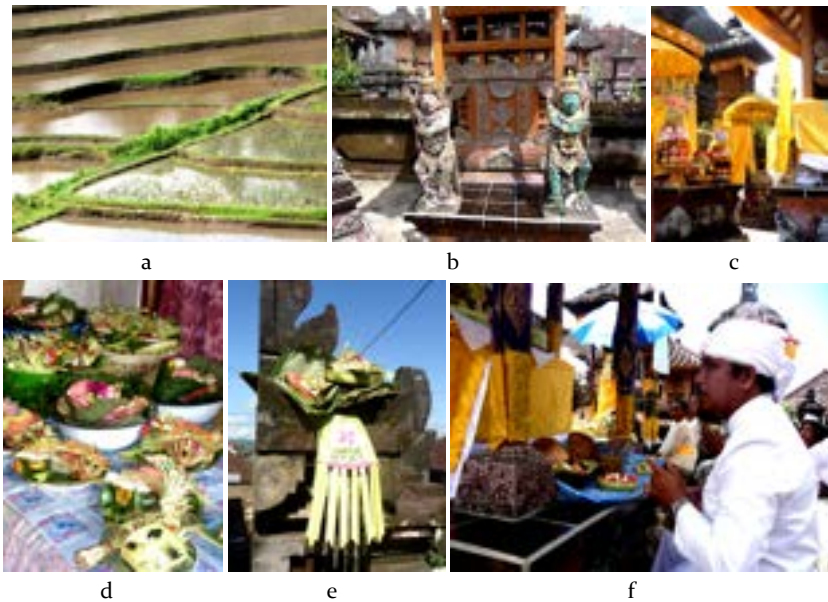
- Age.
- B transmission of ecstatic cults from West Asia to the Aegean region.
- C transmission of ecstatic cults from West Asia to South East Asia.
- D proposed transmission of ecstatic cults from Ancient Mediterranean North shore to North Africa.
- E' proposed Pelasgian transmission of West Asian ecstatic cult to Haussaland, inland West Asia
- E'' proposed transmission of South East Asian ecstatic cult to Haussaland, inland West Asia, via corridor 7
- F' conjectural transmission of ecstatic cults

- from West Asia to Southern Africa on the wings of Pelasgian expansion.
- F'' conjectural transmission of ecstatic cults from South East Asia to Southern Africa on the wings of Sunda expansion..
- G transmission of ecstatic cults from Haussaland to North Africa.
- Note that both Eand E'' are in line with Frobenius's claim of Bori as an Asia-derived shamanic inroad into Africa (p. 164, above); the insistence on the origin of shamanism outside Africa (therefore not in Pandora's Box) remains a point for future research

Fig 19.8. Proposed selective reconstruction of the history of ecstatic religion from the Upper Palaeolithic onward

Admittedly, such a model is too complex and contains too many conjectural elements to immediately appeal to the scholarly mind. This may help us on our way towards the formulation of more convincing, and ultimately substantiated, models concerning the world his-

tory of ecstatic religion.



From left to right then from top to bottom: (a) irrigated fields (*sawahs*) around Sanda; (b) the family temple, the central section being dedicated to the Sun god Surya; (c) adornments of the temples for the festive occasion; (d) vegetable delicacies and adornments prepared in the family home and about to be sacrificed at the temple; (e) as (c); (f) a *pandit* (Hindu priest) officiating during the celebration, reciting Sanskrit verses

Fig. 19.9. Main annual Hindu ritual at a family temple at Sanda, West Bali, 2010

With regard to East and South Central Africa the general feeling is that ecstatic cults of affliction were relatively recent (19th-c. CE) introductions from the Indian Ocean region (Bourgignon 1968; van Binsbergen 1981; Alpers 1984), which makes a Sunda connection quite conceivable. This may even cover the West African ecstatic forms of the *Bori* type, for the evidence of mankala, geomancy, divining bowls, *Voodoo*, musical instruments especially the xylophone, food crops, the massive import of cowries, even a stray Roman coin ending up on Mt Cameroon via the probable detour of the Indian Ocean; *cf.* Dick-Read 2005) all might be read as suggesting a major cultic influence from the Indian Ocean (Sri Lanka, Madagascar, possibly South East Asia) around the Cape to West Africa, in the course of the second millennium CE (for all this see my monograph on *Sunda*, 2020c, and my 2019c article). But again this cannot be the entire truth, for two reasons:

- already in the Mediterranean Mesolithic cowries sporadically appear in ritual and jewellery context, and
- in the second millennium BCE changes in the therapeutic system of Ancient Mesopotamia suggested the arrival (presumably from Uralic / Altaic speaking regions to the North and East) of shamanism, *i.e.* ecstatic religion – traces of which also abound in Graeco-Roman classical Antiquity, probably not unrelated to the cult

of the Hephaestus Fire god, cognate forms of which are found all over the Pelasgian Realm (Ritter 1965; Dodds 1951; van Binsbergen in press (a), (g)).



Fig. 19.10. The chorus during the *Kecak* Dance (left) and the Fire Dance (right) in Bali, 2009 CE.

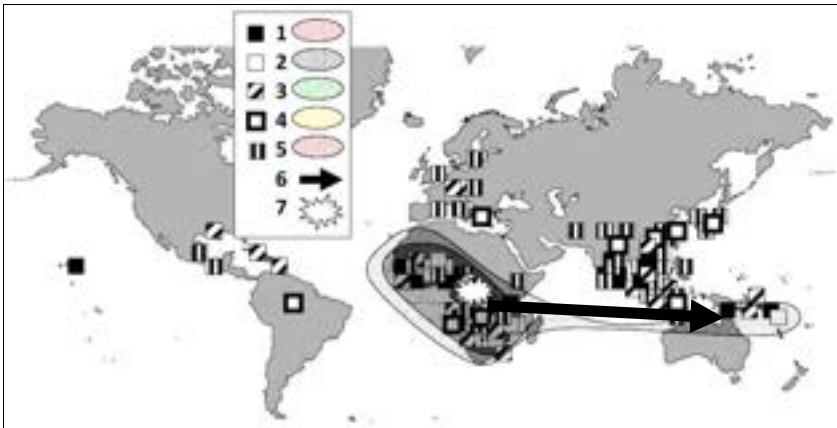
- In the consideration of transcontinental continuities on a global scale we often hit upon the rivalry or complementarity between Pelasgian and Sunda explanations. Both have been considered in the context of the reconstruction presented in Fig. 19.8.

However, there is perhaps a third possibility which, as an Africanist known for my defence of moderate Afrocentrism ((van Binsbergen), I should not overlook:

- It is significant that the Balinese trance-dancer in the Fire dancer should masquerade as a horse. The imagery of trance possession as a horse being ridden by a spiritual rider, is central to *Bori* trance possession (Besmer 1983). The use of the horse-rider metaphor is very widespread (e.g. in Plato's *Phaedrus* – 1975 / 4th c. BCE) and throughout classical and late Graeco- Roman Antiquity it appears as a metaphor for the relation between body and soul), and could hardly be considered specific to West African ecstatic cults, even including their Caribbean derivatives (Deren 1970). In folklore studies, the widespread hobby-horse has also been brought in connection with the ecstatic cult (Alford 1978; Elwin 1942). Horse-riding (as distinct to horse-drawn chariots, which appears to be one or two millennia younger) seems to have started in Central Asia in the 5th millennium BCE (Chamberlin 2006) – very much later than the religious significance of the horse as a symbol of the sky, the sea, and the divine, as amply attested by European Upper Palaeolithic art (Rap-penglueck 1999; Carr 1995), where the (undomesticated) horse is by far the most frequently depicted animal; traces of this fixation on the horse may still be found in the mythologies of Greece (where Poseidon and Demeter appear as horses) and South and East Asia (the horse-headed Hayagriva, an avatar of Vishnu). The horse / rider metaphor in ecstatic religion is likely to be younger than horseback riding as such (however, one could imagine the reverse relation: a prior trance / ritual imagery of being ridden in the form of an as yet undomesticated horse, bringing people secondarily to experiment with horseback riding...?), and a 5th millennium / Central Asian origin for horseback riding would be eminently compatible with a Pelasgian interpretation of the horse-rider symbolism in ecstatic religion, diffusing into West Africa and South East Asia in the course of

millennia from a common Central Asian source.

Admittedly, sub-Saharan Africa need not have been the passive recipient of transcontinental influences as it appears in this model. Strong Afrocentrists take Africa as the source of much of the achievements in world cultural history since c. 10 ka BP. In their view, such widespread formal systems as geomantic divination and *mankala* boardgames have an exclusively West African origin and from there were diffused over much of the Old World and the New World. When West African xylophones are found to have exactly the same tuning as Indonesian ones (Jones 1964), our first inclination would be to conclude to borrowing from Indonesia to Africa (after all, there is the evidence of massive linguistic and cultural transmission from South East Asia to Madagascar); theoretically an Afrocentrist counter-view would be to postulate borrowing from West Africa to Indonesia, yet also on closer scrutiny (van Binsbergen 2020: Prologue) the Sunda provenance of the xylophone seems to be confirmed. For the cheap and clumsy, locally produced thumb pianos now to be found in Balinese curio shops (Fig 31a) a similar argument might be made, *yet in my 2020 extensive treatment the thumb piano is confirmed as originally an African instrument.*



source: van Binsbergen 2020: 31, Fig. 0.7; diffusion arrows (map symbol 6) and caption added. The thumb piano is represented by the map symbol no.2, \square ; the white explosion icon stands for proposed area of origin. The other icons numbered 1 and 2-5 stand for other musical instruments, extensively discussed in my 2020 book. NB in the original 2020 version, only the distribution was given but the historical distribution not indicated; that has been remedied here

Fig. 19.11. Global distribution and reconstructed history of the thumb piano

By the same token, *mankala* board games, which appear sporadically in the South Asian (Sri Lanka; Parker 1909: 587 *f.*), South East Asian (Jones 1964: 198 *f.*; Barnes 1975) and East Asian context (Eagle 1995, 1999), may be considered the results of diffusion from the oldest forms of such boards as were archaeologically attested in Neolithic West Asia (Rollefson 1992; Simpson 1999).⁶¹³

⁶¹³ On the basis of one stone slab with *mankala*-like indentures, Oppenheimer - 1998 - suggests *mankala* to be among the original Sunda package to be diffused westward in early to middle Holocene times under his General Sunda thesis, but considering the global distribution of *mankala* in space and time (amply studied in several of my publications as listed in this book's bibliography), this is very unlikely. Oppenheimer's claim is all the more shaky



Source: http://dryleafdesign.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/images/thumb-piano.298165621_std.gif, with thanks

Fig. 19.12. Tourist-market thumb piano from Indonesia

However, these Asian attestations could also be seen as more recent direct diffusions from Africa, where, in Culin's (1896) words, 'mankala has become the national game'. Indian-Ocean trade, discovery and occasional conquest between East Africa, Persian, India, Indonesia and China have been established extensively and are discussed in an extensive literature (e.g. Neville *et al.* 1975; Duyvendak 1949; Snow 1988; Li Anshan 2000), to which the Afrocentrist scholar Clyde Winters (1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1988, 1989) has made surprising but substantial contributions. Black African slaves were sufficiently abundant in 商朝 T'ang dynasty China (618-907 CE) to give rise to an entire genre of *belles lettres* there, highlighting the exploits of a Black hero with Trickster connotations (Irwin 1977). African slaves also went to other parts of East and South East Asia, and they may have brought African traits such as *mankala* and thumb pianos with them. In the course of the 19th century CE, Ashanti (Ghanaian) soldiers were recruited for the Royal Dutch Indies Army (van Kessel 2013), and also to them the introduction of *mankala* in the Indonesian archipelago has been attributed. Against this background, it becomes just conceivable that also the Balinese Fire dance with its trance-and-equine connotations, is a recent introduction from Africa in the course of the second millennium CE. This presses all the more, in view of the fact that the equine imaginery has been retained so emphatically. Horses have played a considerable role in Indonesian history in the second millennium CE (Boomgaard 2004) but they seem to be hardly conspicuous in historic Balinese iconography; this makes it thinkable that the horse imagery in the Fire cult is a recent foreign import.

At this point it is imperative that I explain why such an Afrocentrist interpretation of *mankala*, and by analogy of the equine ecstatic imaginery, yet does not appear obvious to me, despite the lip-service which I have repeatedly paid to Afrocentrism. *Mankala* is not alone in the peculiar nature of its distribution and attestation pattern. This pattern may be summarised as follows:

- in historical times to be found all over Africa
- and only sporadically elsewhere,

because after careful consideration we have to admit that we are unable to reconstruct the postulated original, pre-Sunda culture of the pre-flooding, pre-insular subcontinent of South East Asia (van Binsbergen 2020c).

- and in practice to be considered a typical African phenomenon, even though the oldest attestations are not found in Africa but in Neolithic West Asia.

In my texts on the Pelasgian Hypothesis, on the Sea peoples's ethnicity in the Mediterranean Bronze Age, and on the assessment, after more than 20 years, of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011), I have considered several other formal systems whose distribution and attestation pattern is very similar to that of

- *Mankala*:
- *Geomantic divination*,
- *The spiked-wheel trap*, and
- *The unilateral mythical being* with only one side to his body (and variously associated with the weather, hunting, cattle, and metallurgy).
- Also the *Nigercongo / Bantu linguistic macrophylum* could be considered to belong to the same series: while about a quarter of the Proto-Bantu vocabulary can be argued to derive from *Borean, and Proto-Bantu can be attested in Bronze Age West Asia (Karst 1933; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), yet this macrophylum now features only as the main macrophylum of the Southern half of the African continent, from Senegal to Kenya and South Africa. I do not think these five formal systems have an origin in sub-Saharan Africa – they originate in West to Central Asia where their oldest attestations have been found. Subsequently, in West Asia they were superseded and supplanted by other such formal systems. After all, especially after the invention of agriculture, and of the potent *logocentric* package consisting of writing, the state, organised religion and protoscience, West Asia has been seething with a succession of some of global cultural history's most important and most successful cultural and technological innovations. But while being eclipsed in West Asia, our five formal systems managed to find a permanent and fertile niche in sub-Saharan Africa, where they were only up against the social-organisationally, economically and conceptually relatively defenseless prior formal cultural systems of Palaeo-African hunter-gatherers.⁶¹⁴ I therefore take the distribution and attestation pattern of these five formal systems as corroborating evidence for my Pelasgian Hypothesis, and prefer to see African / South East Asian parallels (such as the presence of *mankala*, and ecstatic cults with equine imagery) not in the first place as resulting from transmission from West to East or East to West, but as parallel transmission of the West to Central Asian Pelasgian heritage. (also see ch 4, above, where my original argument on the spiked-wheel trap as Pelasgian is intergrally reprinted). As a result, I take it that the equine symbolism in ecstatic cults was not specifically invented in South East Asia, not in West Africa (where horses have been an important symbol of power for a millennium, cf. Law 1980; Harris 1982), but probably already adhered to the complex when still in West Asia (where the domesticated horse was every much in evidence, iconographically, ever since the second mill. BCE), or picked up on the way when being transmitted from West Asia to South East Asia.

These are the considerations triggered by my encounter with the Bali ecstatic Firecult.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ The same argument appears above in ch. 14, above, where in a long footnote I explain why I speak of Africa's 'cultural receptiveness' in this connection.

⁶¹⁵ Nor does this in the least exhaust the manifestations of trance cults in modern Bali; cf. Belo 1960. While conducting some limited local fieldwork in and around the town of Sanda, West Bali, in 2010, I witnessed (van Binsbergen



on the lion guardian statues, note the chequered cloth: a Balinese sign of ritual attention, especially on festival days; and on a more abstract level an iconography bringing out the reconciliation of opposites, like the well-known Chinese Taoist 陰陽 *yin / yang*



The lion statues make the staircase very similar to that of the Sigiriya Rock on Sri Lanka, as described in chapter 20 of this book, across a distance of over 4,000 kms; much nearer by, in Central Java, Indonesia (Groneman 1901 and personal fieldwork), similar sacred staircases with lion ornaments may be found at the Prambanan sacred complex, with Hindu connotations. Probably, the lion iconography is widespread, and highly significant; chapter 17 of the present book suggests that it is solar; in which case the stairs appears to represent the Sun's course across the sky.

Fig. 19.13. White cloth marking the steps to the holy of holies, in the community temple of the desa of Nyuh Kuning, near Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 2010

#19.3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHITE CLOTH. Another parallel between *Sangoma* and Bali religion (an a reinforcement of the Sunda perspective as profitably to be applied here) may be seen in the use of *white cloth* as marking a crucial sacred path (Fig. 32). When I was

2010a, 2010b) how during a ritual at our host's family temple (Fig. 19. 9), one of the family members entered into trance and divulged messages from the gods, having to do, among other things, with outstanding ritual obligations at a distant shrine, whose neglect had allegedly negatively affected the family. Throughout the Old World, such ritual omissions appear to be considered a principal reason for ancestors to manifest themselves in the world of the living; for Africa, I have from my personal fieldwork evidence of such a local interpretation from Islamic North Africa; the Nkoya of Zambia; and the *Sangoma* cult of Botswana. Further comparative research on this point appears to be worthwhile.

initiated into *ukutwaza* (i.e. apprentice mediumship) in Francistown, Botswana, in 1990, one of the items I was required to bring was a considerable length of white cotton cloth, about 10 m. long, which was to be laid out on the ground and over which my ritual leader Mma Shakayile was to guide me from the plot's central dancing area to the ancestral shrine where, after divination, the initiation was to be effected; adjacent was the cenotaph of Mma Shakayile brother or cousin Johannes, whose incarnation I was considered to be as a *Sangoma* -- my own grave, in other words. The piece of cloth is still in my possession and is considered to be one of a *Sangoma's* central paraphernalia.

An interesting study could be made of the role of white cloth in comparative religion and mythology.⁶¹⁶ In South Central Africa, such cloth (never manufactured locally in home industry, but invariably imported through the channel of long-distance trade – and presumably of a South Asian provenance, ultimately) had played a major role in the last few centuries before colonial rule (imposed ca. 1900 CE) as the standard article of wealth to be used as gifts to chiefs and big men, to be paid in settlement of debt notably as incurred in the case of manslaughter, and as sacrificial material to the ancestors and spirits – often offered at royal graves and shrines. Among the Nkoya people during the 20th c. CE, the use of white cloth was a prominent feature of the *Bituma* cult (van Binsbergen 1981). This use in the South Central African region was paralleled in West Africa, where the role of white cloth was amply described for the *Bunu*⁶¹⁷ people of Central Nigeria, West Africa (Renne 1991); and where, among the large Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria, the Sky God *Obatala*⁶¹⁸ was known as the 'King of the White Cloth'. We have several

⁶¹⁶ #19.4. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE COLOUR WHITE is too extensive a topic to discuss here in any meaningful detail. In sub-Saharan Africa white often has the connotations of the dead, of ancestors, spirits – and only secondarily of people of European descent. In other contexts white may have connotations of high status (e.g. designating Brahmin caste in South Asia) or innocence, e.g. in bridal attire in Western Europe. The significance of the category of White Gods for comparative mythology should not be underestimated, as my discussion in van Binsbergen & Woudhuijzen 2011: Table 6.3, p. 137 indicates; white gods (usually associated with Creation or Secondary Creation) include such figures as Heimdal, Śiva, but also the Flood Hero Noah, who is known to be an albino. The unreliable yet *grosso modo* meritorious and influential modern mythographer Robert Graves has concentrated (1964) on the category of the White Goddess, identifying Greek Rhea as an exponent. In my research on Flood myths, white aquatic birds have turned out to be widely venerated as epiphanies of the mythical Mother of the Waters often manifesting herself as another a White Goddess, and constituting, an early creatrix concept associated with the Separation of Water and Land.

⁶¹⁷ Phonologically, the name *Bunu* is a very simple lexical compound, which may be independently formed and parallel-wise re-invented everywhere on the globe. In this light it is probably sheer coincidence that *Bunu* is also the name of those of the Yao peoples of South East Asia who speak Hmongic or Miao languages (Anonymous, 'Bunu'). Similar coincidences are the (equally phonologically simple hence potentially repetitive) ethnonyms Yao (both in South East Asia and in Malawi); and Tonga (both in Malawi and several other places in South Central Africa, and in the Western Pacific – cf. my discussion in van Binsbergen 2020: 161 *f.* and *passim*, see that book's Index). However, such coincidence may be seen in a slightly different light when we become aware of many uncanny parallels between South East Asia and West Africa., notably in the field of material culture. Fig. 19.14 shows just one example. My personal hunch, which however I am still very far from substantiating, is that in the overall westbound movement of people, genes and cultural traits from South and South East Asia back into Africa from 15 ka BP, transcontinental continuities have been brought about which are so blatantly at variance with the geopolitical self-evidences of the last few centuries that they fail to convince.

⁶¹⁸ *Obatala* is the counterpart of the Earth goddess *Oduduwa*, and supposed to be locked with the latter in eternal embrace – much like *Uranus* and *Gaia* in Ancient Greek mythology, and *Rangi* and *Papa* in Oceanian mythology. For an extensive discussion of these and other most remarkable parallels in a Sunda perspective, see van Binsbergen 2020: Part II, pp. 353-460.

reasons to postulate Sunda influence upon the Bight of Benin and the further Nigerian coast, including (van Binsbergen 2019, 2020) the global distribution of head-hunting, and of the genetic markers (alpha and beta thalassaemias) that all over the Old World have been associated with possible Sunda influence. Further East along the postulated Sunda trajectory, we find an emphasis on white cloth very similar to that in West and South Central Asia in Sri Lanka. Here among the Tamil minority as described by Chitty 1992, white cloth is ceremonially used in a manner very similar to that in Africa (e.g. in the ceremony conferring caste membership upon an extramarital child (Chitty 1992: 56), and also in the marriage ceremony the booth is decorated with the same kind of cloth (Chitty 1992: 105 f.). Jayatilake, however, brings out (2003) that in Sri Lanka this use of white cloth is not limited to the Tamil minority but is also found in Sinhalese ritual contexts. e.g. around the ancient royal capital city of Kandy. In the latter context, ceremonial walking over white cloth is strongly reminiscent of the Southern African *Sangoma* practices. Interestingly, considering the overall Westerly direction of the postulated Sunda movement, the colour white is in the correlative cosmology of East Asia and particularly of Taoism, the colour of the West, of the planet Venus, and of Silver (Culin 1991). In *Korean Games* as described by Culin (1991 / 1895), a white cloth is spread upon the ground so as to create a demarcated ceremonial space – reminiscent of the sacred origin and the calendar connotation which have often been surmised for many games even if these are now entirely secularised. At the Western end of the Old World, such a white-cloth underground has been reported for ceremonial divination, both in the Graeco-Roman context and among the Ancient Germans and Celts (Graves 1988: 436; Tacitus, *Germania*, 1954 / cf. Much 1967; Warrington Eastlake. 1880, referring in passing to Normandy magicians, western France).

#19.5. A STUNNING CASE OF WEST AFRICAN / SOUTH EAST ASIAN CONTINUITY. Fig. 19.14 shows two elaborately decorated, modern walking sticks, practically identical, one from the amileke people, Western Grassfields, Cameroon, West Africa – the other from the Hill Tribes Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Can we identify a likely context for this uncanny parallelism between West Africa and continental South East Asia? In the first place, many more indications have been identified of the amazing inroads of Hinduism and Buddhism among the Atlantic coast of Africa – an aspect of Sunda expansion; detailed discussion is outside our present scope, but see Wuaku 2013; van Binsbergen 2017, 2019, 2020, and in press (c), where especially the probable Asian elements in present-day Bamileke culture, Western Grassfields, Cameroon, are highlighted. (Even more extensive discussions of Asian, specifically Sunda, inroads into culture and society of the present-day Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa, are offered in van Binsbergen 2020c and in press (b)) Specific clues are offered by a display in the Museum of Lanna / Thai Folklore, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020, explaining aspects of local Buddhist iconography. There it is claimed that a Buddhist shrine tends to contain a sacred representation of a ceremonial royal bed (*asana*), and associated with the latter are 'crown jewels' or regalia, notably: a walking stick, a royal fan, a royal umbrella, a whip, and a hat. These are usually made of carved wood decorated with Thai lacquer-work, placed on a ceremonial tray beside the royal *asana*. I take it that the Bamileke walking-stick, as a ceremonial object belonging to a high-ranking African noble (whose current status, in an environment largely devoid of Buddhist elements, may well have been a transformation of an original high ritual rank in Buddhism. I am indebted to my younger son, Dennis van Binsbergen, for accompanying me on the 2015 Bamileke fieldwork,



Practically indistinguishable ornamental walking sticks from the Hill Tribes in North-Western Thailand (held at the Hill Tribes Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020), and from the Bamileke in Cameroon (author's collection, 2006 – a gift from the Notable de Neuf Mr Touoyem Sr, whose village is situated only a few kms from Mbouda, Western Grassfields, Cameroon. Source: van Binsbergen 2020b. (c) is a painted statue of the predecessor of the 2015 Bamileke Chief of the town of Mbouda under its own ceremonial canopy – leaning on an ornate ceremonial walking stick, the right hand raised in a Buddhist *mudra* hand sign, and the robe decorated with motifs that seem to derive almost directly from the principal Indus / Harappa priestly royal statue. Incidentally, the chief healer at this court employs a pharmacopoea and diagnostics that are reminiscent of Chinese Taoism / Buddhism.

Fig. 19.14. Uncanny parallels between West Africa and South East Asia, interpreted from a Buddhist perspective.

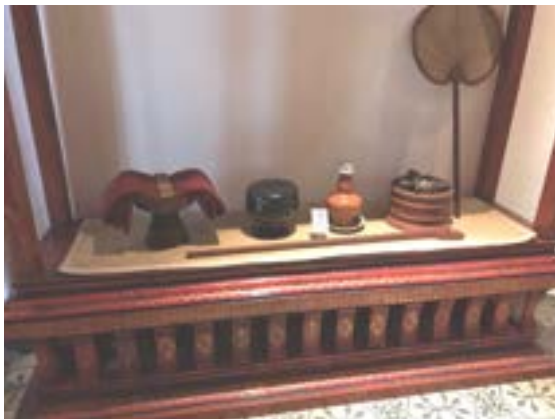


Fig. 19.15. Display of the typical contents of a Buddhist shrine at the Museum of Lanna / Thai Folklore, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2020,

I was reminded of the various regalia which were issued to me in the Western Grassfields, Cameroon, Africa, 2006, by the Bamileke notable Mr Touoyem, as tokens of my ceremonial incorporation in his family, being the PhD supervisor of his son Pascal. These regalia were somewhat reminiscent but certainly not identical to those listed above in the Chiang Mai museum. The Bamileke items included: a life specimen of the 'Arbre de la Paix', a plant symbolising peace; a carved walking stick, depicted here in Fig. 19.14 (b); a notable's ceremonial bag; a carved cow's or buffalo's horn – to which the son had already added, as a personal gift by himself, a year earlier, a ceremonial hat depicted at van Binsbergen 2005f.

19.6. Conclusion

These few impressions are not in themselves sufficient substantiation of my claim of historical parallels between Homa and Sangoma, but the overall context as elaborated elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1991, 2003, 2021) throws them in relief and reinforces the argument already made.

Chapter 20. ‘Fortunately he had stepped aside just in time’

Mythical time, historical time and transcontinental echoes in the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa⁶¹⁹

Although by its Greek and Ancient Egyptian etymology the concept of ‘myth’ would seem to be primarily predicated on the *narrative* dimension, its use in Modern (Post-Enlightenment) contexts, worldwide, hinges on an interplay of *truth* and its proverbial mother, *time*. A myth may be taken as the paroxysm of truth (*e.g.* a cosmogony or eschatology in the eyes of believers) or as an untruth (*e.g.* such a cosmogony or eschatology in the eyes of non-believers), but it often derives its peculiar status of hovering away from the plane of everyday reality from its dissociation *vis-à-vis* the here and the now – in other words, from a play on virtualities of space and time, as a stepping-stone towards transcendence. Could we say (*cf.* Cassirer) that in our Modern specialist usage as comparative mythologists, every myth is by its very nature in the first place a statement about the enigmatically oscillating nature of time?

I propose to pursue these pointers on the basis of one particular myth whose variations and ramifications I have explored since the early 1970s: the regional form which the widespread myth of the Tower into Heaven takes in South Central Africa. Recorded in the literature in dozens of attestations, and very much alive among the Nkoya people of Zambia as one of a handful of constitutive myths of kingship, this Solar or rather Lunar myth features a royal

⁶¹⁹ van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2016, ‘Fortunately he had stepped aside just in time’: Mythical time, historical time and transcontinental echoes in the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa’, paper read at the conference: Time and Myth: The Temporal and the Eternal; 10th Annual Conference, the International Association for Comparative Mythology Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic on May 26-28, 2016 (paper proposal only).

child's craving to wear that round white object up in the sky as a regalia (*mpande*, elsewhere in S.C. Africa also known as *ndoro*) – notably a pendant, breast jewellery. The entire nation is, disgruntledly, made to build a high Tower out of forked poles (hence the name of the royal parent: *Kapesh Kamununga Mpanda*: 'the *Kapesh* Who Joins The Forked Poles' – the name *apesh* lacks a Bantu etymology), so as to pluck the coveted object out of the sky – but before it can be reached, the brittle tower collapses under the weight of the people it carries, and we see another widespread mytheme come into effect: the fragmentation or confusion of early humankind into a plurality of dispersed languages and ethnic identities – the Confusion of Nations.



(a) Artist's impression of *Kapesh ka Munungampanda*, a mythical Tower in *Nkoya* mythology, South Central Africa; (b) A *Lo-tuho* age-set Tower, Southern Sudan, ca. 1990, photo: Simon Simonse, with thanks

Fig. 20.1. A mythical and a ritual Tower from sub-Saharan Africa

I have discussed this myth several times before, also in the IACM context (2nd Annual Meeting, 2008, proceedings 2010). Without wishing to specifically explore the symbolism of the forked poles (a time symbol?),⁶²⁰ I propose to take the analysis a few steps further on

⁶²⁰ Among the *Nkoya*, the forked branch is not explicitly discussed as a meaningful symbol, yet the central shrine of the *Bituma* cult has that form, and so do selected village shrines; the forked pole was the principalsym-

this occasion:

1. Reviewing the Nkoya myth within its comparative regional, continental and transcontinental comparative context (highlighting not only the obvious parallels with the Ancient Near East including the Bible World (e.g. *Genesis* 11:1-9), but also with cultural (initiatory and funerary) practices of ritual Tower building in East Africa and South East Asia in historical times)
2. Confronting the mythical narrative with an historic parallel from South Asia (Sigiriya, Sri Lanka), where the ruler Kashyapa,⁶²¹ a possible namesake / etymon of Kapesh, established an unassailable mountain fortress only to meet his doom when lured into the plain to give battle (all this against the background of considerable evidence concerning South Asian, specifically Buddhist, Hindu, and Chola influence upon S.C. Africa in the 1st and early 2nd mill. CE)
3. To the Nkoya people of the late 20th and early 21st c. CE, the Kapesh myth turns out to constitute a tangible, literal, timeless or presentist reality. Incumbents of royal titles in South Central Africa are supposed to form an unbroken chain of successors sharing and transmitting emphatically the same undivided identity; thus an incumbent uses the first person singular, 'I', when narrating any event situated during the reign of any of her or his named predecessors. This made it possible, in July 1989, for me to travel some 40 km NW from the royal capital of Mwene (King) Kahare in eastern Kaoma District, to the village of Mwene Kapesh, a nonagenarian who was supposed by the local people to tell me all about the Tower and its collapse, and how he had managed to survive this primal disaster: *'Fortunately he had stepped aside just in time'*.

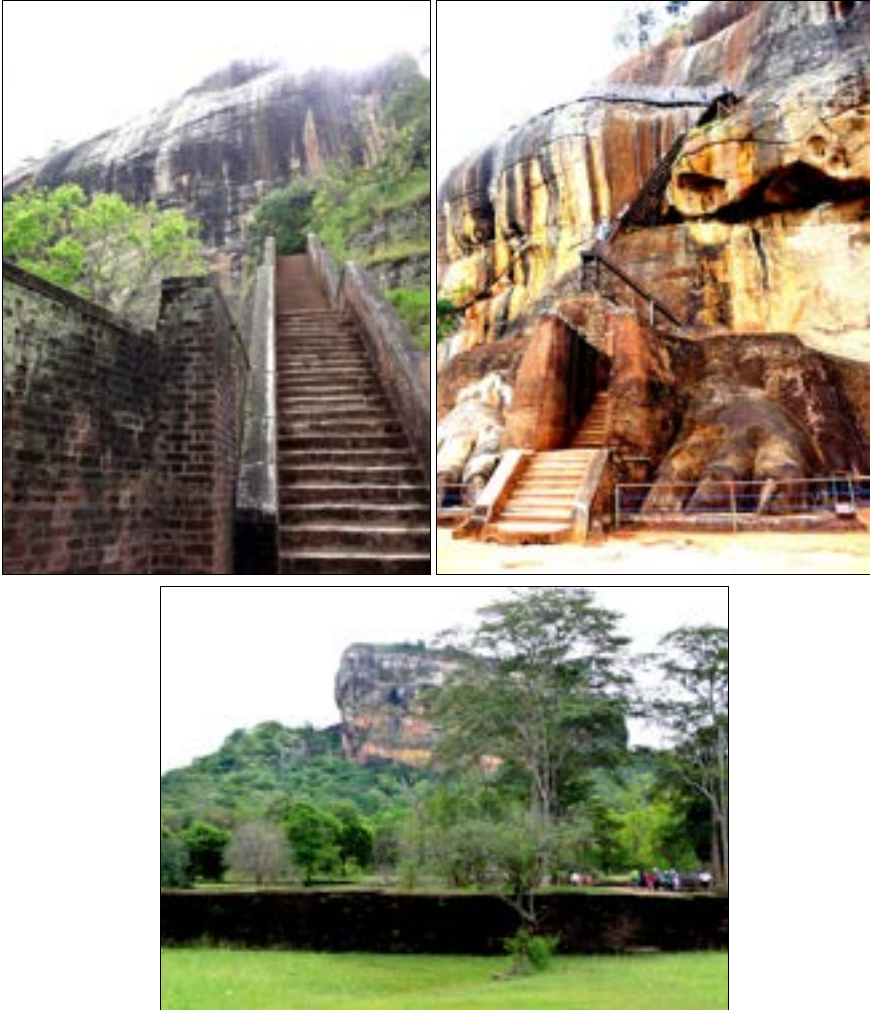
The point is not that our proposed royal informant turned out to be too senile for coherent interviewing. The point is that a myth which is clearly thousands of years old and distributed over at least three continents, yet managed to be brought to life in a specific, present-day periphery of the world, *under the spell of the local people's peculiar, mythical conception of time*. The case reveals, as a feature of Nkoya culture (and perhaps as a feature of 'savage thought' in general, *i.e.* – Lévi-Strauss – Anatomically Modern Humans' spontaneous, untutored, non-specialist thought wherever and whenever, but especially in effectively illiterate contexts) *the self-evident interpenetration of mythical and real time*. It does not stand on its own in a culture like that of the Nkoya, where (another transcontinental echo?) reincarnation beliefs and name-inheritance ritual practices constantly both affirm, and deny, the reality and inescapability of death, and of time.

Could not our amazement at such naïve handling of time simply reflect the extent to which

bol and shrine in the widespread prophetic ecological cult which the leper Mupumani (from the neighbouring Ila people) launched in 1915, and which despite its initial success died down as soon as, within a few months, he had been arrested for vagrancy... (van Binsbergen 1981). I cannot go here into the global mythological symbolism of the Forked Branch, which is as yet little elaborated in comparative mythology. Yet a simple *Wikipedia* search on 'forked branch' already yields a dozen promising returns, to be explored in the future. Disappointingly, Hastings's (1909-1921) usually so helpful *Encyclopaedia* has nothing to offer on this point, although there are a few discussions of branches and twigs – but not specifically *forked* ones. Mathematically / topologically, the forked branch is a very inspiring figure, a likely symbol of chance events and of causal alternatives.

⁶²¹ In the Jataka, the accounts of the Buddha's earlier incarnation and infancy, another king Kashyapa occurs, who submits to the Buddha's superior spiritual power; *cf.* Musaeus-Higgins 2000: 244f.

our own thinking (scholarly, specialised and logocentric as it has been disciplined to be), has been weaned away from widespread *standard* human modes of going about time? Could it not just be an artefact of text-based scholarship? A sign of the constructed, artificial, alienated stance on which even the New Comparative Mythology of the last decades is predicated?



(a) Ascending the rock fortress; (b) as (a), note the lion's paws flanking the final stair-case to the top; (c) view from the valley below

Fig. 20.2. The originally Chola rock fortress of Sigiriya, Sri Lanka, 2011

Chapter 21. Michael Witzel's 2012 *magnum opus* on the history of world mythology – Ten years after (2007 / 2022)

My farewell to the New Comparative Mythology as a collective undertaking⁶²²

21.1. Introduction

The great driving force behind Michael Witzel's incessant endeavour, throughout the first decade of the present millennium, to turn comparative mythology (considered by many as intellectually and politically suspect and dated, even dead) into a thriving, innovative, and inspiring field, *was the fact that he personally, after reaping great fame in the field of Indian studies, had embarked, already before the year 2000, on the most ambitious comparative-mythological project that could be imagined: to retrieve humankind's oldest myths, and to systematically trace their development through the millennia right on to modern times.* Per-

⁶²² This text is based on what was originally my 2007 unpublished referee's report on the MS of: Michael Witzel, *Homo Fabulans: Origins And Dispersals Of Our First Mythologies*, finally published as Witzel 2012. The subtitle is a pun on the title of the original author's (i.e. Dumas's) sequel to Dumas, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1846, 1850); I used the same pun for the title of my collection on the *Black Athena* debate (van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011). In order to preserve the argument's original format as a reader's report, I have kept the publisher's original headings (albeit between quotation marks), and have relegated my extensive later additions to footnotes. Of course I realise the blatant discrepancy between the positive tone of the official reader's report, and the incisive, sometimes dismissive tone of the later, critical footnotes. I was certainly not being unfair or subservient or mercenary when I wrote my 2007, positive report – but I needed the incubation time of well over a decade before I could see Witzel's astounding work in its proper perspective, allowing also the darker shades to show up.

sonally also engaged in the passionate study of myth throughout my academic life, as a literary writer and as an anthropologist of religion in North and sub-Saharan Africa, I was co-opted to Witzel's international, transcontinental, movement in the early 2000s, and rapidly became a regular and vocal participant in the international scholarly meetings which Witzel organised on an annual basis, in order to keep his own project under a constant flow of collegial inspiration and new comparative data (*more than under a constant flow of critical feedback – fundamental theoretical and methodological debates were generally discouraged at such meetings, as I soon learned to my dismay*). In Beijing, 2006, I was among the few to stand at the cradle of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, and I served on its board of director for one and a half decades. I was to be one of a handful of specialists consulted by Oxford University Press as expert readers, when Witzel had submitted a draft of his intended, final book to that famous publishing house. The present chapter is built around my confidential 2007 reader's report, but with many amendments and extensions. I had hoped to work that report into a fully fledged review article to be published in the early 2010s, but even though Michael continued to solicit my participation in his circle of comparative mythology, and sent me several complimentary copies when the book was finally published (as *The Origins Of The World's Mythologies*, 2012),⁶²³ I never got round to fulfil my

⁶²³ As a glance at the Google Scholar bibliographic website immediately reveals, the book was very well received upon publication, and rapidly became a standard reference in discussions not only of myth, but also of comparative religion and further related fields. Most reviewers were duly impressed, even enthusiastic (Cusack 2013 is a good example; also cf. Lyle 2018, 2019 – my dear friend and colleague Emily Lyle being another long-standing member of Witzel's circle, and another former director of the IACM). Tsonis in the *Journal of Religious History* (2014) came close to appreciating the uniqueness of Witzel's achievement as a successful (?) attempt to join human and scientific time scales:

'Over the last two decades new forms of macrohistory have emerged that unite broad scientific time scales with the shorter time scales of human history. But although we have witnessed major strides in "big history" alongside a slew of works on the evolution of human culture, up to now there has been little sustained integration of the new paradigms with traditional fields of humanistic scholarship. This is particularly the case with "evolutionary" treatments of religion. However, a connection has finally been established, and the two provocative books reviewed in this article [one of them being Witzel 2012 – WvB] have opened up new terrain in the study of religion.'

Other commentators did bring in examples from their own specialist research to back up Witzel's argument. Thus Václav Blažek (2014), yet another long-standing director of the IACM, adduced, in the journal *Mother Tongue* whose readership has greatly overlapped with the Witzel circle, additional comparative-linguistic material in an vain attempt to back up Witzel's contentious Gondwana / Laurasian mythological dichotomy; below I shall come back to this plausible linguistic – although mythologically barren, not to say perverse – point. But already we can see a major weakness in Witzel's intellectual strategy: the very people he has co-opted over the years to offer him feedback in his impossibly ambitious project, despite their individual brilliance have almost been reduced to stooges because of the organisational web of friendship, patronage and financial / organisational dependence in which they have been spun in. Meanwhile an outsider to Witzel's circle, Jörg Bäcker (2017) in *Fabula*, was very critical on a wide selection of pertinent methodological and theoretical points. And Brian Collins in the *Religious Studies Review* (2014) could hardly conceal his disappointment at Witzel's book:

'Even the most cynical mythologist cannot help but be intrigued by the project that Witzel tackled with such determination and care, but one will likely be disappointed with what will be found at the end of Witzel's treasure hunt: vague generalities including a high god, a Demiurge, and stories of the creation of the world and of humans.'

Given that fact that such generalities have been comparative religion's main stock-in-trade for well over a century, one can only wonder what more Collins had expected? The same type of unimpressive gener-

intentions with the present text. Ill health, and numerous rival writing projects, go some way to explain this omission, but the main reason was that I was torn between, on the one hand, my great indebtedness to, and admiration for, Michael and, on the other hand, my increasing abhorrence at his defective interdisciplinary appropriation of my own original and still profoundly cherished field, being anthropology, both socio-cultural and physical (including genetics). One does not immediately realise that nearly half of his book's stunningly impressive bibliography consists of anthropological texts, and that he likes to speak of 'his fieldwork' (notably at the 2010 Harvard *Homa* conference reported on elsewhere in the present volume) when what is really involved is merely a few days inquisitive strolling in the Katmandu Valley, Nepal.

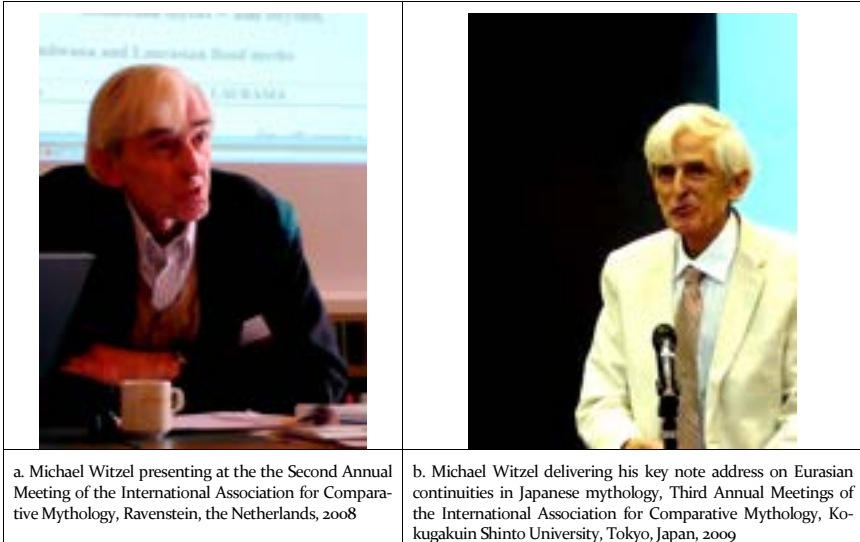


Fig. 21.1. Two glimpses of Michael Witzel as the leading comparative mythologist

alities constitute the meagre results of Fontenrose's masterly *tour de force* in (what I take to be) one of comparative mythology's most treasured texts, *Python* (1959 / 1980). Is it, as Collins wrongly suggests, for such superficial generalities, such shallow insights that would do well on a wall tile, an embroidered hanging, or a *New Age* magazine, that people are attracted to Comparative Mythology? Scarcely, and Witzel's great achievement – whatever the defects – deserves to be judged by more essential criteria that Collins has in stock. For many students of myth, whose temporal horizon has normally not extended further back than the Ancient Greeks, Witzel's tracing back to the Middle Palaeolithic has been a similar eye opener as it has been for me myself, when – always with one eye on the remotest past anyway – I was immediately enamoured with the new vistas he was opening already twenty years ago (Witzel 2001). F.M. Smith in *The Religious Studies Review* (2013) could not resist the temptation to fashionably label Witzel's innovative achievement by coining another phrase with 'turn' as the catchword – after the *Linguistic Turn* (Rorty 1970), the *Postmodern Turn* (Best & Kellner 1997), the *Sociological Turn* (in the study of scientific rationality, Brown 1984), the *Cultural Turn* (Jameson 1998), the *Ontological Turn* (in anthropology, Viveiros de Castro 1992; Vulto 2019), the *Postcolonial Turn* (Devisch & Nyamnyoh 2011), etc. etc. Regrettably, falling in with current and ephemeral fashion is not a sign of greatness. Then what is?

Similarly, I was concerned about Witzel's remarkable unheedfulness of my later field, intercultural philosophy (which explores – beyond the pretended 'positivistic' and 'value-free' orientation of philological scholarship as established in the West in the 19th c. CE, and as still largely cherished by Witzel; cf. Said 1978; Bernal 1987-2006; van Binsbergen 2003) the conditions under which reliable and valid transcultural knowledge may be produced and transmitted; such conditions include – far more than Witzel seems to be aware of – the global politics of knowledge *i.e.* ways to respect both the prerogatives and sensitivities of the original owners of such knowledge.)

It was Michael's doing that I repeatedly and greatly benefitted from Harvard funding towards my conference attendances in the United States, Japan and China, rubbing shoulders especially with Asianists including many Asian-born colleagues, and thus could enlarge the scope my scholarship, broadening my specialisation as an Africanist and Mediterraneanist in ways that were to have great impact on my publications in the 2010s and after. I am afraid that my full and fundamental critique of Michael's 2012 book (in anticipation of that final critique my present volume was delayed by nearly a decade) will never materialise, and instead the present short chapter will have to do. I retain the requesting publisher's own suggested headings, putting them between quotation marks; yet the contents of the sections thus headed have been greatly expanded since the assessment was originally made, in 2007.

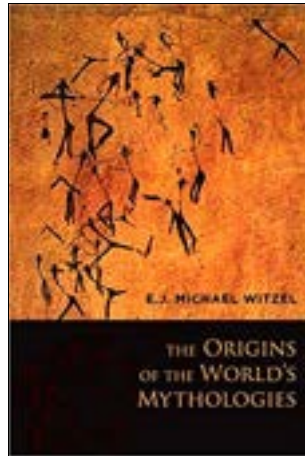


Fig. 21.2. Cover of Michael Witzel, *The Origins Of The World's Mythologies* (2012)

20.2. 'Rationale, purpose or thesis of the work'

The rationale of Witzel's monograph is:

- to demonstrate – by reference to such ancillary fields as genetics, archaeology, comparative ethnography and historical linguistics – the great antiquity and the amazing inter-relatedness of most of humankind's mythologies as attested and documented in historical times but most probably going back many millennia into humankind's past;

- to trace their interconnectedness, underlying communality of story-lines, and historical development, in broadly two categories allegedly coinciding with a (rather idiosyncratic) geographic division of the world into Laurasia (Eurasia and North America) and Gondwana (the rest of the world), with an even older layer of 'Pan-Gaia' (i.e. global) mythologies underlying both categories;
- and to indicate the implications of this great antiquity and coherence for world religions and for other central socio-cultural and political phenomena during historical times, all the way up to modern life, in which these mythologies, however transformed and distorted, continue to have considerable impact – but perhaps not enough.

20.3. 'Assessment of scholarship'

The author is a prominent scholar who has made path-breaking and widely acclaimed contributions in the field of South Asian philology – especially in relation to the ideologically highly charged question as to the region of origin of the Vedic scriptures which are constitutive of South Asian religion. His command of the field of comparative mythology is unrivaled, and his knowledge of the ancillary fields pressed into service (especially historical linguistics and genetics) impressive. I am less convinced⁶²⁴ of the superior quality of his archaeology and deplore his anthropology, where a tendency

⁶²⁴ The rather negative reviewer Lincoln in *Asian Ethnology* (2015) makes a similar critical point, yet cannot be wholeheartedly endorsed:

'In spite of these admirable efforts, Witzel's knowledge of the data beyond India (and to a lesser extent, Japan) remains understandably spotty, since mastering the requisite materials, languages, and cultures would take more than a lifetime. Inevitably, anyone who attempts to work on so large a scale relies on secondary sources, among which one must thus choose wisely. In some areas, however, Witzel seems to have read little more than a book or two by his Harvard colleagues (for example, Carrasco 1982 and Sullivan 1988), or to have relied on works written by poets, rather than ranking authorities (Graves 1955 [/ 1964] ; Colum 1937). Worse still, when treating the myths of non-literary societies, Witzel consistently ignores the more recent, more reliable, and less prejudicial work of British, American and French anthropologists, in favor of dated German literature steeped in the *Kulturkreis* paradigm, which used a mix of racial, cultural, and geographic factors to categorize the world's peoples in ways that naturalized, legitimate and reinforced the privilege of Europe's colonial powers.(...)

Lincoln thus claims Witzel to be guilty by association – and for convenience's sake kicks up the dead horse of allegedly antiquarian, irrelevant, racist German anthropology of an earlier vintage. But it remains unclear on what grounds Lincoln makes his assessment. Does he prefer the non-German writers perhaps simply because they are recent, and (in the light of 20th c. CE world history) non-German? In a time when German was recognized as the international scholarly *lingua franca* (more so than English), Germans such as Kant and Boas (cf. Ballard 1982), as well as German-informed pioneers such as Malinowski and Durkheim, stood at the cradle of international anthropology including the anthropological study of myth, and Frobenius – leading German Africanist of his generation – made mythical recordings and analyses which still compel at least my own respect. Lincoln considers the non-German, more recent research on myth 'more reliable, and less prejudicial', and by his implication supposed to be far removed from the hegemonic myopia that – however regrettable – certainly was not the exclusive prerogative of the older German ethnologists. Nor is it clear (certainly not to me, who am a published poet) why poets by the nature of their profession would be less equipped to appreciate myths than 'ranking authorities'; elsewhere (2003b, this book ch. 3) I have made a plea to the contrary, stressing the necessary fusion of the scholarly student of myth, with the myth she studies. The point is not that Robert Graves primarily identified as a poet (although I prefer his literary prose); having had an old-fashioned gentleman's education as son of the inspector of schools in South England in the early 20th c. CE, brought him not only traumatic, though predictable, public-school experiences of social and sexual oppression and parental disloyalty (Graves 1929), but also a thorough acquaintance with the Graeco-Roman classics. This in itself allowed him to

to reification and schematisation may be detected, at the expense of a methodological awareness of how such knowledge is, and was, produced in the first place, before entering the standardised, contextless collections – the comprehensive handbooks from which comparative mythologists regrettably but understandably tend to derive much of their data.

20.4. ‘Assessment of writing style’

The author writes by and large an impeccable intercontinental English. However, sometimes his style is cramped (but hear who is talking...) by the tendency to weave long sentences with many subordinate clauses. Such a tendency is paramount, and syntactically supported, in his native German, as it is in my own native Dutch. English however largely lacks the required syntactic means and therefore is more comfortable with shorter sentences. Some slight editing may need to be done, preferably by a native speaker. (I am happy to perceive that the manuscript was in fact subjected to very heavy in-house editing, even after Witzel himself spent several years revising it, and came out splendidly in print.)

20.5. ‘Assessment of organization’

The book is obviously the impressive and successful result of many years of untiring library research, hard thinking, and wide (if sometimes often perfunctory and shielded) international debate. To facilitate the latter, the writer has instituted and found funding for the eminently successful Harvard Round Tables, an intercontinental conference circuit that was to be running for a decade. In the meantime the Harvard Round Tables have had an organisational spinoff of even wider international and interdisciplinary scope: The International Association for Comparative Mythology (IACM), which was founded at Witzel’s initiative at Beijing, People’s Republic of China, in 2006. The enormous stimulation and validation which this tightly textured and high-grade intellectual environment has had on Witzel’s own project over the years can hardly be overestimated – although it has also very clearly entailed the risk of offering a cushioning and legitimating context in which the hard nuts of debate and paradigmatic disagreement could be expected, by outsiders, to have been cracked – but very seldom were.

The book’s overall organization could hardly be improved. However, given that overall conception, to judge by the synopsis the final two chapters (8. ‘The meaning of Laurasian mythology’, and ‘Epilogue’) would seem to have come out rather shorter than the eminent importance of their subject matter would warrant. For it is here that the lessons are presented which the argument’s prehistoric reconstruction has in stock for the last few millennia of historical times, and for today. The ramification of these very ancient mythologies into familiar world religions and into today’s geopolitics is of the greatest importance. Full treatment on these points would make the book directly relevant to an entire additional range of readership beyond the relatively narrow field of comparative mythology alone. It is

produce one of the most successful popular compendia of classical mythology (Graves 1964 / 1955), even though it has been widely acknowledged among scholars (the late lamented Nick Allen in his very charitable review of Witzel 2012 makes the same point; but also Nick belonged to Witzel’s inner circle of comparative mythologists) that Graves’s many inaccuracies and often nonsensical etymologies render his compendium largely unfit for scholarly use except with the utmost prudence.

my impression that these two final chapters could be developed to greater length and could thus further enhance the book's already striking qualities.

20.6. 'Does the work make a significant contribution to the field?'

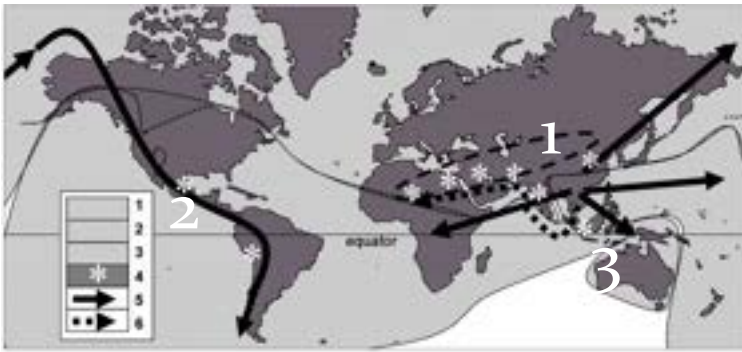
The work is undeniably a land-slide contribution to the field, at a par with (and perhaps surpassing) the contributions associated with such great names as Müller, Frazer, Lévi-Strauss, Jung, Campbell, Dumézil, Eliade. These writers wrote between a few decades and a century ago, and Witzel's book is in my opinion a timely rethinking of the entire field of comparative mythology, which for the first time takes into serious account the gigantic developments made, in recent decades, in the fields of genetics and comparative linguistics. *It will be the standard text on diachronic and global comparative mythology for decades – perhaps not so much for its actual results, but as a touchstone and inventory of some the most pressing research questions in this field.*

20.7. 'Suggestions for improvement'

- 1) For one suggestion for improvement I refer to the above section on organization of the book.
- 2) Also another point of criticism I have already noted: *the tendency to reify and schematise the findings from such fields as (comparative) ethnography and archaeology* – where, as is commonly recognised, today's interdisciplinary borrowing tends to be only yesterday's intradisciplinary wisdom, not just in this book, but in general. To a considerable extent this kind of dilemma also applies to the other fields on which the author leans heavily, genetics and historical linguistics. One cannot be an expert authority in all the ancillary disciplines involved, but how to combine transdisciplinary borrowing with the fact that *inside* disciplines, the insights borrowed are (by the very nature of scientific theories) *preliminary, contested, and often* (e.g. as far as the definition and delineation of linguistic super families are concerned) *represent minority positions within their particular discipline?* For genetics and linguistics, it is my personal impression (as a moderately informed non-specialist) that the transdisciplinary selections which the author is employing for his comparative mythological argument, are state-of-the-art, valid and fundamentally sound – yet this does not exhaustively solve – in fact, scarcely addresses – the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological problems involved. In such a context, to speak of Popperian *falsification* is naïve, invokes the wrong methodological register, and invites severe epistemological criticism. Fundamentally, this is also the range of dilemmas implied in authoring an interdisciplinary book as a single author – but admittedly there is no alternative in the short run, for one could hardly imagine, in this *pioneering* phase of the New Comparative Mythology, an interdisciplinary collective equipped with the visionary mythological insights (and the lavish funding resources) that now emanate from every page of Witzel's manuscript. When I remember the absolutely devastating institutional opposition that attended my own engagement with the subject (as set out in one of the first footnotes to the Introduction of my present book), as well as the seminal (although far from impeccable) example

of another one of my intellectual heroes (for Michael Witzel is certainly one), notably Martin Gardiner Bernal (cf. Bernal 1987-2006; Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers 1996; van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011) and many more examples from the recent History of Ideas could be given), 'going it alone' is often the best strategy for success in a courageous but controversial attempt at scientific innovation. (In fact my present book is another example, for better or worse).

3) A third point concerns the dichotomy between Laurasian and Gondwana – an obsolescent terminology borrowed from geology, and there referring to processes extending *over tens, even hundreds, of millions of years*, rather than (like in the case of the mythologies of Anatomically Modern Humans, the subject matter of this book) *tens of thousands of years* – a difference of 10^4 in order of magnitude.⁶²⁵ The use of these terms, which I have repeatedly chided (also in my present book) and to Witzel's unmistakable awareness, lends an unfortunate ring of primordality to the mythologies involved.



⁶²⁵ Meanwhile the Gondwana / Laurasia distinction has already been critically adopted by Indian scholars, e.g. Sreenathan & Rao 2010; Sreenathan 2008, where the admixture of allegedly Laurasian and Gondwana traits in the pivotal context of the Andamanese is, fortunately, a reason to contest the absolute nature of Witzel's distinction. The Andamanese (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1922) are pivotal because they represent a trace of Anatomically Modern Humans's First Sally Out-of-Africa, 80-60 ka BP, which stands out in their genetic pattern (Endicott 2003; Thangaraj 2003) and apparently also in their mythology – including a Creation and Flood story (Weber & Weber *n.d.*) which one would not expect here in terms of Witzel's typology. Weiss (2017) takes the *a priori* validity of Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy for granted, but uses it as a stepping stone towards indicating the possible use of quantitative methods in order to settle a fundamental question in comparative mythology, notably *the Mytheme Of The Struggle Between Celestial And Terrestrial Gods*, familiar from Japanese, Indian, Greek, and Scandinavian mythology:

The historical-comparative approaches of Georges Dumézil and Michael Witzel take the wide distribution of this theme into account and explain it with common origin. Dumézil believes that the Indo-Europeans shared a tripartite ideology which was represented in their social structure as well as in their myths. According to this theory, one group of deities represented the 'functions' of 'king / priest' and of 'warrior' while the other group (which loses the struggle) represents the function of 'cultivator / herder'. Witzel, on the other hand, argues that the theme can be explained as one episode in the 'Laurasian story line' which was created by our ancestors some 40,000 years ago in or near south-western Asia and subsequently diffused parallel to the spread of the human race [read: *Anatomically Modern Humans*]. After a discussion of these two theories, I will suggest how quantitative approaches like social network analysis, phylogenetics or principal component analysis might enable us to counter-check these hypotheses and be instrumental in either refuting them or placing them – and thereby the often highly speculative field of comparative mythology as such – on a firmer scientific fundament.'

Needless to say that I am immensely sympathetic to Weiss's assertion as to the use of quantitative methods, (cf. chs 15 and 16 of my present book), but I am far from sure whether he has successfully carried out his proposals.

1. (a) Continental cluster of disintegrated *Borean (Eurasianic including Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, Dravidian, Kartvelian, Eskimo-Aleutic)
 2. (b) Peripheral cluster of disintegrated *Borean (Austic, Amerind (misc.) and African languages (misc.) with the exception of Afroasiatic ones (such as Omotic, Chadic, Berber, Old Egyptian, Semitic), Afroasiatic, Sinocaucasian)
 3. Unclassified Indo-Pacific cluster (languages of Australia and New Guinea)
 4. Major civilisation centre, Early Holocene – Late Bronze Age
 5. Major linguistico-cultural (including mythological) transfers, Upper Paleolithic to Neolithic
 6. as (5), conjectural
 7. (broken ellipse) proposed Extended Fertile Crescent
- Note the inroads of Eyak-Athabaskan < [Dene-]Sinocaucasian languages in North America

Fig. 21.3. World regions associated with the Continental and the Peripheral Cluster of disintegrated *Borean

This erroneous suggestion of primordially also obscures the very extensive continuities which in fact exist, demonstrably (as I have personally repeatedly demonstrated, also in the context of the present book and its constituent chapters as published earlier), between the mythologies of sub-Saharan Africa and those of the rest of the Old World (*i.e.* Eurasia). Excellent genetic and culture historical explanations⁶²⁶ exist for such continuities, which in Witzel's approach are swept under the carpet of clear-cut terminological distinctions, while the latter are mistaken to be, not just ephemeral and alien theoretical constructs imposed upon relatively poor data, but to constitute real and absolute populational and socio-mythical differences on the ground. Also the reification of Australia and New Guinea as inherently 'Gondwana' obscures similar continuities – the historical result of other, much later inroads from continental and insular South and South East Asia into Australia and New Guinea, tens of thousands of years after these two large islands formed the final destination of Anatomically Modern Humans' First Sally Out-of-Africa, 80,000 (or, by the downgrading which Witzel prefers, 60,000) years Before Present.

Must we fault Witzel's dichotomy simply on the grounds that it is politically incorrect and does not accord a place of equality to the peoples and cultures of the Southern Hemisphere? The distorted representation of a state-of-the-art scientific truth because of that truth being unwelcome to some of the interest groups concerned, has marked the debates around *Black Athena* and Afrocentricity, and brought *e.g.* the prominent, initially feminist classicist Mary Lefkowitz to write a pamphlet entitled *Not Out Of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became An Excuse To Teach Myth As History* (1996; also see Berlinerblau 1999). Witzel's critical (not to say belligerent) engagement with Hindu fundamentalism makes it very clear that he endorses Lefkowitz's point and does not wish yield to Political Correctness. But should we not fault the (politically blatantly incorrect) Laurasian / Gondwana (≈ North / South, ≈ White-to-Brown / Brown-to-Black, ≈ Coloniser / Colonised, ≈ World Language / Local Language, ≈ World Religion / Paganism) dichotomy *on empirical grounds*?

In Table 8.1, above, I have summarised my glottochronological statistical analysis of the interrelations between the major linguistic macrophyla spoken in the world today. Fig. 21.3 sums up what this means geographically on a world scale.

The resulting world map looks *deceptively* like the dichotomous world picture Witzel presents to us in terms of

⁶²⁶ Including the Out-of-Africa Hypothesis, the Back-into-Africa Hypothesis, The Pelasgian Hypothesis, and the Sunda Hypothesis – all of which are amply covered, with extensive references, in my recent work, including the present book.

- (a) Laurasian mythology, versus
- (b) Gondwana mythology (cf. Fig. 3.2, below),

yet there are fundamental differences. In Fig. 21.3, the Western Hemisphere is very largely (b), and so are sub-Saharan Africa, South East Asia, and Oceania. On the other hand, Eurasia, Northern Africa, and Northern North America, are (a), with remarkable inroads into South Asia (the Indian peninsula) and Western North America (the Eyak-Athabaskan languages, a branch of (Dene-)Sinocaucasian). Australia and New Guinea have yet to find their place in this world picture, but since they were among the few regions to be peopled in the first Out-of-Africa wave of 80-60 ka BP they have certainly partaken of some Pre-*Borean Pan-Gaian substrate and are unlikely to fundamentally upset the overall picture – although we must acknowledge far more recent inroads from Austric, *i.e.* (b). In terms of land surface, what upsets the Laurasian / Gondwana / North ./ South equation here is that the majority of (b) regions lie North of the equator, a part of the world also (a) is entirely confined to.

When we take (as in Fig. 21.3) the Oppenheimer-Dick-Read-Tauchmann's Sunda Hypothesis into account (whose eminent relevance and validity I have recently published an international collective work and a massive monograph (van Binsbergen 2019a, 2020c), the picture of the South's apparent passive retardedness (totally unacceptable under today's global politics of knowledge) may be supplanted by a picture of Sunda initiative emanating from South East Asia. We are absolutely unable to reconstruct in detail the civilisation of early Holocene Sundaland before the melting of the polar caps caused the sea level to rise globally by c. 200 m, turning much of South East Asia into an archipelago of islands, and dispelling much of its original population in all directions – eastward to further populate the Pacific, northward to impact upon East Asia (Taiwan, China, Japan), southward to add to the much older population of Australia, and westward to impact upon South and West Asia, Africa, and the Mediterranean (somewhat contributing, to extents that remain to be ascertained, to civilisational innovations in all these regions, including China, the Indus, the Persian Gulf, Phoenicia, Egypt, Crete, West and East Africa). Part of this movement, probably largely overland rather than maritime, has been the westbound transfer of language elements (and the attending cultural, including mythological, components) from the Peripheral Cluster of disintegrating *Borean, giving rise – either still in Asia, or in West Africa – to the emergence of Nigercongo (> Bantu), and probably also to the related lesser cluster of Nilosaharan. The emerging picture cannot be considered to be totally unrelated to the crucial emergence of civilisations in the Extended Fertile Crescent, ranging (as a belt of seething Neolithic innovation in modes of production and socio-politico-religious organisation, from the then fertile Sahara all the way to China). In this way the world picture is no longer a direct, and suspect, reflection of hegemonic global relationships in the 19th c. CE under North Atlantic / White, and suggests the gives and tends to be rather equitably distributed among the regions and continents of the Old World.⁶²⁷

Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy has rapidly been incorporated into the accepted toolkit for long-range analysis, especially by scholars who might not be able to test the di-

⁶²⁷ And what about the New World? Must it remain on the passive, receptive side *vis-à-vis* the Old World? Here there is room for considerable rethinking. One of the early outcomes of my quantitative analysis of Flood myth (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) has been that certain features of Flood stories may have a New World origin and may have been transmitted from America to Eurasia across the Beringia divide in the Early Holocene. The fact that globally the New World has far more Flood myths than the Old World may be read as pointing in the same direction. We have already covered the same ground in chs 15 and 16, above.

chotomy either on its empirical or on its ideological, hegemonic implications. Others however have, like I myself, noted the racial(ist) implications of the distinction; e.g. Chakrabarti 2019 asserts

'Michael Witzel's categorization of world mythologies, its geological denominations have lent it racial and cultural significance';

but I am not sure whether Chakrabarti disapproves of such racial perspective as much as I do myself.

4) A considerable problem in a project of this scope in space and time lies in the methodology of handling prehistoric mythemes, for which there are by definition no written texts, and which therefore need to be reconstructed by scholarly extrapolation from much later, written text (with the danger of imposing the thought models of specialist scholarly thinking upon what is essentially [*de la*] *pensée sauvage*' (Lévi-Strauss 1963) – or by a conjectural reading of iconographic material that lacks the historic participants's subtitling. *There is a problem of circularity here: only by detailed and systematic reference to a widely accepted and tightly argued list of ancient core mythemes can we begin to read prehistoric iconographies* – even though much of the current work in this field (the highly acclaimed work by Lewis-Williams and Dowson and their followers, initially only on Southern African rock, meanwhile also on European equivalents) wrongly suggests that this is a solved problem as long as we insist, as an incessant mantra, on the link with entoptics and shamanism. However, in order to construct such a list of ancient core mythemes (my present book also makes some proposals in that direction, after all, it pretends to have *Prised Open Pandora's Box*; – and cf. van Binsbergen 2018: espec. chs. 8 and 9), *we need to pretend to understand the prehistoric iconographies in the first place*. But beyond inner consistency and our carefully honed scholarly art of persuasion, what grounds do we have for such pretension? I am not convinced that Witzel's approach to this tangle of problems is methodologically and theoretically sufficiently sophisticated so as to claim that it has already yielded such a list. Admittedly, the manifest usefulness of Witzel's approach for prehistoric interpretations by James Harrod (2010), a seasoned researcher in this field, suggests that Witzel may have come a considerable way. Witzel certainly pays a lot of attention to prehistoric iconographies (one specimen of rock art even makes up his 2012 book's cover illustration), knows the literature rather well, and has enlisted, through his long list of international conferences, the (none too vocal) feedback from some of the major prehistorians of our time. But, just as I do not trust his anthropology while being a seasoned anthropologist myself, I have difficulty trusting his prehistory even though I cannot really claim recognised specialist competence here (my international specialist contributions to archaeology have been few and far between: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 1997 / 2011).

5) The above criticisms mainly reflect my life-long identity as an empirical researcher in the fields of history, ethnography, and religion, mainly in Africa and the Mediterranean. Finally, however, and more specifically as an intercultural philosopher, I would have liked to see the following point more explicitly developed (or confronted!) in Witzel's book. It is his conviction that *we live by the power of myth* (a claim implied rather than explicitly argued in this book, but that is not my point). If this is the case, finding ultimate prehistoric convergence of mythologies whilst such mythology also endures, and continues to shape our beliefs and politics, to this very day, *represents a most effective and convincing claim as to the existential unity of present-day humankind* (cf. van Binsbergen 2015: 7 f., 2020f). This is a message we

might well cherish, now that recent globalisation has more and more led to conflictive dichotomies. If I fundamentally disapprove of the Gondwana-Laurasian dichotomy reified in Witzel's work, it is not only because I think it is (pre-)historically wrong, but also because I know it is Politically Incorrect, *i.e.* devastating from a point of today's geopolitics and politics of knowledge. It risks to reiterate the inveterate distinction between North and South, 'the West and the rest' (while the extension to North America somehow accommodates the USA as the (now rapidly obsolescent) seat of global hegemony in recent decades – at the expense of the far more conspicuous mythological continuity between North, Meso and South America). Such a North-South dichotomy is in itself mythical (albeit perhaps no more mythical than the claim of fundamental unity...). If it is Witzel's intention, among others, to expose the destructive mythologies that threaten to usher us on to World War III, the Gondwana-Laurasian dichotomy is certainly counter-productive in that connection.⁶²⁸ Diachronic global comparative mythology, rather than presenting the image of a 'Clash of Civilisations' (Huntington 1996), persuades us to see the underlying unity of thought and image that could inspiringly and convincingly unite all humans alive today; this is one of the main reasons for me to continue to engage in this field – where, needless to say, I have been greatly inspired by Witzel myself.

However, the criticism listed here may point at relatively minor shortcomings, inherent in any work of major scholarship, and perhaps not truly detrimental to the book's overall argument. Meanwhile the footnotes on the next few pages appear to contain more devastating criticism of Witzel's courageous attempt.

20.8. 'The probable market for this book'

As a major, and revolutionary, contribution to comparative mythology, this book will appeal to a very wide audience, ranging from history of religion / science of religion to the study of separate languages and language families world wide, anthropology, genetics, and archaeology.

20.9. 'Does the referee recommend that Oxford University Press should publish this manuscript?'

Without the slightest reservation, I very strongly recommend publication by Oxford University Press.

20.10. 'Further remarks'

The synopsis contains no information as to proposed indexes and maps, but these certainly

⁶²⁸ This was copy-edited in March 2022, while the Russian invasion into Ukraine had been raging for two weeks. Surely Mr Putin, the Russian President, did not really need the pretext of a mythical narrative to justify his actions – as scholars we ought not to overestimate the importance of our subject matter. But come to think of it, the subsequent appeal to the unalienability of the Russian soil, and of Ukraine's primordial belonging to it, and the claim to the effect that the attack on Ukraine was merely a continuation of World War II's legitimate battle against Nazism, were yet mythical, after all; as was the West's, especially the USA's, pretension that ultimately the struggle was not about NATO's wildly expanding geopolitical sphere of influence, but about such lofty goals as democracy, liberty, and loyalty.

cannot be missed in a work of this scope and calibre. (This objection was partly met in the / final, published version, but even there the relative paucity of diagrams and tables still contrasts with the enormous scope of the empirical material covered.)



photo Wim van Binsbergen

Fig. 21.4. A present-day village scene in Havelock Island, Andaman Isl., India, 2012.

21.11. Conclusion

It rarely happens that one individual scholar manages to bring, basically with one seminal publication, to a specialist field such a new synthesis that the entire field is revolutionarised as if touched by a magic wand. The names come to mind of such pioneering innovators of science and scholarship as Isaac Newton (1687 / 1947 – physics), Immanuel Kant (, 1983 / 1781 / 1787 – philosophy), Sigmund Freud (1961-1973 / 1899 – psychology), Albert Einstein (1960 / 1917 – the new physics), Emile Durkheim (1960 / 1912 – religious sociology and general epistemology), Hugo de Vries (1901 – genetics)... Michael Witzel's *The Origins of the World's Mythologies* appears to be another such new synthesis. It will kindle general new interest for comparative mythology and sets an interdisciplinary example for research in several decades to come. Meanwhile it is to be hoped that after singing the praises of this monumental achievement, specialists – focussing on that one, long and well-integrated – text, will begin to systematically and constructively address the many conceptual and epistemological defi-

ciences⁶²⁹ which inevitably adhere to this book (inevitably, since the author remains at heart

⁶²⁹ Here the dilemma arises that indebtedness to and friendship with Michael Witzel have kept me from detailed incisive criticism, yet my remarks in passing would remain futile insinuations bordering on slander if I would not back them up by at least the rudiments of a substantial argument. Over more than half a century, I have known to be devastatingly critical of my colleagues and my students, and while this has clearly led to my present, painful isolation since my retirement, it comes with the satisfaction of having lovingly and expertly fulfilled my obligations towards the scientific fields entrusted to me or captured by me – whichever way one wishes to look at it. Looking through my notes I signal, among others, the following fundamental shortcomings of Witzel's work – and (conceited crackpot that I am) I flatter myself that some of these shortcomings could be avoided or repaired if the theoretical thrust (more than minute details, some of which Witzel does explicitly address; I have deliberately refrained from reflecting upon all points where his and my analyses touch and even overlap) of my own recent work could be taken into account:

- *conceptually and theoretically, his argument surprisingly lacks a profound sense of history, since it scarcely stops to consider, typologically,*
 1. the conditions under which specific socio-cultural phenomena could have emerged and endured;
 2. or when, for systematic reasons, it would still have been too early for them;
 3. and how such mythical concepts, once emerged, must have profoundly changed over time rather than remaining timeless lapidary givens;
 4. and how even the underlying structure and procedures of thought must have changed greatly with the tens of millennia.

Thus Witzel suggests that the notion of a High God (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2018: see Index to that book), with all the transcendence this entails, would have been possible 60 ka BP (I can see a case (2018: see that book's Index; *cf.* Hubert 1909 / 1964, which Witzel cites) for 'sacrifice' being indirectly attested in the Middle Palaeolithic, but not theistic beliefs); while shamanism (one of Witzel's pet topics in his 2012 monograph; and here again he sees his Laurasian / Gondwana distinction confirmed, *cf.* Witzel 2011) is implausibly suggested by Witzel to have emerged in Africa as early as 70 ka BP (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2012a, 2018, and in fact the entire systematic long-range periodisation of religion and myth as brought out in much of my recent work including the present book.). To back up such fantasies (they are ultimately *presentist* in the sense that they are predicated on the fallacy that present-day manifestations would *ipse facto* already apply to the Upper and Lower Palaeolithic), Witzel relies far too heavily on the antiquated Maringer 1956, on the sweeping Wunn 2000, and on an outdated article on religious evolution by the American Japanologist / Durkheim / non-archaeological scholar Bellah (1973). Remarkably, it is perhaps under the latter's influence that Witzel (whose predilection for Japan is unmistakable) makes a lot of Durkheim's *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse* (1912), but nothing indicates that Witzel has properly understood the latter book's project; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2018 – or has been sociologically equipped to do so.

- All this presses all the more when we look at the aggregate mythemes in terms of which Witzel attempts to describe ancient mythological patterns. *In the absence* (except for the last few millennia of literate civilisations) *of the ancient historical actors's own texts and explanations*, we can only try to interpret their iconographies, and that task is wrought with uncertainties and modern appropriative projections; therefore, scholarly artificial mythemic aggregations come in the place of such concepts and semantics as were really (but almost irretrievably) there on the ground. *These aggregate mythemes have been constructed by the thought methods of Modern scholars*, but Witzel has scarcely a theory of the evolution of human thought patterns, and does not investigate to what extent the thought patterns of actors from the Middle or Upper Palaeolithic could be assumed to converge with those of Modern scholars (I have personally paid a lot of attention to the reconstruction of ancient modes of thought, especially in their structure and mechanisms rather than in their contents, and I have repeatedly stressed the fundamental difference between Modern and Ancient thought, along such dimensions as range semantics, the emergence of the binary opposition, the cyclical transformation of elements as a mode to reconcile change and permanence, thinking in triads, *etc.* (van Binsbergen 2012, 2018, 2021c; and I have been far from alone – and, admittedly, in fact relatively pedestrian – in these attempts, *cf.* Mithen 1996; Renfrew & Zubrow 1994); Anati 1999 / 1995; Calvin 1992; Gellner 1973; Lienhardt 1954; Horton & Finnegan 1973.

- Given the relatively unbounded, perspectival, and shifting nature of populational and socio-cultural aggregations, and given the nature of culture (including mythology) as essentially acquired through a socially-underpinned learning process across boundaries (of age, gender, class, somatic phenotype, creed, geography, etc.), Witzel's neat taxonomic / cladistic (cf. Geertz 2014) juxtaposition of
 1. social groups with
 2. major genetic markers (especially mtDNA haplotypes) – a juxtaposition repeatedly chided by me in the case of Cavalli-Sforza 1997 – also see Fig. 9.1 in chapter 9 above; after all, the molecular base of genetic traits, and even the extremely patterned and marked nature of linguistic consistency – constantly sanctioned (at the price of unintelligibility and in-group exclusion) by numerous native speakers in numerous speech acts on a day to day basis – , makes for far greater inertia in space and time than mythemes which are mere products of the flee-floating human imagination (however, for a similar approach to Cavalli-Sforza's and Witzel's on this point, cf. Penny *et al.* 1993),
 3. in combination with the pretended precise dating of such haplotypes (whereas in fact – by the nature of the multivariate statistical techniques used, and according to the expert opinion of specialist geneticists such as Witzel is certainly not) the attending error functions tend to run into tens of thousands of years)– Witzel's entire seductive and exciting model of the unfolding of world mythology, risks to be reduced to what I can only call a pious piece of scientific science fiction
- One of the most seductive aspects of Witzel's approach is that he manages to make us forget that, beyond the handful of millennia covered by literacy, we simply have no direct evidence for the antiquity and unaltered persistence, in other words, *inertia*, of myths. The late lamented Nick Allen (2014) read Witzel's book as convincing proof that myths have such inertia and long-range constancy. But it would be more correct to assert that we do not have such direct proof, and that approaches like Witzel's, or my own (as in the present book) are merely predicated on the assumption that *inertia and long-range constancy is a basic quality of myth*. These two qualities are remarkably improbable: archaeology has made us familiar with the phenomenon of lithic cultures and styles of hunting and butchering remaining fairly unaltered across several, even many, millennia, but all we can derive from our experience with more complex, symbolic products of human culture is that they are *ephemeral, constantly shifting, and prone to cultural drift*. Their alleged constancy, inertia, persistence, even immutability in itself constitutes a huge research problem – even though we may try to read recognisable mythemes in rock art tens of millennia old. I tend to the hypothesis (van Binsbergen 2018, 2021c) that the pivotal, absolutely indispensable function of religion in human society is precisely to create *ritual* situations in which persistence is the rule, change is considered anathema, and the practical conditions for relatively unaltered transmission of cultural material from generation to generation (and from established members to newcomers) are optimally ensured. Transcendence, in other words, is a precondition for societal survival – much in the vein of Durkheim (1912; cf. van Binsbergen 2018). But we arrive at such insights not on the basis of direct knowledge about very old myths and of seeing their persistence in our time and age, but on the basis of theoretical reflection inspired by – I admit – essentially defective, incomplete, and myopically warped data.
- In his tendency to reify and perpetuate the larger conglomerates of his home-brewn socio-cultural analysis, Witzel seems to have missed the point of the anthropology of ethnicity of the last 40 (!) years: *les ethnies ont une histoire*, 'ethnic groups have a history!' (Chrétien & Prunier 1989; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen 1985b, 2008c, 2021d, and extensive references cited there), and ethnic names and clusters are in the first place contradictory and manipulative actors's constructs, to be deconstructed and historicised, rather than to be taken as objective givens fit to serve as neutral and independent inputs in further, mythological, analysis.
- Witzel's appropriation of physical anthropology takes recourse to an attenuated version of 'race' (Bamshad & Olson 2003; but contra Lévi-Strauss 1952; Montagu 1974, and in general the discrediting of race as a scientific concept throughout the second half of the 20th c. CE), and also reifies obsolete classifications e.g. that in terms of dolichocephalous / brachycephalous – which is certainly not a recommendation for a book appearing in the 2010s. An appreciation of social relationships, power

and meaning as being at the heart of any human expression and certainly of myth (cf. Elwood 1999; Kolakowski 1984), is thus eclipsed in Witzel's approach by a spurious natural-science pseudo-conception of culture, tending towards an obsolete form of sociobiology (cf. Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1997); hence his naïve listing a suspect title like McKee's 'Genes contribute to religious inclination' (2005).

- In general, Witzel has the amazing tendency to present his typologies as self-evident without stopping to engage in definitional exercises, and without further investigating on what grounds such self-evidence may be based and defended, and what could be the alternatives.
- The latter point shows one of the weakest aspects of Witzel's approach: his *lack of an explicit, theoretically grounded, comparative method* (cf. my present book, chapter 2), even though he cites a promising title like Patton & Doniger 1996: *Myth and Method*, and Ragin's 1987: *The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative And Quantitative Strategies*.
- As a result, many of Witzel's constitutive arguments are scarcely more than 'just-so stories' (cf. Kipling 1912), which are seldom set off against the alternative interpretations available in the literature (e.g. the interpretation of the famous 'dead-man' scene in the Upper Palaeolithic rock art at Lascaux, France, for which almost a dozen rival interpretations are now in circulation; cf. Rappenglück 1998, van Binsbergen 2012:).
- A close look at Witzel's impressive bibliography reveals that more than half of the references are of an anthropological nature. This is most surprising, not only given Witzel's non-anthropological, philological background, but especially because he does not show any signs of having internalised and understood the anthropological project. For Witzel, anthropology, just like genetics, *is not an invitation to intercultural encounter and dialogue, but just another field to be raided for apparently immutable, apparently factual data*. He is not always wrong – e.g. his handling of a pet case of early social anthropology, the Andaman Islanders (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1922) is not without merit. But the 'positivism', Eurocentrism (who would still speak of Central Africa as 'backwoods, in the literal sense'...), and pretense of objectivity that were the hallmarks (and the bane) of North Atlantic philological scholarship a century ago (cf. my assessments of Bernal and of Karst as instances in the History of Ideas, 1997 . 2011 and 2021), has still left detectable traces in Witzel's comparative mythological work. My claim that comparative mythology as a field of study if not only about rupture but also about fusion, that the comparative mythologist should engage in *mythopoeiesis* herself, was lost on Witzel; although he diligently cites my myth definition as given in my same 2009 article (chapter 3 of the present book). That anthropology, after naïve and admittedly hegemonic (implicitly colonialist and racist) beginnings in the 18th–early 20th century CE, has grown to be a critical and especially auto-critical, self-reflexive, dialogic, transcontinental counter-hegemonic epistemology (cf. Mudimbe 1988, 1991, 1994; Mosima 2018; Geertz 1973, 1979; Jackson 1989; Devisch & Nyamnyoh 2011; Fabian 1983; van Binsbergen 2003, 2015, and many others) seems to have escaped Witzel and probably lies at the very heart of the misunderstandings between him and me.
- As a text-based philologist, and evidently lacking a sophisticated and personally internalised theory of culture, Witzel tends to conflate culture and language (a decade ago I chided Bernal for the same weakness – yet most aspects of human life are not adequately expressed or even expressible in language; cf. my contribution to Kao & Alter 2020, and their collection as a whole), and to underrate the protean quality of the *oral* texts that inevitably have formed the basis for any mythology committed to writing; not rigid, immutable structure transmitted and reproduced impeccably across space and time, but the free variation and improvisation that are oral narrators's greatest charms, should guide our typologies, and should bring us to adopt a relative view of any rigid narrative formula. *The science fiction (should we say: 'myth?') on which Witzel's approach is predicated, dreams of permanent, neatly demarcated human groups, adequately defined and distinguished by their gene pool, and unequivocal, exclusive, owners of well-defined, easily identifiable mythemes that are not appreciably altered by their appropriation and textual rendering in the hands of 19th-21st North Atlantic scholars*. Very little of this illusion would stand up in the face of today's anthropology and intercultural philosophy. A properly, internalised anthropological perspective would not only be aware of the *historicity* of all concepts, modes of thought, meanings and narratives (although, admittedly, one would have to go beyond the established mainstream anthropo-

an Indological philologist, untutored to expertly think in quantitative terms (hence his deterministic fallacy that makes him assume that, if there is some relationship whatsoever, that then that relationship must be perceptible in all surface manifestations), lacking a personal acquaintance let alone practical experience and critical peer accountability in the major fields of empirical science (genetics, anthropology, comparative ethnology) on which his synthesis is yet predicated.

We still have a very long road ahead of us.

logical perspective to begin to write those histories; my own books are extensive demonstrations of the possibility and especially of the pitfalls of such a *demarche*), but it would also put the question of *cultural inertia* at the centre of its attention. How do mythemes survive across space and time – whereas the common outcome of research into ethnography and cultural history has been cultural drift, free variation, mutability? What are the social and psychic, perhaps even neurological and biological, mechanisms that make for such extensive inertia in mythemes that we may seriously claim to be able to reconstruct the mythological contents of Pandora's Box, at a point in time at least 60 ka BP?

- A study in its own right could be made of Witzel's tendency to use a unique model of 'growing from the roots'—as in the arboral metaphor once so seminal in comparative historical linguistics but since severely criticised (Bernal 1990: 2 f., 53 f.; Salminen 2002; Labov 2007; Kammerzell 1999 Relationships in the mythical field are implicitly understood as genetic, based on historical relationship, usually with the backing of a unique and genetically detectable population history. Horizontal relationships of borrowing, transcontinental movement, acculturation, and (the dirtiest word in the classic anthropological vocabulary, and apparently also for Witzel) *diffusion*, upset such a unilinear appellation, and are most surprisingly underexposed in Witzel's monograph. Witzel is datisfied that he has successfully ascertained, at the onset of his project, that his predecessors such as Yoshida and Littleton had tried but failed to explain mythological patterns by diffusion. But this is applying far too narrow an analytical scope. It is as if we are confronted with a model of social organisation where there are only vertical lines of consanguinity through descent, but no alliances through marriage and affinity. Yet, as most of my work of the last two decades brings out, such transcontinental and intra-continental *horizontal* cultural relationships are absolutely essential for an understanding of long-range cultural history – and comparative mythology is one of the principal keys towards discovering and arguing such continuities.
- Finally, at long last, there is Witzel's easily misunderstood call, not only for a New Comparative Mythology, but also for a New Mythology *tout court*. Those who have read the signs of our times, know that during the past two centuries (even in the face of Nietzsche (1973a, 1973b) proclaiming the death of God – although that, of course, is a myth too) we have had quite enough myths, and that they have been among the principal incentives to mass murder – from White and Japanese racial superiority to Stalinism, Fascism, Nazism, and Putinism, to the myth of the free market (responsible for millions of deaths through famine, suicide, and drug abuse, and environmental destruction) and of female or racial inferiority. Why is the scholarly study of myth so often in the hands of brilliant people tending to the extreme right – from Jan de Vries, A. Rosenberg, and Carl Jung to Mircea Eliade, possibly (despite protestations to the contrary) even George Dumézil? I am not sure whether Witzel should be counted in their midst, I hope not, yet so much seems to be suggested by his insistence on the alleged distinction between a more or less civilised, lofty Laurasian mythology for the Northern hemisphere as against a rather barbarian and retarded Gondwana mythology for the Southern hemisphere (with, let me repeat this *ad nauseam*, the message of an unbridgeable chasm by the deliberate choice of geological terms, suggestive not of mere millennia but of hundred of millions of year!). It is true that the fabric of collective culture has been torn up by Modernity and Postmodernity, that we live more than ever in times of anomy and meaninglessness which is particularly affecting our children and grandchildren, but instead of a new mythology (with all its likely group psychology of exclusion, megalomania, lynching and mass murder), why not advocate that we take refuge in reason and science? (However, and again, hear who is talking: I must admit that, without directly advocating a new mythology in its own right, the total deconstruction of reason, logic and science is among the more obvious implications of my recent book *Sangoma Science* (2021)).

I could go on in this way, but feel that already with the above I have at least discharged the obligation of substantiating the dismissive allegations made in the main text of this chapter.

21.12. *My farewell to Comparative Mythology as a collective undertaking*

One gets the impression that Witzel's immensely important interdisciplinary project fell victim to two increasingly rare diseases, *excess funding*, and *friendship as the silencing of fundamental criticism*.

Harvard University is situated in a very elegant part of the small town of Cambridge under the smoke of Boston, Massachusetts's capital. Walking there from the modest bed-and-breakfast where I had found lodgings in 2010 (like the prominent linguist John Bengtson; the landlady tried to pick my brain concerning the airport-art African masks she had collected), one passes a considerable number of stately homes lying in their own grounds; one of them was home of the celebrated poet Longfellow – poetical populariser of the somewhat contested Native American myth of Hiawatha⁶³⁰; Schoolcraft 1839; Longfellow 1855 / 1856 – from age thirty till his death at age 75 in 1882), after it had been the headquarters of General George Washington in 1775-1776, the first year of the American War of Independence. We are here not only at the nostalgic heart of American patriotic and poetical sentiment, but also at the centre of the USA as an intellectual world power, of USA corporate power as underpinned by graduates from Harvard's Law School, and hence of USA finance capital. Six years earlier, when (after having travelled the length and width of the USA since 1979) I visited Harvard for the first time, I had coffee at a terrace where I overheard two slightly overweight and elitist male White students bragging about their recent vacation experiences; one had visited his father's gold mine, and boasted plans of investing in it. Except at the Witzel-organised conferences, I cannot remember ever overhearing any intellectual conversation in these public surroundings – but whenever I came to Harvard, it was to engage in conferences and passionate scholarly debate, and I admittedly had little time for eavesdropping. Any way, ever since 2004, Harvard has, indeed, proved a personal goldmine for me, in terms of travel funds, intellectual stimulus, and Asianist regional specialist knowledge. Now when, in 2010, having just delivered (as editor along with Eric Venbrux) the first major book the Witzel comparative-myth circuit had ever produced, I walked through the craftily wrought-iron gate of Radcliffe College as an uninvited gatecrasher to my own association's conference, the elegant architecture and flowered lawn arrangements oozed a sense of filthy riches and hegemonic power. From humble origins in an Amsterdam popular neighbourhood, I had become a poet, father and husband, scholar, philosopher, editor, African diviner-healer, the adopted son of an African king, a moderately affluent and prolific

⁶³⁰ What about the following proposed long-range trans-macrophyla etymology:

Hayəhwātha --->	HIAWATHA	= *hyaw-[at]HA	<? JAHWEH יהוה ?
Am□ind	English appropriation	proposed Amerind proto-form	proposed original Semitic etymon

It would not be the first time that the Hebrew god under the name of Jahweh was to become a cornerstone of New-World religion. For instance, when the name of the High God among the Ndjuka Maroons, Surinam, was finally to be disclosed to the Dutch anthropologist Thoden van Velzen (personal communication, 1966), after long trying in vain, to his great disappointment it turned out to be *Yehovah*. And another example: Despite the abundance of Flood myths especially in North America, and the strong impression (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) that these spring from local / regional developments rather than from Old-World prototypes, yet Christianity reached North America already in Early Modern times, and there are indications that some relatively early recorded American Flood myths are in fact adaptations of the Biblical, Genesis template (McLoughlin 1974).

writer, and a publisher. But infinitely more than amidst the Radcliffe-College feminine elegance, I feel at home in the huts of my Nkoya village, without running water, without electrical power, with a leaking straw roof – but with fragments of myth instantly (though usually only implicitly) breaking out in every expression of word and song around me. A sense of rebellion overtook me, while contemplating the niceties of the upper-class all-women's college that Radcliffe is.

Richly endowed with research and conference funds, Michael Witzel no doubt believed to give his passionately pursued project the best possible context by lending, every year, to more or less prominent specialists of his personal choice the opportunity to visit his conferences, in the North Atlantic but more often in East Asia, at virtually no costs to themselves. They certainly brought inspiration and exciting topics. However, 'Who finds me bread and cheese, it's to his tune that I dance'; in my native Dutch the saying is even more poignant, especially in the context of such an almost exclusively verbal affairs as a scientific conference tends to be: 'Wiens brood men eet diens woord men spreek' ('If it is your bread I eat then it will be your word that I will speak').⁶³¹

The endless series of conferences which Michael Witzel initiated, were occasions of fact-finding and markets for the circulation of specialist data – they were clearly not intended as scenes of profound theoretical and methodological debate. During my first attendances, 2004-2005, I was still unaware of this amazing convention, and being profoundly programmed to act against it,⁶³² I happened to engage in a somewhat principled theoretical discussion with my dear friend Boris Oguibénine, contesting the latter's claim that *the only* viable approach to myth was that of his eminent (adoptive) fellow-countryman and our co-religionist the Americanist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. I cannot remember who formally chaired that session but Witzel immediately intervened, declaring such debate out of order. We were here to discuss real facts about real myths... Ever since its inception in Hellenistic Alexandria two and a half millennia ago, and certainly since its formalisation and academic establishment in Germany two centuries ago, philology has been and has remained an utterly a-theoretical undertaking, where the very word theory still means what myth has come to mean: a bundle of irrelevant untruths apparently concealing their theoretically-inclined articulator's vanity and self-interest.

Thus a remarkable strategy underlay Witzel's long preparatory path towards the 2012 *magnum opus*. Specialists were co-opted but on the tacit assumption that the theoretical and methodological problems of the immense research task at hand had already been adequately, even exhaustively, considered, by Witzel himself. I cannot complain that Witzel showed a lack of generosity – not only regarding travel funds, but also as chairperson he was patient and repeatedly allowed me to overstep my time by as much as half an hour, or even much more. I saw Witzel once or twice a year for days on end, and e-mail ensured an incessant

⁶³¹ There is even an echo here of the Czech linguist Hrozny who, while in active military service during World War I, found the key to the decipherment of Hittite hieroglyphic by simply substituting bread and water in the unassailable text at hand. Which, of course, offers irrefutable proof of the truth of the Dutch saying.

⁶³² I had held the famous Simon Chair in Anthropology at Victoria University, Manchester, United Kingdom, like the innovator of religious anthropology Victor W. Turner, and the South African freedom fighter H. Jack Simons before me, and in that innovative context of the Manchester School (cf. van Binsbergen 2007f) debates among colleagues formed a constant re-enacting of the mythical original fratricide of *Genesis 4*; moreover, I had meanwhile joined the Philosophical Faculty, and intercultural methodology was now my prime concern.

sant communicative availability, but the long and profound conversation he kept telling me he had in stock for me, never took place. Did I dodge it myself? Was I so full of my own ideas that I could not listen? Did we not share the same sense of humour?⁶³³ I remember a short private exchange with Michael in which he expressed his amazement that I accorded such a pivotal place to Central Asia, whereas that region (on whose linguistic diversity he had written extensively; Witzel 1999a, 1999b) was generally considered to have been populated relatively very late by Anatomically Modern Humans; of course he was perfectly right, but characteristically he had not stopped to ask me how I defined Central Asia – clearly differently from him. I remember another short conversation in which he assured me – in answer to my question as a non-Indologist – that the *Sacred Books of the East* translations (Müller 1875-1910), although obsolete, could still be profitably used by non-specialists like myself. It was typical of our conversations when Witzel, at my request, went searching for the particular Indian text, but could not find it, in which a demon, about to be subdued by the power of the Buddha, saw such contradictory demands imposed upon him as we have been familiar with in the story of the clever farmer's daughter: '*not on the road nor outside the road, neither dressed nor naked, etc.*' (cf. Meder n.d. [2007]) Sometimes I suspect that Michael is just a very shy person.

It was a great honour when, at the end of the conference during which we had founded the IACM at Beijing in 2006, Witzel asked me to thank our Chinese hosts on behalf of the entire gathering. At the same occasion Eric Venbrux and I were commissioned, entirely out of the blue and without any initiative on our part, to organise the 2008 Second Annual Meeting of the newly created organisation, which meant not just academic leadership but also academic entrepreneurship; assuming that all delegates would have their traveling and accommodation paid by the organisation, that meant a budget of c. EUR50,000, towards which Harvard could contribute only about EUR13,000 from Witzel's usual funds. Between the two of us Venbrux and I were sufficiently resourceful to find adequate funding for our entire budget, especially with the Royal Netherlands Academy for Arts and Sciences; but what had initially seemed an honour, was rapidly turning into a great and constant burden. Accommodating the conference in the Netherlands proved a problem – Venbrux preferred his (Nijmegen) university's conference centre, a former convent for upper-class Roman Catholic nuns (the splendid library still intact) at the little city of Ravenstein, in Early Mod-

⁶³³ Humour is particularly difficult to accommodate and to be effective in transcultural situations, e.g. across disciplinary or transcontinental boundaries. As the opening phrase of my first ever presentation in the Witzel circle, in 2004, I said

'I am on a mission from God'

imitating a USA drawl, making an implicit reference to the cult motion picture *The Blues Brothers* (John Landis, 1980), and thinking this would be automatically understood as a humorous opening sentence for an argument that was to describe my odyssey across scientific paradigms, global therapy systems, religious systems, continents, and disciplines in order to understand why in the world the High Priest of the Mwali cult at Nata, Botswana, Southern Africa, had told me that the Leopard-skin is the true traditional attire of 'my kind of people' – thus sending me on a fool's errand to return in such a skin, in other words, sending me 'on a mission from God'. However, Witzel and his lieutenant Steve Farmer were scared out of their wits, for they did not know me yet, and they had just had a long struggle with Hindu fundamentalism, had been digitally and verbally attacked in the process, and therefore misunderstood my joke as a fanatical statement by an adherent of yet another brand of fundamentalism. God known of what more I would be capable. Come to think of it, humour has been the one commodity in short supply in Witzel's circle. And the present chapter is ample proof that, given time, I am capable of anything short of intergenerational incest.

ern times an independent free state on the river Maas – almost an Old-World equivalent of Radcliffe. But in addition to being very expensive, the place was unusually inhospitable, only open (even for coffee and tea) to registered guests and therefore scarcely amenable to the free-floating, constantly conversing and coffee-consuming regulars of the Witzel conferences; non-resident colleagues who wished to attend a selected session had to be refused entrance, and in my naïve sense of loyalty I could not bring myself to explicitly distance myself – as an emphatically non-Nijmegen person – from this unfortunate arrangement, – which became a source of great and genuine embarrassment when Mrs Kenoyer confronted me, demanding an explanation as to why her son J. Kenoyer, a well-known Indus specialist and an asset to any international conference, had been refused at the conference's door.



Only three of a total of c. 10 office-bearers are shown. From left to right: Professors Kazuo Matsumura (Tokyo, Japan), Yuri Berezkin (St Petersburg, Russian Federation), and Joseph Harris (Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA). Note the elegant appointments of the room, and on the wall the stately portrait of an Harvard dignitary, in whose physiognomy one seems to recognise the familiar Rockefeller family features. Invisible to the observer is a cuneiform text written large on the wall (cf. *Daniel* 5:25), and to be translated provisionally as 'If it is your bread [....? flesh? thought?...] I eat then it will be your word that I will speak'.

Fig. 21.5. Three continents at the table: A glimpse of the lunch of the Board of Directors of the IACM during the 4th Annual Meeting of that organisation, in the Harvard Senior Staff Club, Cambridge MA, USA, 2010.

After the conference, editing the book was supposed to be a piece of cake since I had edited many international collections before; but also this turned out to be another stumbling block, since part of our intercontinental crowd of conference participants – as philologists rather than social scientists, deep down perhaps *manqué* poets at heart, and proud of their status of native speakers of (a regional variety of) English – tended to be unprofessionally over-sensitive about the copy-editorial quality of the manuscripts they had submitted,

ignored deadlines, and openly rebelled against the experienced interventions of our copy editor Kirsten Seifkar, a California-born and trained political scientist *cum* philosopher with two MAs to her name, native speaker of American English, and my own PhD student to boot. Yet the massive book of proceedings came out in time for the 4th Annual Meetings of the IACM at Cambridge MA, early October 2010. My fellow editor Venbrux and I had gone out of our way to highlight – with the usual editorial exaggeration – the theoretical and topical originality of our collection (with our respective two personal specialties, the Mythology of Death and Dying, and the Mythological Continuities between Africa and Other Continents, as principal innovative achievements of this volume; and we had given the collection a short theoretical introduction, also separately published in the journal *Anthropos* (van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2009). In recognition, we dedicated the book to Michael Witzel, but given the overall division of labour attending its genesis we saw no reason to make him our third co-editor, even though he had at one stage advised us in weeding out a few of the conference contributions so as to maintain the book's standards of quality, and even though (but since when does finance stipulate authorship?) one quarter of the conference and publication budget had been met by Harvard.

My formal career was drawing to an end, and I had just been rehabilitated at the Leiden African Studies Centre after spending three years in total isolation and on water and bread, for braving both a pompously tyrannical ignoramus as director, and his henchmen. I could do without further disappointments. But much as Venbrux and I (as well as our copy-editor Seifkar) were expecting formal and public recognition for our Herculean achievement of having brought the conference and book to such a splendid result in scarcely two years' time, at the Annual Meeting all I got was the cold shoulder. Contrary to all my previous participations in Witzel's conferences, this time I (but not Venbrux) had to pay my own way and arrange my own accommodation. Witzel did not thank us for having dedicated the book to him. The fact that this was the first ever book to come out of the long series of Witzel international encounters remained unacknowledged. In addition to the Annual Meetings proper, a parallel Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology, was held at the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University, – a famous all-female college; also see chapter 9 of the present book. The circle of Radcliffe participants had been carefully selected, and I was not among them; I was allowed to join the audience as an observer and to participate in the discussions, but I was not welcome to the Radcliffe concluding dinner. IACM members who only a year earlier had gone out of their way to keep me company and show me, as locals, the religiously interesting sites of Tokyo, Japan (including the bewildering War Memorial Museum, and the curious Greek Orthodox Church – part of Tsarist Russia's expansion towards the Pacific from Vladivostok around the year 1900 CE) now scarcely returned my greeting.

What had gone wrong? Had my dear but unsuspecting colleagues finally become aware of my life as a rapist, bank robber, plagiarist, nudist, slave owner, witchdoctor, secret agent of a rogue state in sub-Saharan Africa, speaker of six African languages, and honorary member of the murderous Assassine brotherhood? Had it been my style of editing – in which, again, I had refused to be disloyal to Seifkar with her tough but fair interventions? Had it been because a year back, in Japan, I had incurred the wrath of the leader of the Tokyo research group Professor Inoue Nobutaka, by insisting that 古事記 *Kojiki* and 日本書紀 *Nihonshoki*, the early-8th century CE classics of Japanese mythology, had been written under massive and undeniable Chinese influence? Had I been on too good (although purely academic) an un-

derstanding, at Kokugakuin University, with the Shinto students who gave us a demonstration of the central Shinto ritual (the opening of the doors, re-enacting the Sun goddess's 天照大神 Amaterasu's return after – having been insulted by her brother the storm god スサノヲ Susanoo – she had locked herself in her spinning room (much like Isis and Penelope), plunging the world in darkness)? Were my colleagues in the IACM still regurgiating, in their minds, the indignation which my Chinese academic audience had displayed when, in my attempts to reconstruct the mythical contents of Pandora's Box (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, reprinted in the present book as chapters 5 and 6), I had exclusively relied on African material, emphatically and without apologies to my East Asian hosts? Was it that, in the very massive volume of our 2010 proceedings, my own contribution had (with my co-editor's consent, and following in detail my oral presentation at the conference) come out twice as long as any other? Or was it simply that they resented my irritatingly vocal, direct and highly critical interventions during the debates? Or my being (in this company mainly of Eurasian philologists) not in the first place a general linguist (a field in which I was also extensively trained), but an anthropologist, a statistician, an Africanist, even an African? Or my exposing publicly, in the context of IACM meetings, Witzel's Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy as Politically Incorrect, hegemonic, even potentially racist?

I was at long last beginning to see that my understanding of the procedures and social forms of the production of valid and worthwhile scientific knowledge was miles apart from that of Witzel and most of his circle. When after the 2010 Annual Meeting I left Cambridge with a heavy heart (amazed at the immigration officer's lackadaisical bearing – little wonder that, nine years earlier, Boston International Airport had been selected as the starting point for '9/11'), I knew that my short and vicarious life as a comparative mythologist was drawing to an end. I only attended one later IACM conference (the 2016 one in Brno, Czech Republic, convened by my dear friend Václav Blažek), but it took me ten years to effectively step down as IACM official, and as the introductory chapter to my present book makes very clear, comparative mythology has remained one of my main fields of research and publication.

Chapter 22. Envoy

Having arrived at the end of this huge (1.8 million chrs) book, the few readers that have seen it through right up to this point – and most of those few may have endured me mainly because they were forced by their role as reviewers anyway – may feel the need to see their reading experience summed up. Let me help them a little.

They have been confronted with a highhanded and self-possessed author, whose every third reference is to his own work (preferably marked as still in the press; but the mere listing of the published ones still takes up ten pages in the book's bibliography), and who has taken the opportunity of this interminable book to settle old scores and plant the seeds for new controversies. The author's passion and dedication can hardly have escaped the reader. Neither his doggedness to investigate a question (the many questions considered in this book) to the bottom, trying to reveal its hidden epistemological and methodological implications and paradigmatic suppositions, bringing to bear upon the argument an unprecedented range of personal investigations in fieldwork in over a dozen sites throughout the Old World, with extensions to the New World and Oceania. What will register, in general, is the author's apparent pretension of being himself – demonstrably an indefatigable investigator of divination worldwide, and a recognised diviner in his own right – an unflinching, divinely-elected oracle of scientific knowledge and truth. To this is to be added an irritating, and irritatingly caleidoscopic, play on identities – European yet African, working-class yet academic elite not to say royal, male yet androgynous, Afrocentrist yet globalist, Christian, yet Jewish, animist, Buddhist – as if the Postmodern, and globalisation-informed, explosion of all permanent and clear-cut identity has been among the most cherished points on the author's agenda. And perhaps it has.

All this makes for a scholarly style that is hardly palatable, that deviates widely from established scholarly conventions, and that brings about a general impression, not of truth, but of science fiction, of untruth. The fact that the author is also a minor literary writer adds plausibility to this unfortunate impression. Smothered in the trappings of scholarship, this may be hardly a scholarly book, after all, but a literary product in effective disguise – so effectively disguised as to be oftentimes unreadable. Yet the execution of the interdisciplinary scientific argument is sophisticated, complete, state-of-the-art, extensively researched, methodologically sound, and all in all inescapable.

Obviously, I cannot bring the reader to believe me, to trust me, and to like me, if I have not already succeeded in doing so with the preceding 21 chapters. Implicitly (but deliberately) my style

may be threatening to many pedestrian researchers, since I am throwing around – with studied carelessness – points of knowledge, insight and bibliographic accumulation that for another researcher might take years to attain. And why repeatedly extend the highest praise to authors (Witzel is a case in point, but also Graves, Karst, Bernal) who are devastatingly criticised at the same time. This book is a megalomaniac display of would-be mastership that can only invite suspicions of an inferiority complex, a lack of adulthood, failing mental powers, the wrong kind of humour, a doomed extotist pose as African villager, prince and diviner, and a terrible sense of failure. Beyond that, it is a vulnerable, existential declaration of love for the systematic, methodological, unbounded pursuit of knowledge, predicated on the resigned conviction that, when all is said and done, such a pursuit can do without any of the social and financial perks which even the moderately successful pursuit of academic knowledge usually yields in Modern North Atlantic society (a resignation that comes in handy, for such perks have been largely lacking in the second half of my career). It is loving adoration without even a thought for carnal consummation. It is the *White Goddess* (Robert Graves).

I sincerely hope that the reader, despite her misgivings, vertigo and occasional nausea, yet takes home from this complex and difficult book what I consider its most important achievement *a sense of orientation in a bewildering world, a sense of arrival, of homecoming*. Never mind the intimidating bibliography, the interminable indexes of topics and authors, nor the many specific theories and part analyses which this book entails – these will be inherently ephemeral, obsolete, even ridiculous before the ink is dry with this book is printed. What hopefully will not be lost, and will enrich the reader more and more with every page, is *the awareness*

1. *that global cultural history, as well as those who carry it, we humans – despite the fragmentation, even annihilation, of locality, identity and meaning that was produced by recent globalization – display, in space as well as in time, a demonstrable and reassuring unity*
2. *that our current thoughts and sentiments have a very long history, which is coherent, understandable, retrievable, knowable, and (albeit often only as a implied substrate) shared among all of us.*

Producing this effect is, frankly, not *per se* my own personal achievement – without the combined efforts of thousands of philologists, linguists, comparative mythologists (in the first place Michael Witzel!), geneticists, archaeologists, comparative religionist, philosophers, sociologists, and especially anthropologists, over a century of more, this book could not have been written. After decades of fixation (with all the depressing and deceptive limitations which our sheer anatomy entails) upon the concept of Anatomically Modern Humans, *prising open Pandora's Box* means that we may now begin to look at ourselves as *Mentally, or let us say Mythically, Equipped Humans*, in recognition (which is an African thought much more, alas, than already a North Atlantic one) of the long chain of thousands of generations of ancestors that have made this possible, through their sweat, blood and tears. Towards this result I have adduced, in this book and throughout my publications over the last two decades, not only

- convincing methods (such as the reconstruction of long-range history on the basis of geographic distributions and of statistical analysis); but also
- crucially illuminating concepts (such as Pandora's Box, the Pelasgian Hypothesis, a revamped Sunda Hypothesis, the postulate of humankind's fundamental unity, transcontinental continuity, 'range semantics', cyclical element transformation, and the codification of such pivotal mythemes as the Leg Child, the Spider, the

Unilateral Mythical Being, and the Cosmic Egg); and

- an avalanche of reliable and well-referenced data.

I shall consider my self-set task with this book successfully fulfilled if a profound sense of illumination, recognition, global belonging, home-coming and pride is firmly planted in my readers, compensating for all the negative aspects of this book which I have tried to conjure by enumerating them myself in the preceding paragraphs.

Hoofddorp, May-July, 2022

Wim van Binsbergen

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Index of proper names other than those of authors cited

The indexes in this book were compiled with special software designed by my brother Peter Broers 1984-1985, and subsequently developed by me. In the final stage of preparing the present book for publication, compiling the indexes was thwarted by the fact that the (by now) vintage computers on which this software had been designed and used to run for decades, predictably had broken down, while the software could not be accommodated on more recent computers. I am greatly indebted to my brother and to my eldest son Vincent for finding solutions to this problem.

In principle the following lists of proper names and authors are exhaustive, with some important exceptions. Table 6.2 on divinatory themes in Pandora's Box, as well as the table that makes up ch. 10. and the one on pp. 358 *f.*, are in a graphic format not amenable to indexing. Also the specific names given to variables in statistical analyses (chs 15 and 16) have in principle not been indexed. Due to circumstances beyond our control (last-minute stop-press corrections), the actual page occurrences may be off by one or two pages from those listed.

Reflecting the riches of the mythologies of all the world's regions and across the ages, this book contains well over 10,000 proper names. Listing them in indexes serves a number of important purposes at the same time. In the first place, it is great fun, and eloquently brings out the scholarship that underlies the present book, enhancing the latter's authority. Indexing moreover benefits meticulous, consistent copy-editing and keeps the number of typos to a minimum (although in this book of 1.7 million chrs involving many different languages, typos remain inevitable). Indexing allows a check on the argument's internal consistency, empirical substantiation, and bibliographic coverage. And it identifies, by frequency of occurrence as reflected in the indexes, the principal topics and authors around which the book's argument revolves. Meanwhile a few key topics and key authors are referred to so frequently in the book's main text and the notes, that precise listing leads to meaningless enumerations of many lines' length; in those cases I have resorted to the kill-sport '*passim*'. The book's ultimate availability on the Internet moreover implies additional search facilities so powerful that cross-references between topics indexed here could be kept to a minimum. An index is not a dictionary; only sparingly have I been tempted to offer a short explanation of a particular lemma. Usually a proper name's significance, literal meaning, and implications are clear from the book context.

Even with the aid of a sophisticated computer programme, making an index of a book containing myriad proper names from so many different geographic and disciplinary provenances is sheer agony, and has delayed the publication of the present book with several months. In the listings below, page numbers referring to notes have -n attached to the figure.

AT = Aarne-Thompson	AaTh, see Aarne-Thompson	Aboriginal(s), 201, 340-341, 453, 468; <i>cf.</i> Australia	Achimi, 60n
<i>A Midsummernight's Dream</i> (Shakespeare), 281	<i>Ab Urbe Condita</i> (Livy), 300	Abu Hamed, 129	Acholi, East African people, 128, 129, 133
<i>A Transcontinental Career</i> (Mosima), 47n	Abbasid Iraq, 532, 276n	Abu Nuwas, 496	Acinonyx, 518
AA, see Afroasiatic, 424	°Abd al Qader al Jilani, Sidi, 167; <i>cf.</i> Qadiriyya	Abydos, 301	Acrisius, 107n
Aarne-Thompson, 270n; and Africa, 155n	°Abd al-Salam ben Mash-ish, Sidi, 167	Abyss, 459	<i>Ad Lycophronis</i> (Tzetzes), 385
	Abel, 427, 449	Accipitridae, 288	Adam, Biblical figure, 297, 384, 387, 448, 103rd Eve / Hava, 295, 387, 420, 510
	Abkhazians, 142n	Achelous, 107, 302	
		Acheulean, 232	
		Achilles, 432n	

- Admetus, 107n
 Adonis, 346
 Adroa, 144
 Adversary, 221, 233; – of Rain, 186
 Aëtes, 300n
 Aegean, 223, 234, 243-244, 255, 289, 293, 338, 387, 389-390, 392, 396-397, 543, 83n, 111n
 Aegir, 293
 Aeneid (Virgil), 296, 332, 334, 333n
 Aeolus, 221, 332, 334, 345; *cf.* Wind
 Aerial, 49
 Aether, 296
 Aetiological, explaining a word from the uses of its object, 291
 Afri, 455n
 Africa Seminar, ASCL, 1975-2000, *convenor* *im* van Binsbergen, 479n
 Africa(n(s)), 34, 57, 116, 121, 129, 131, 134, 138, 141, 162, 165, 181, 187, 204, 233, 235, 244, 251, 253-254, 261, 263, 267, 291, 305, 307-308, 376, 382, 398, 421, 448, 497-498, 503, 508, 510, 520-521, 530, 546-547, 581; Proto- -, 58, 139, 146, 374; Palaeo-African, 120, 122, 124, 138, 150, 173, 207, 230-231, 257, 306, 308, 514, 520, 548; – and the Mediterranean, 450; – historiography, 279; – and Eurasia, 248, 249, 253-254, 257, 261, 263, 267; – languages, 259; Africanity, Africanness, 250-251, 277, 495; *cf.* Amerind, Dene, Sinocaucasian, Back-Into-Africa, 165
 Africa(n(s)), 37n, 42n, 51n, 60n, 69n-70n, 75n-76n, 81n, 96n, 111n, 119n, 120n, 123n-124n, 127n, 132n, 135n, 140n, 142n, 151n, 154n-155n, 173n, 179n, 181n, 183n-184n, 210n, 213n, 215n, 222n, 232n, 241n, 255n-256n, 258n, 263n-265n, 269n-270n, 276n, 293n, 295n, 307n, 309n-310n, 318n, 357n, 400n, 411n, 439n, 445n, 452n, 456n, 462n, 486n, 488n, 494n-495n, 507n, 510n-511n, 541n, 548n-550n, 572n; Palaeo-African, 123n, 134n, 265n; Pre-Exodus Africa, 96n, 123n, 309n, 494n; African American, 318n; African and Eurasian Mythologies, 309n, 318n; African Conversion and the Widening Scope of Experience, 462n; African Eve, 510n; African Gondwana, 177n; African Islam, 151n; Africa and Asia, 37n, 492n; African-Eurasian, 142n, 265n, 276n, 316n; Africans and Europeans, 486n; Proto-Africans, 213n; *cf.* Back-into-Africa, Afrocentricity, Southern Africa, South Central Africa, South Africa, West Africa, sub-Saharan Africa
 African Studies 494n; *cf.* Africanist(s)
 African Studies Centre, Leiden (ASC, ASCL), Netherlands, 17, 580, 37n, 61n, 120n, 150n, 183n, 243n, 479n, 494n
 Africanist(s), 33, 41, 44, 48, 77, 82, 121, 125, 131, 151, 190, 232, 234, 238, 242-243, 251, 277, 491-492, 494, 545, 562, 581, 44n, 124n, 239n, 310n, 376n, 492n, 494n, 563n; North Atlantic -, 108; *cf.* African Studies
 Afrikaander, 134n; *cf.* South Africa
 Afroasiatic, 110, 115, 123-124, 131, 134, 146, 162, 207, 234, 237, 249, 256, 258-259, 261, 265, 291, 303, 351-352, 373-374, 381, 424, 447, 502, 505, 508, 510, 514, 517, 520-521, 523, 542, 567; Proto- -, 179, 224, 228, 260, 505, 506, 514; – and Eurasiatism, 259, 542; – and Indo-European, 46, 109, 228, 502-503, 505-506, 512-513
 Afroasiatic, 111n, 139n, 213n, 250n, 255n, 357n, 381n-382n, 451n, 494n, 499n, 507n; – and Sinocaucasian, 258n; Proto- -, 506n
 Afrocentricity, Afrocentrism, Afrocentrist(s), 41-42, 44, 57, 69, 105, 119, 121, 144-145, 150, 108, 173, 179-181, 191, 235, 243-244, 248, 251, 253-256, 316, 508, 545-547, 567, 583
 Afrocentricity, Afrocentrism, Afrocentrist(s), 111n, 142n, 141n, 145n, 179n, 217n, 253n, 256n, 279n, 376n; -, Strong, 181n; – and Black Athena, 108n
 Agar, 509
 Agatamori, 107
 Agency in Africa, ASCL Theme Group, 183n
 Agenor, 107n
 Aggressive Diachronic Model of World Mythology (van Binsbergen), 34, 183, 188, 238, 248, 258, 261-262, 312, 313-314, 328, 416, 426, 448, 451-452, 454, 184n, 281n
 Aggregation, 40, 238
 Agni, 534, 388n; *cf.* Fire
 Agriculture, 459; *cf.* Neolithic
 Agrippaeans, 305
 Aha, First Dynasty Egyptian king, 301
 Ah-bit ('Horizon of the Bee'), 281, 295, 103n; *cf.* Chemmis
 AIDS, 489
 Aigis, 107
 'Ain Draham, 49, 59
 Aino > Ainu
 Ainu, 379, 380, 381n
 Air, 140, 145, 296, 310-311, 419; – and Chaos, 342, 397
 Air, Sahara region, 130, 311n, 312n
 Aijer, 122
 Akkadian, 502
 Aktaion, 107n
 Al-Ashmunien, 112n
 Alaska and Greenland, 71
 Albertus Magnus, 297
 Alboin, 300
 Alexander The Great, 102, 294
 Alexandra (Lycophronis), 72n
 Alexandria, Egypt, 59, 162, 332, 345, 577
 Algeria(n(s)), 122, 130, 341, 60n
 Algonquin(s), 384, 387, 388-389
 Alkmaeon, 345
 Allat, 287
 All-Shining, 294n
 All-Shining, 344
 Al-Nuḥ, 420; *cf.* Noah
 Aloidae, 287
 Altaic, 123, 134-135, 352, 381, 400, 424, 502, 543-544, 567, 139n, 357n, 382n, 451n; Altaic and Dravidian, 83n; Altaic and Uralic, 139
 Altair, α Aquilae, a major star, Chinese 'Cowherd'; *cf.* Vega, 511
 Altars, 448n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
 Altertumswissenschaft, 342n
 Amala, 509
 Amaterasu, 107, 219, 221, 290, 331, 334, 340, 343, 347, 581; *cf.* Sun
 Amazon river, 495
 Amazons, 294
 Amazons, *legendary* West Asian people of women warriors, 294
 Amdjid, a particular Saharan well, 130
 America(n(s)), 33, 38, 57-58, 63, 73-74, 86, 104, 124, 134-135, 138-139, 167, 173-174, 214, 217-218, 222-223, 233, 236, 238, 243, 275, 281, 283, 287-288, 290, 293-294, 297-298, 304, 306-307, 310, 337-338, 348-350, 374-375, 380, 384, 387, 390, 395, 424-425, 428, 451-452, 455, 458, 475, 483, 492, 495-496, 534, 567, 570, 576; Native -, 289, 304, 390; – Blacks, 508; – English, 580; – War of Independence, 576; Americas (North - and South -, c.q.), 107, 127, 134-135, 138, 157, 167, 173, 214, 223, 258, 310, 338, 350, 374, 395, 451; Americanist, 577
 America(n(s)), 77n, 99n, 139n, 218n, 246n, 265n, 294n, 307n, 451n, 563n, 568n, 572n; African American, 318n; – Flood myths, 576n; *cf.* New World, Meso- -, Native -; South -
 Africa, *Mother of Western Civilization* (ben-Jochanan), 253
 Amerind, Native American languages other than Dene-Dinocaucasian

- (*q.v.*), 124, 135, 258-259, 351, 373, 380, 390, 395, 424-425, 451, 567; Proto-139, 259, 425; - and Austric, 259, 307; - and NADence, 135
- Amerind, 135n, 213n, 357n, 451n, 576n; - and Austric, 307n; - and African languages, 258n, 294n, 381n
- Amerindian Studies, 81n
- Amewakahiko, 107
- Amgid, Amguid, a particular well in the Sahara, 130
- AMH, see Anatomically Modern Humans
- Amma, 282
- Ammon, 106, 82n
- Ammonites, 74
- Amsterdam School of anthropology, 62, 67; *cf.* Köbben
- Amsterdam University, 36, 61
- Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 58, 61, 63, 66, 73, 245, 479, 500, 576, 511n
- Amun Re^c, 390, 82n
- Amur, 126, 129, 397, 500
- Amycus, 107n
- Amyntor, 107n
- Anahit(a), 115, 170, 190, 290, 294
- Anansi the Spider (*q.v.*), 115, 290, 375n
- Anat(h), West Asian goddess, 106, 115, 170, 290-291, 332, 342, 397; *cf.* Athena, Neith
- Anatolia(n(s)), 34, 106, 120, 122-123, 145, 255, 258, 280-281, 289, 512-513; - Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, 501
- Anatolian Pre-Pottery Neolithic A, 512n
- Anatomically Modern Humans, 41, 43, 50-51, 57, 67, 69, 71, 77-79, 113, 120-121, 137-138, 150-152, 159, 166, 170, 173-174, 176, 178, 189-181, 184-185, 187-191, 192-195, 200-201, 203, 205-206, 208-212, 223-226, 228-230, 233-235, 248, 252, 259, 261-262, 264-267, 278, 312-313, 316, 331, 338, 340-341, 377, 379, 394-395, 411, 416, 420, 445, 448, 452, 475-476, 488, 514, 557, 566-567, 578, 584; - and Neanderthals, 209, 210; - In Africa, 187, 204, 371; -
- Out of Africa (*q.v.*), 167
- Anatomically Modern Humans, 37n, 91n, 98n, 103n, 123n, 154n, 158n, 175n, 177n, 210n, 213n, 222n, 265n, 289n, 341n, 376n, 411n, 416n, 445n, 448n, 456n, 484n, 566n; - in Africa, 510n; - into the Neanderthaloid Levant, 313n; Anatomically Modern Humans: the erroneous assumption that their thought faculties have undergone no significant changes in the 200 ka of their existence, and are identical to those of modern scholars, 411 (*cf.* Logic)
- Ancient Near East(ern(ers)), 109, 214, 242, 415, 428, 455, 421n, 70n, 115n, 124n, 217n, 256n, 260n, 275n-276n, 285n, 291n, 300n, 387n, 400n, 416n, 493n
- Andaman Islands, 120, 214, 263, 315, 337, 341, 371, 395, 571, 574n, 566n
- Andaman Sea, 197
- Andromeda, 106
- Andronovo, 123
- Angeli, 509; *cf.* Luwe
- Angels, 267
- Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 129
- Anglosaxon, see England, American 483
- Angola(n(s)), 199, 202, 274-275, 286-287, 291, 294-295, 341, 396, 497, 511, 520, 543, 285n, 485n, 511n
- Animal Demurge, 428
- Animal Survivors of Flood, 426, 428
- Animal(s), 338, 428, 508
- Annual Extinction and Rekindling of Fire, 288, 419n
- Annual Meeting of The International Association for Comparative Mythology, 33, 39, 43, 45-47, 318, 407, 416, 556, 561, 578-579-580, 590, 232n, 318n, 407n, 421n, 529n, 555n; Fourth -, 533
- Annunciation, 333n; *cf.* Mary
- Antaeus, 107, 298, 299-300, 347
- Antarctica research station, 208-209
- Antelope, mythical character, 283
- Antenor, 115, 300n, 508n
- Anthropologie (Hartman), 48n
- anthropology.....Religious Anthropology, Free University, Amsterdam, 58
- Anthropos, a journal, 580
- Antinea, North African goddess, 115
- Antiquity, especially Graeco-Roman, *q.v.*, 106, 129, 246, 294, 299-300, 398, 524, 543-544, 151n; - and the Ancient Near East, 276n
- Anu, 106
- Anubis, 297, 333n
- Anuradhapura, 286n
- Ao people, Nagaland, India, 289
- Apep, 106, 190, 432
- Aphrodite, 38, 102, 106, 115, 302, 379, 300n, 508n
- Apis, 112
- Apocalypse, 296; *cf.* Ragnarok
- Apollo n Cave, 202
- Apollo and Heracles In the, 294
- Apollo, 107, 111, 169, 202, 286, 298, 304, 113n, 492n
- Apophis, 112
- Application of ancient mythical material in concrete present-day contexts of literary and pictorial production, political oratory, etc., 102
- A-priori (Kant), 85n
- Apsu, 106, 296
- Apulian, 385
- Aqhat, 106
- Aquatic Bird, 432, 380n; *cf.* bird
- Arabian Peninsula, Arab(s), Arabic, Arabian, 108, 129, 134, 163, 167, 210, 239, 241-242, 259, 287, 496-497, 502, 534, 154n, 210n, 250n, 276n, 456n, 486n
- Arachnophobia, 354; *cf.* spider
- Araneae, 375n
- Arannhod, 297
- Arbre de la Paix, 553
- Arch of The Covenant, 507; *cf.* rainbow
- Archaeological Museum of Taranto, 385
- Archaeology, 35, 261, 513
- Ardea alba, heron, 288
- Areop-enap, 218n; *cf.* Spider
- Ares, 107, 294, 298
- Artawi(yya), clan, NW Tunisia, 506n
- Argonautica (Apollonius Rhodius), 219, 289, 305, 111n, 300n
- Argus, 107n
- Ari, 507, 509, 510n
- Ariadne, 332
- Aristaeus, 111, 112-113, 111n, 300n, 451n
- Arizona, USA, 493n
- Ark of the Covenant of the Ancient Israelites, 293
- Ark, 162, 220, 333, 340, 343, 397, 417-418, 420, 427, 431, 451, 454, 456
- Armijo, 197
- Ars Poetica (Horace), 72n
- Ars Punctatoria, 533; *cf.* geomancy
- Arsinoë, 345
- Artemis, 74, 107, 286, 289, 302, 111n
- Arthur(ian), 333n
- Arthur, 281-282, 293, 295-296, 333n; - and Morgana, 296
- Articulate language, 413n
- Artificial woman, 296-297
- Artikulation des Gegebenen, as function of myth (Dupré), 88
- Artis (Natura Artis Magistra), Amsterdam Zoo, the Netherlands, 500
- Aruna, 144, 397
- Aryans, 316
- Asag, 106
- Aschenputtel (Grimm), 338
- ASCL, see African Studies Centre Leiden
- Asclepius, 107n
- Ase, 343
- Asgard, 343
- Ashanti, 547
- Asherat, 106
- Asheri and Corcella, 300
- Asia Center, Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA, 183n
- Asia Minor, 302, 347, 111n; *cf.* Anatolia, Turkey
- Asia(n(s)), *passim*; - and Palaeo-African, 207; - and Africa, 141, 508, 530; - and Ancient Europe, 223, 337; - and Buddhism, 397; - and Central Africa, 58; - and China, 115; - and

- Europe(an(s)), 139, 185, 187-190-191, 210, 235; - and North Africa(n(s)), 131, 165, 540; - and the Pacific, 455; - and Oceania, 213, 401; - and the Aegean, 293; - and the Americas, 451; - and the Ancient Near East, 109; - and the Mediterranean, 307; - and the Pelasgian Realm, 101; - and the Western Old World, 35; - Bronze Age, 58; - Buddhist and Hindu Homa, 532; Asia In the Early to Middle Holocene, 401
- Asia(n(s)), 69n, 124n, 142n, 258n, 265n, 307n-308n, 395n, 455n, 479n, 494n, 566n; Asia, North & East -, 451n; - and African, 64n, 124n, 395n, 479n; Asia and Europe, 494n; cf. South Asia, South East Asia, West Asia
- Asian Ethnology*, a journal, 563n
- Asianist(s), 77, 562, 576
- Aso, mythical heroine, 106
- Assam, 496, 496n
- Assassines, 580
- Assyriologist(s), 42, 94, 450, 256n
- Assyriology, 242, 275, 448, 450, 492
- Astaroth, 287
- Astarte, 287
- Astrologia terrestriis, 533; cf. geomantic
- Astronomy, 213n; Astronomy Pole Into Heaven Unilateral Being (Nar-Com22), 213n, 263n
- aśvamedha, Hindu sexual ritual of queen and stallion, 293
- AT, see Aarne-Thompson
- Atlanta, 68, 300
- Athena, 106, 107, 115, 169-170, 190, 220, 260, 290-291, 293-294, 332-333, 346, 349, 384-389, 83n, 140n (Minerva), 261n, 270n, 432n; - and Dionysus, 333; - and Hephaestus, 140n, 270n; - and Poseidon, 140n, 270n; - in Greek, 83n; - Neith, 507n
- Athens, 59, 389
- Athirat, 287
- Atibu, 218n
- Atibun, 217n
- Atlantic Europe, 171, 173
- Atlantic Ocean, 36, 42, 231, 350, 374, 389; trans-Atlantic, 375 (and Portuguese, 240); trans-continuities, 217n; Trans-Atlantic Exchanges, 376n
- Atlantide, North African mythical figure, 115
- Atlas mountains, 139
- Atlas, 107
- Atraxaxis, 281
- Attenuated Afrocentrist, 57
- Attis, 386
- Atum, 112, 169, 112n, 387n-388n
- Audumra, 107
- Aufklärung, 86; cf. Enlightenment
- Aunt, 220
- Australia(n(s)), 127, 135-136, 152-153, 157, 159, 164, 167, 169-170, 174, 193, 198-202, 207-208, 214, 228, 231, 263, 265, 290, 296, 305, 315, 341, 356, 371, 379-380, 388, 395, 398, 449, 455, 567-568, 103n, 135n, 136n, 210n, 218n, 265n, 376n, 451n, 454n; - Aboriginal, 103n
- Australopithecus, 508
- AustrAs = Austroasiatic, 451n
- Austria(n(s)), 129, 380
- Austriac, 71, 78, 124, 135, 236, 256, 258-261, 307, 351, 373, 395, 424-425, 567-568, 69n, 124n, 134n, 139n, 213n, 258n, 357n, 381n, 451n, 484n; Proto-Austriac, 135
- Austroasiatic, 161, 424, 357n, 451n, 484n; Proto-Austroasiatic, 260-261, 484n
- Austronesian, 258, 424, 521, 357n, 451n, 521n; Proto-Austronesian, 260, 261, 351, 521, 484n
- Autolykos, 107n
- Avalokitesvara, 349
- Avalon, 296
- Avaro-Andian, Westcaucasian language, 425
- Avars, 300
- Avestan, 351
- Azbine, 122
- Azjdjir Tuaregs, 130
- Azi Dahaka, 107
- Aztec, 289
- Ba- Rotse of Zambia, 286
- Bab al Mandab (Gate of Lamentation), 208, 210, 210n, 456n
- Babel, see: (1) Tower of Babel, etymological database, 83n, 95n, 484n, 499n, 508n; (2) Tower of Babel, Biblical theme, 95n
- Babylonia(n(s)), 93, 220, 291, 302, 333, 218n, 388n; - Flood myth, 287n
- Babyloniaca* (Berossus), 450
- Babylonian and Hittite, 448
- Babylonism, 254
- Ba'al, 106, 332, 342, 397; Ba'al-ze-Bub, 347n; Ba'al Tarz, 106
- Bacchantes* (Euripides), 385
- Bachama, 130
- Bacho Kiro In Bulgaria, 195
- Back-Into-Africa Hypothesis / HypothesisBack-Into-Africa, Hypothesis / Movement, 40, 78, 109, 116, 120, 135, 147-148, 150-152, 165, 171-172, 174, 181, 185-186, 188, 190-191, 194, 196, 203, 207, 215, 223, 225, 229-231, 234-237, 246, 248, 263, 266-268, 315-316, 338, 380, 395, 399, 450, 69n, 142n, 265n, 331n, 494n, 567n; Pre-Back-Into-Africa, 207
- Baganda, 130
- Baggara, 129
- Baghdad, 167, 305, 496
- Baghdadi, 305
- Baikal, Lake, 137, 200
- Bajracharya, Pandit, 534
- Bakici Baci, 291
- Bakweri, 519
- Balaam, Balam, 524n
- Balder, 301
- Bali(nese), Indonesia, 46, 396, 539-540, 544-547, 548-549, 539n, 548n-549n; - Fire (q.v.) cult, 547
- Balkan, 289
- Baltic, 83, 211, 293, 351, 398, 401
- Bamileke, people, Cameroon, 382, 543, 551-553
- Bangala, 288
- Banks Isl., Melanesia, 348, 217n
- Bantu, linguistic phylum, 42, 46, 124, 130, 134, 137, 139, 162, 163, 168, 179, 223, 228, 243-244, 248, 249, 256-258, 260, 270, 273, 277, 279, 281-282, 288, 291, 303, 308, 337, 341, 351, 374, 380, 390, 494-495, 499, 504, 513, 515-521, 523-524, 532, 548, 556, 568; cf. Nigercongo (> Bantu); Pre-Bantu, 301, 521; Proto-Bantu, 124, 162, 179, 257, 260, 291, 300, 301, 303, 515-517, 520, 523, 548; Proto-Bantu In the Bronze Age Mediterranean, 301; Common Bantu, 516; Common Bantu and Proto-Bantu, 515, 517, 523; Bantu Expansion, 113
- Bantu, 69n, 74n, 96n, 124n, 140n, 162n, 241n, 253n, 258n, 285n-286n, 296n, 310n, 493n, 499n, 532n; - in Southern Africa, 134n; - in Asia, 68n; Proto-, 74n, 124n
- Bantuist, 257
- Banyoro, 130
- Barbarians, Barbaroi, 316, 42n
- Barbe Bleu, 334
- Bari, 129
- Bariba, Borgu, 130
- Baronga, 348
- Barotse, 274, 276, 297, 493, 293n, 484n
- Barotseland, 273, 274, 286, 303
- Basarwa, 252
- Basque, 389, 425, 357n
- Başra, Iraq, 276n
- Basutu, see Sotho
- Bata, 106, 297, 333n
- Batswana, see Botswana
- Bayuda Steppe, 129
- Bean, Straw and The Fiery Coal (Grimm), 75
- Bearson, 107
- Beauty and The Beast, 338
- Becoming a Sangoma (van Binsbergen), 241, 76n
- Bednarik, 78, 195
- Bee, 111, 112, 171, 244, 255, 271, 278, 280-281, 291, 295, 305, 420, 505; -, Queen, 280; -hive, 280; cf. Lumbamba; - and Honey, 281
- Bee, 83n, 111n, 300n, 505n; - Ruler, 300n; cf. Aḥ-Ḥi-Before the Presocratics (van Binsbergen), 34, 40, 57-58, 71, 79, 140, 190, 246, 397, 408, 470, 212n, 465n
- Beijing, China, 33, 191, 222, 236, 247, 260, 312, 314,

- 560, 564, 578, 183n, 184n, 215n, 239n, 315n, 319n, 417n, 524n
- Beijing Round Table for Comparative Mythology, 334
- Being, 100, 169, 175-176, 219, 221, 223, 241, 330-331, 334, 337; Annihilation of Being, 331; Non-Being, 169, 330, 341, 446; Not-Yet-Being, 331; cf. cosmogony, cosmoclasm, chaos
- Being, 175n, 448n; - and Non-Being, 175n, 332n; Pre-cosmogonic Not-Yet-, 333n
- Belfast, N Ireland, UK, 76, 76n
- Belgium, Belgian(s), 38, 238, 39n, 44n, 96n, 516n
- Belles Lettres*, Literary, 38, 103-104, 108n
- Beltis, 106
- Bemba of Zambia, 286, 288, 518, 293n
- Bena, 518-519
- Bena-Lulua, 286
- Beni Amer, 129, 576
- Beni Selim, 129
- Benin, 294, 396-397
- Beowulf*, 107
- Berber, 341, 502, 567, 276n, 357n, 451n; and Old Egyptian, 250n
- Bering Strait, 120, 236, 523, 96n, 514n; Beringia(n), 306, 307n, 568n; trans-Bering migrations, 308n
- Berlin, Germany, 282; Berlin Museum, 130
- Bestiary, 37
- Bible, Biblical, 35, 42, 58, 73-74, 121, 140, 144, 161-162, 173, 176, 188, 213, 215, 267, 279, 286, 291, 294, 296-297, 304, 320, 340, 342, 376, 387, 410, 427-428, 448-449, 462, 466, 472, 480, 557; in Hellenistic (q.v.) Alexandria (q.v.), 162; cf. *Old Testament*
- Bible, Biblical, 70n, 96n, 138n, 150n, 190n, 286n, 307n, 321n, 347n, 486n, 576n; - Adam (q.v.), 510n; - Hebrew, 285n; - Jonah, 387n; - Nimrod, 201n; - Onan, 387n
- Biblical Studies, 95, 242, 492
- Bibliotheca* (Apollodorus), 287, 294, 296, 298, 346, 385-386, 83n
- Bibliotheca Historica* (Diodorus Siculus), 112
- Bifrost, 190
- Big Bang, 334, 394, 176n
- Bight of Benin, 378, 551
- Bihe, 288
- Bilkamir, 129
- Bilulu, 106
- Bilzingsleben, 195
- Bird Heart, 338, 339
- Bird, 95-96, 150, 156, 168, 171, 178, 184, 186, 189, 195-196, 198-201, 210, 224, 227, 229, 264, 271, 288, 308, 338, 378-380, 394-395, 426, 432, 432, 505-506; Bird-Like Nature of Gods, 288; cf. Garuda, Eagle, Hawk
- Birth of Fire In Japanese, 529
- Biscaye, SW Europe, 425
- Bituma, 550, 285n, 541n, 556n
- Black African, 131, 547
- Black and White, 487
- Black Athena* (Bernal, q.v.), 34, 42, 51, 83, 109, 137, 139, 234, 242-244, 246, 248, 255, 278, 386, 548, 567, 77n, 83n, 110n-111n, 144n-145n, 179n, 244n, 252n, 256n, 279n, 432n, 449n, 559n
- Black Athena Revisited* (Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers), 243
- Black Athena Ten Years After* (van Binsbergen), 110n
- Black Sea, Black Sea (Pontus, - Euxinus), 142n, 432n
- Black, 162, 179, 181, 292, 300, 486, 489, 547, 567
- black-and-white, variegated / pied, colour / texture, 96n; cf. speckled
- Blackbeard The Pirate, 300
- Blackitude, 382
- Blacks and Whites, 316
- Blacks, 101, 252, 508, 98n, 179n, 256n
- Blind Brother, 496
- Blodeuwedd, 297
- Blombos Cave 38, 196, 198-199
- Blood, 302; Blood As Poison, Menstruation (NarCom), 263n; Blood Brothers, 338 (AT)
- Blue Nile, 134
- Bluebeard, 221, 334, 338, 343-344
- Boadicea, Queen, 294
- Bobangi, 518
- Bodhi Tree, 286n
- Bodhisattva, 340, 388
- Boer, 241
- Boii Gauls In Gallia Cisalpina, 300
- Bokenyane, an East African leg child, 348
- Bolewa, 130, 130
- Bolewa, Ngano and Kare-Kare of Northern Nigeria, 130
- Bon, Tibetan cult, 397
- Bones, Shamanism / Bones, NarCom, 264
- Boni, people in Kenya, 286
- *Borean, Upper Palaeolithic language construct for Central to East Asia, and the attending *Borean Hypothesis, 71, 78, 120, 123-124, 135, 138-139, 146, 166, 207, 231, 236, 248, 256-261, 265, 267, 307, 351-352, 373-374, 377, 380-381, 390-391, 395, 411-412, 414-415, 425, 446, 541-542, 548, 567-568; Pre-*Borean Pan-Gaian, 568
- *Borean, 69n, 91n, 124n, 135n, 139n, 154n, 213n, 258n, 264n, 308n, 357n, 381n, 389n, 396n, 445n, 476n, 484n, 499n; - into Sinocaucasian, 139n
- Borgu, 130
- Bori, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 46, 164, 543-545
- Borneo, 379
- Bororo, 82
- Bospowes, 497n
- Boston International Airport, 581
- Boston, 576
- Botswana (inhabitants: Batswana), 35, 36, 44, 46, 110, 240-242, 245, 419, 531, 537-539, 550, 276n, 541n, 549n, 578n
- Boyle's Law, 312n
- Brahma, 388
- Brahmin(s), 388, 530, 530n, 550n
- Bretagne, France, 514n
- Bridges, 448n; cf. Reven Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Britain, Island of, 293
- British Columbia Folklore Society, 155n, 271n
- British Columbia, Canada, 430
- British, 76, 93, 131, 274, 276, 389, 480, 176n, 563n; - Central and Southern Africa, 486n; British Isles, 350, 389; British Museum, 130; British, cf. Great Britain
- Brno, Czech Republic, 46, 581, 555n
- Broad Homeland Hypothesis, 258
- Broad Institute, 316
- Broers, Peter D.H., Romanist, Hebraeist and ICT specialist, 645 (and see Authors Index)
- Broken Hill, Kabwe, 210
- Bronze Age, 40, 58, 79, 120, 122-123, 125, 140, 145-146, 169, 184, 186, 216, 228, 235, 239, 242, 249, 253, 255-256, 265, 268-270, 279, 281, 294, 372-373, 389-390, 398, 400, 415-416, 422, 447, 452, 512, 543, 548, 567; - Ancient Near East, 242, 415; - Eurasia, 79; - West Asia, 215, 307, 548; - Mediterranean, 35, 40, 93, 137, 139, 246, 257, 301, 303, 400, 448; - Old World, 34; - Sea Peoples, 35
- Bronze Age, 72n, 83n, 109n, 140n, 150n, 256n, 265n, 285n, 388n-389n, 411n, 432n; - Mediterranean, 131n, 158n, 540n
- Brother, 296, 339, 480, 496; Younger -, 296
- Brown University Library, 62n
- Brown, 332n, 341n, 493n, 561n
- Brown, intermediate skin pigmentation in humans, 567
- Brown-to-Black, 567
- Bruder Lustig (Grimm), 338
- Brynhild, 107
- Buddha, Buddhism, Buddhaist(s), 144, 188, 284, 301, 340, 388-389, 396-397, 529, 534, 537, 539, 551-552, 557, 578, 583, 124n, 272n, 285n-286n, 530n-531n, 557n; - Homa, 532, 532; - Fire, 46; - Sumsumara, 496; - and Islam,

- 216;– Vedabba, 496;
Pre-Buddhist, 534
Buffalo River, see Linyanti
Buffalo, 304
Bu-Ĵaruba, Sidi, NW Tuni-
sian saint and shrines,
60, 60n
Building-With-Skulls, 298
Bukhen, 129
Bukusu, 519
Bulgaria(n(s)), 57, 195, 289,
57n
Bulgarian Comparative
Education Society, 57n
Bulgars, 300
Bull of the Ennead, 112
Bunu, 550, 550n
Burashaski, 425
Burma, 283
Burning The Barn To De-
stroy an Unknown Animal
(AT), 339
Burning The Witch In Her
Own Oven (AT), 338
Burushaski, 357n; a lan-
guage isolate
Bushmen, 252, 523, 532n
Bushong, 159, 160
Busiris, 106
Butcher, Mr Great – , 295
Buteo, 288
Buzzards, 288
Buzzards, 288
Byblos, 287
Cackler, 396
Cacus, 107, 296, 300, 341,
60n
Caddo, 281
Caddoan, 390
Cadmus, of Thebes, 106,
107, 342, 342, 385
Cahiers Caribéens
d'Égyptologie, 254
Cain and Abel, 427, 449
Cainan, 162
California, 136, 580, 136n
Cambridge MA, 46, 246,
312–314, 316, 529, 533, 579–
581, 47n, 67n, 246n, 318n,
479n
Cambridge University
Museum of Archaeology,
129
Cambridge, 36, 576
Mt Cameroon, 544
Cameroon, 254, 342, 376,
378, 381–382, 543, 551–553,
75n
Canaan, 106, 162, 342, 397,
74n, 275n; Canaanitic
Anat, 332
Canada, 302, 430
Canadian Press, 431n
Cannibal Hymn (Unas,
Pyramid Texts), 294
Cape of Good Hope, 505,
523, 544
Cape, 515
Capisca, 136n
Capitalists and Socialists,
316
Caprimulginae, 286
Cardinal Directions, 263n
Caribbean region, 242, 289,
544–545
Caribbean region, 544
Carschena, Alpine archaeo-
logical site, 136n
Cassara, Demiurge, Man-
jacos, Guinea-Buissau,
287n
Cassiopia, 106
Castellon, Spain, 136n, 218n
Castor and Pollux, 72, 144,
332, 72n; cf. Dioscuri
Catholic, see Roman
Catholic, 384
Cattle, 267, 490
Cattle-Swallower, 483, 485,
491, 485n
Caucasian languages, 130,
134, 260, 351, 425, 138n,
311n
Caucasus, 129, 138n, 139n,
142n
Cauldron of Kingship, 272,
288–294, 96n, 293n–294n
Cauldron, 293
Cave, where Endymion
sleeps, 331; – In Book VII
of *De Re Publica* (Plato),
84,
Celestial Axis and the
Nocturnal Star-Spangled
Sky, 299n; cf. Heaven
Celts, Celtic, 83, 106, 123,
281–282, 293, 295, 297,
300, 551, 140n, 333n, 538n;
cf. Gallia, Gaul; – and
Uralic, 291; – Europe,
294; – World, 270
Central Africa, 34, 42, 45,
57–58, 61–62, 69, 71, 75–76,
109, 139, 147, 161–162, 169–
170, 239, 244, 248–249,
253, 255, 271, 273, 275–277,
279, 283, 290–293, 307–
308, 375–380, 448–449,
479–481, 486, 489–492,
494, 502–503, 507, 509,
521–522, 532, 544, 550–551,
555–557, 507n, 574n; –
Iron Age, 276, 492; cf.
South Central Africa
Central America(n(s)),
524n
Central Asia, 110, 119–121, 123,
131, 134–135, 138–141, 146–
147, 150, 166, 168–170, 174,
179–180, 209, 212, 214, 222–
223, 233, 236, 243, 256,
258, 265, 268, 275, 281,
283, 288, 292, 294, 301,
304, 337–338, 380, 399–
400, 425, 445, 449–450,
455, 475, 492, 525, 539,
541–542, 545, 548, 551,
578; – In the Upper Pa-
laeolithic, 123, 170, 390; –
Pelagian, 141, 548; – to
the Ancient Near East,
214
Central Asia(n(s)) (to East
Asia), 69n, 83n, 139n–
140n, 142n, 213n, 264n,
270n, 399n, 445n, 476n; –
Steppe, 294n; – Upper
Palaeolithic, 135n, 294n,
357n, 396n
Central Bantu (*q.v.*), 42, 273
Central Branch, or Conti-
nental Branch, of disin-
tegrating *Borean, *q.v.*,
259, 379, 258n, 257n
Central Europe, 195, 348
Ceraunius, 107 Cewa, 495;
cf. Nyanja
Ceylon, cf. Sri Lanka; – and
Madagascar, 521
Chad(ian(s)), 202, 515, 520
Chad, Lake, 130, 163, 258
Chadic, Afroasiatic lan-
guage phylum, 260, 261,
502, 567, 250n, 357n
Champas, Eastern Tibet,
129
Chants et Contes (Junod),
497n
Chaos, 106, 190, 219–220,
302, 331, 333, 342, 345,
396–397, 432, 447, 417n;
cf. cosmogony
Chariot In Saharan rock art,
122
Charlemagne, 305
Chemmis, 281, 295, 103n
Chewa, 518, 522
Chiang Mai, Thailand, 284,
551, 552–553, 285n
Chibinda, 282, 283n; – and
Luweji, 296n
Chichen Itza, 300
Child(ren), 189, 265, 288,
295–296, 333, 338, 384,
388–393, 380n–'s Dedic-
ation to the Morning Sun,
390 Chile, Northern, 136n
China, Chinese, 33, 36, 39,
59, 79, 107, 115, 119, 121,
123, 144–145, 150, 176, 191,
196–197, 214, 216, 220, 225,
230, 234, 243, 260–261,
282–283, 294, 297, 300,
314, 333–334, 342, 396,
400, 409, 415, 502–503,
505, 524–525, 532–533,
536, 547, 562, 564, 568,
578, 580–581; Classic Old
– (language form), 260; –
Flood myths, 342; –
Tower myth, 287; – Pan
Ku creator myth, 282; –
Taoism, 549, 552; – and
Korea, 243, 300; – and
Meso America, 455; –
and South Asia; – and
South Central African,
246; Chinese Lord Death,
282; – Shang Dynasty,
145
China, Chinese, 71n, 98n,
115n–116n, 183n–184n,
239n, 276n, 296n, 315n,
381n–382n, 412n, 495n,
510n–511n, 531n–532n; Na-
tional Treasures of
China, 524n; – Flood
myth, 417n; – Taoist,
524n; – and Japan, 184n
Chinyanja Folklore (Rat-
tray), 496n
Chnum, 297
Chobe river, 521, 522, 521n,
522n
Chokwe, 274, 286–287
Chola, 161, 277, 557–558,
493n
Christ, 333n; cf. Jesus of
Nazareth
Christianity, Christian(s),
42n, 102n, 124n, 310n,
462n, 486n, 576n; – and
Islamic, 252n; – Ethiopia,
151n
Christianity, Christian(s),
48, 58, 165, 174, 188, 249,
277, 283, 289–290, 300,
393, 342, 384, 424, 452,
495; Pre- – Northern
Europe, 107; English
Christian, 289; Protes-
tantism, 58; – and Islam,
101, 280, 417, 448; cf.
Judeao...
Christmas, 289
Christophorus, 305
Chrysaor, 387
Chthonius, 107
Chu Wang, 107
Chukchee-Kamchatkan,
502, 514n
Cilicia, 106

- Cinderella, 495, 495n; As A Pelasgian Theme, 495n
 Cingle De La Mola Remigia, archaeological site, Spain, 136n, 218n
 Circe, 115, 282, 297, 508n; – and Pasiphaë, 300n
 Circumcision, 291
 Ciris (Virgil), 72n
 CITI, Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (*q.v.*), 179, 186–188, 224–225, 228–230, 262, 265–266, 452, 455; CITI VII, 392
 Civil Rights Movement, USA, 508
 Civilized and Barbarians, 316
Clash of Civilisations (Huntington), 570
 Classicists, 85
 Cloth, 550
 Cloud Riders, 333
 Clytaemnestra, 72, 144, 332, 72n
 Cocalus, 333n
Coffin Texts, 301
 Colchis, Colchian(s), 297, 305, 300n; – Aeëtes, 300n
 Cologne Museum, 130
 Combat, 428, 440, 467; *cf.* heroes
Commentarii ad Lycophonem (Stesichorus), 83n
Commodification: Things, Agency and Identities: The Social Life of Things Revisited (van Binsbergen & Geschiere), 530
 Common Era, 400
 Communism, 86
 Comoro Islands, 532, 176n
 Comparison, Comparability, Comparativists, 33, 40, 57–58, 64, 67, 72, 57n
 Comparative Method, 574n
 Comparative Mythologists, 48, 421
 Comparative Mythology, 33, 34–36, 38, 40–41, 44–47, 50–51, 73, 246, 310, 312, 314, 330, 404, 448, 479, 559, 565, 576, 580; *cf.* New –
 Comparative Mythology, 38n, 47n, 64n, 150n, 183n–184n, 232n, 264n, 341n, 357n, 411n, 416n, 479n, 482n, 561n, 575n; – of the Fly Isl., 347n; – of the Witzel school, 150n; – is predicated on an unlikely tacit assumption that the thought faculties of Anatomically Modern Humans have undergone no significant changes in the 200 ka of their existence, and are identical to those of modern scholars, 411n
 Connection, *cf.* Re-connection
 Conference for The Comparative Sciences, Sofia, Buklgaria, 2013, 57
 Conference of the International Association of Comparative Mythology, 315n; *cf.* Annual Meeting of –
Confronting the Sacred: Durkheim Vindicated Through Philosophical Analysis, Ethnography, Archaeology, Long-Range Linguistics, And Comparative Mythology (van Binsbergen), 35, 557
 Confusion of Nations (and of Tongues), 74, 286, 288, 556, 217n, 286n, 291n
 Congo river, 492; Lower –, 279n; – and Zambezi, 304
 Congo, 113, 144, 272, 274–276, 342, 396, 493, 497, 177n; Congo-Brazzaville, 520
 Connection Between Heaven and Earth, 170, 227, 377, 428, 448, 454, 458, 467
 Constructivism, Strong, 181n
 Contamination, especially of local mythology by world religions from Western Eurasia, 249, 452, 215n
 Contest With Drought Demon, 271
 Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation (CITI), 41, 186–187, 193, 224, 226–228, 262, 265–266, 371, 452, 458, 263n, 412n; and individual items
 Continent and Modes of Production, 454
 Continental and the Peripheral Cluster of disintegrating *Borean, 373–374, 380, 567, 357n
 Continuities of African and Eurasian Mythologies, 309n
 Contradictory Messengers Bring Death (NarCom), 156, 171, 185, 264, 308
 Conus shell, 169, 293, 521
 Conventionalised, 39
 Convergence, 138
Cornish For All (Nance), 497n
 Cornwall, Cornish, 497
 Coroebus, 107n
 Coronus, 107n
 Corpus Christi College, Oxford, UK, 36
 Corsica, 342
 Cosmos, Cosmic, 45, 92, 156, 171, 184, 189, 404
 Cosmic Bird, 343
 Cosmic Egg, 40, 45, 68–71, 73–74, 152, 169, 189, 220–221, 224, 229, 333–334, 343, 394–401–402, 584; – and the Flood, 77; – and Europe, 72; – in Uralic and Baltic mythologies, 398
 Cosmic Egg, 70n, 71n, 176n, 230n, 333n, 395n; – in South East Asia, 70n; – in Western Eurasia, 72n
 Cosmology, Cosmological, 34, 57, 115; – Substrates, 34, 57; – of the Lion and the Leopard, 115, 116, 504, 512, 514, 522; *cf.* Steady-State, Hoyle, Element Cosmology, 34, 57
 Cosmology of the Lion and the Leopard, 522n; – of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, 344n; – of the Separation of Land and Water, 213n
 Cosmogony, 448n; – of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, 300n, 380n, 432n; – of the Separation of Water and Land, 72n, 300n, 380n; cosmogony...Pre-cosmogonic, 380n
 Cosmogony, Cosmogonic, 176, 246, 333, 431; 448n
 Pre –, 74, 332, 344; – Rainbow Snake, 308; – Virgin, 171, 185, 227, 265 (and Her Lover-Son, 156, 264); Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, 267, 302, 410, 300n, 380n, 432n; Cos-
- mogony of the Separation of Water and Land, 432, 72n, 300n, 380n; Pre-cosmogonic, 380n *cf.* Steady-State Theory of Fred Hoyle, 394
 Cosmoclast, end of the world, 296, 343; *cf.* cosmogony, cosmoclast
 Cow of Heaven, 263n
 Coyote, mythical character, 107, 428, 263n; – and Antelope, 283
 Creation, 34, 221, 246, 288, 295, 301, 333–334, 396, 417–418, 428, 447; – of The World and of Man, 449n; – Deity / God, 111, 354 386 (creation god in Finnish myth, 72, 396); – Goddesses, 290; – Myths and The Visual Arts, Leiden conference, 2005, 196; Creator, 71, 217, 271, 289–291, 297–298, 302, 305, 349, 376, 386, 428, 447; Inca Creator, 302, 305; – Amma, 282; – Sun, 302; – Goddess, 399; Creatrix, 290, 291, 428, 451; Creatrix and Her Only Son, 448
 Creation, 296n, 387n, 417n, 448n, 550n; Secondary – (after cosmoclast), 550n; – and Flood, 566n; – Myth, 451n; Creator Goddess, 140n, 270n; Creator God, 177n, 217n, 380n
 Creation Myths and the Visual Arts, conference, Leiden, Netherlands, 196
 Crete, Cretan(s), 281, 332, 345–346, 568, 111n, 294n, 333n; – Minos, 294n; *cf.* Daedalus
 Criminal Law, 75n
 Cronus, 102, 107, 220, 302, 333, 344–346, 397, 402; – and Aphrodite, 38
 Cross Model, 230; *cf.* Pelasgian
 Crosshatching, 38
 Crow, mythical character, 219, 331, 348
 Cu Chulainn, 293
 Cuculidae, 300n
 Cueva De La Ara, 197
 Cult of The Cave-Bear, 298
 Cults of Affliction, definition, 532n

- Culture, Cultural, 341n;
Culturally Receptive, 400n; Studying A Culture As A Whole, 160n;
Cultural Turn, 561n; Universals of – , 191; Culture hero, 219, 331, 349, 450; – Oannes, 450
Cushites, 121
Cushitic, 260, 502, 250n, 494n
Cybele, 115, 287, 346, 503, 543, 111n, 508n
Cyclicity, 34, 57; Cyclical Element Transformation, 584, 58n, 285n, 465n
Cyclops, 272, 345
Cygnus, 107, 298–300, 492n
Cymric, 526
Cynegetica (Xenophon), 129
Cynegeticon (Falliscus), 129
Cyprus, 106
Cyrene, 111–112, 300n
Czech Republic, Czech(s), 46, 297, 581, 499n, 555n, 577n
Daedalus, 297, 397, 333n; – and Icarus, 219, 331, 345; cf. Talus
Dagda, 144, 293
Dagon, 450
Dahomey, 294, 396
Dallit, 142n
Dancing In Thorns (AT), 339
Daniel, Bible book, 579
Danu, 107
Danube, 136
Dar Fertit, 129
Dara, 507
Darfur, 129
Das Lämmchen und Fischchen (Grimm), 339
Das Lämmchen (Grimm), 339
Das singende springende Löweneckerchen (Grimm), 338
Dat Mäken von Brakel (Grimm), 339
Daughter, 338
Daumesdick (Grimm), 338
Dawn, see Aruna
Day and Night, 417n
De Interpretatione (Aristotle), 411n
De Iside Et Osiride (Plutarch), 334, 387, 526, 527n
Der junge Riese (Grimm), 339
de Rais, Gilles, 340
De Re Publica (Plato), 84, 331 = Republic
Dead Man Walking, cf. Mufuenda, 373
Death, 156, 171, 185, 264, 272, 273–274, 276, 280–282, 308, 331–332, 342, 397, 492; Mythology of – and Dying, 580; Death Demon, 276; Death and Dying, 289n, 318n; Death and the Supernatural, 289n; cf. Lord Death
Dedicating a Newborn Child to the Morning Sun (q.v.), 493n
Deianira, 107
Deipnosophistae / Learned Banqueters (Athenaeus), 72n
Delagoa Bay, 348
Delayed Cosmogony (cf. Heaven and Earth, Rangi and Papa, Uranus and Gaia, Obatala and Oduduwa, q.v., 79
Delphi, 106, 294
Delphyne, 107
Delta, 103n
Deluge, 271, 331; cf. Flood
Demeter, 107, 545
Demiurge, 168, 169, 263, 267, 290, 296, 428, 96n, 287n, 465n–466n, 469n, 506n, 560n; cf. Mvula
Demon, 106, 272, 276; demon defeated by Hindu war god Skanda, 294
Dene, 123, 374, 390; Dene-speaking Amerindian, 390; Dene... Proto-Dene, 542; Dene-Sinocaucasian, 78, 109, 227, 425, 567, 568, 115n, 451n; (Proto-Dene-Sinocaucasian, 139, 178–179, 224); Dene-Sinocaucasian Hypothesis, 425; Dene-Sinocaucasian and Austric, 124; – Indopacific and Super-Nostratic, 425
Deng, 302
Denmark, Danish, Dane(s), 130, 293
DenSinCa = Dene-Sinocaucasian
Department of Indian and Sanskrit Studies
Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Harvard, Cambridge MA, USA, 184, 529, 150n, 183n, 407n, 479n
Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 184
Der Bauer (Grimm), 339
Der Fuchs (Grimm), 338
Der Gang nach dem Eisenhammer (Schiller), 497
Der gläserne Sarg (Grimm), 339; cf. Sleeping Beauty
Der Jude (Grimm), 339
Der Königsohn (Grimm), 339
Der Krautesel (Grimm), 339
Der Liebste Roland, 338
der Neue Pauly (Cancik & Hofmann), 342n
Der Riese (Grimm), 339
Der Schneider (Grimm), 339
Der starke Hans (Grimm), 339
Der Starke Hans (Grimm), 343
Der Teufel (Grimm), 339
Der Trommler (Grimm), 339
Der Wolf (Grimm), 338
Der Wolf und die sieben jungen Geisslein (Grimm)
Descent Into The Underworld, 332–333; cf. Inanna. Eurydica, Odysseus, esus
Descriptio Graeciae (Pausanias), 386, 72n, 111n
Despoina, 107
Deucalion, 294, 420; – and Pyrrha, 428
Devil In The Sack (AT), 338
Diachronic, 262, 570
Dialektik Der Aufklärung (Adorno & Horkheimer), 86
Dialogi Deorum (Lucanus), 72n
Dichotomous variables in multivariate analysis, 423
Dictaeon Cave, 346
Didi, 347
Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten (Grimm), 338
Die drei schwatten Prinzessinnen (Grimm), 339
Die Eule (Grimm), 339
Die Gänsemagd (Grimm), 338
Die Kristallkugel (Grimm), 339
Die Rübe (Grimm), 339
Die Ware Braut (Grimm), 339
Die Wassernixe (Grimm), 338
Difference, 252; cf. Derrida, logic
Diffusion, 110, 292; Secondary, As Contamination, 215n
Diffusionist Hypothesis (Werner), 279
Dilolo, Lake, 287
Dinder, river in Sudan, 129
Dinka, 302
Diomedes, 107, 298
Dionysiac (Nonnus), 346, 386, 111n
Dionysus, -ian, 107, 115, 220, 294, 333, 346, 384–385, 388–389, 503, 543, 115n, 387n, 508n, 541n
Dioscorea, 200, 201
Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, 72, 144, 190, 332, 340, 396–397
Diptera, 281
Disclosing Women's Secret Initiatory Knowledge, 198n
Distributions, 218, 328, 335
Dithlaoa, 36
Divination Systems, 36, 190, 276n; cf. geomancy, Ifá, Hakata, 'ilm al-raml, I Ching
Divine Being, 286
Divine Trickster, 74, 114, 375n
Dizzy Ones, 96n
DNA, 203, 259; DNA Type, 215, 573n; DNA Types A and B, 337; DNA Type B, 214, 258, 449, 475; DNA Type M, 259; DNA Type N, 337, 351; cf. Mitochondrial
Dogon, Mali, 223, 282, 286, 291, 308, 337, 396, 450, 450n; – Nommo, 74, 286
Dogrib, 283
Domenichini, Luca, 531n
Domergu, Saharan location, 130
Dong, 283
Dongola, 129
Donkey, 496
Doré, G., 344
Dornröschen (Grimm), 338, 339
Dotted, 137; cf. speckled, leopard
Dragon, 271, 272, 296; –

- Slayer, 338- - king as
Wind, 272- - Fiery - , 271-
cf. Firedrake
Drakon, 107
Dravidian, 123, 258, 352, 381,
567, 139n, 142n, 357n
Dream, 281
Drought, 271, 295-296, 305,
307; - Serpent, 296;
Drought Demon, 271, cf.
Vitra
Drs, 'doctorandus', former
academic degree in the
Netherlabnds, 58
Druids, 396
Dryness, 296
Dryopes, 107n
Duala, 342
Duality, dualist, 156, 170,
184, 228, 265, 316; Duality
Two Children Twins
(NarCom), 264
Dudugera, 384, 386
Dumuzi, 332, 348, 466, 543
Durban, 533
Durga and Kali, 115
Dutch, 33, 52, 85, 87, 90,
241, 260, 378, 389, 525,
527, 564, 577, 98n, 286n,
288n, 412n, 479n, 486n,
527n, 576n-577n; Dutch
Indies Army, 547; Dutch-
language Belgian, 38;
Dutch Africanist, 479; cf.
Netherlands
Dying, 580; cf. Death
Dymwach the Giant, cf. Og,
293
Dynastic Egypt (q.v.), 112,
243, 201, 281, 301, 387;
Dyn. XIX, 396; Early- ,
298
Eagle, 95, 283, 288, 506, 546
Early Modern, 289, 297,
397; - Jewish tradition,
297
Earth, 68, 71-72, 74, 79, 106,
138, 140, 144, 150, 152, 156,
161-163, 168-171, 173-174,
178-179, 184-186, 189-190,
196-198, 200, 202, 213, 215,
220-221, 223-225, 227,
229, 260-261, 264-265,
267, 282, 286-288, 293,
296-302, 306, 308, 310,
334, 333-334, 337, 341, 343-
345, 349, 351-352, 371, 373,
377, 384-386, 396, 410,
417-419, 421, 427-429, 431,
439, 446-448, 454, 458-
459, 461-462, 464-467,
469-470, 476, 541, 37n,
72n, 140n, 218n, 221n,
265n, 270n, 287n, 307n-
308n, 380n, 387n, 417n,
426n, 432n, 448n, 467n,
494n, 530n; Earth and
Underworld, 456; Earth
Diver, 211, 379, 419, 423-
424, 426-428, 431-432,
438, 446, 470; (and
Noah-like Flood Hero,
432); (to bird, 426); (and
Flood Hero, 426); Earth
priest, 170, 503; Earth and
Heaven (q.v.), 287, cf.
Separation, Re-
Connection, i; Earth-
centred Osiris, 190;
Earth-dweller, 290;
Earth-Lighting(q.v.)-
Rainbow (q.v.), 150, 187;
cf. Papa
Earth Diver, 263n, 423n,
426n, 470n
Earth-Dragon Mountain
Volcano, a NarCom,
263n
East Africa(n(s)), 62, 66,
130, 161, 292, 496, 521,
134n, 275n, 456n
East Asia, 138, 140, 141, 232,
246, 249, 256, 270, 288,
301, 380, 496, 70n, 140n,
276n, 400n, 529n; - Fire
ritual, 529n; - In the Up-
per Palaeolithic, 123
Easter, 289
East-West, 35, 150-151, 172,
180, 187, 246, 249, 341,
354, 373, 380, 396, 400,
221n, 355n, 378n, 388n; cf.
West-East
Echidna, 107
Ecstatic Religion (Lewis),
540n
Ecstatic religion, 239
Edao, 386
*Eden in the East: the
Drowned Continent of
Southeast Asia* (Oppen-
heimer), 448
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK,
39, 45, 421n
Een Buik Openen (van
Binsbergen), 50, 108n
Egg, 156, 480; Philoso-
pher's Egg, 397; Primal
Egg, 342; Primordial Egg,
397; cf. World Egg, Cos-
mic Egg
Egypt, 42, 57, 83-84, 91, 93,
95, 106, 110-113, 115, 125-
126, 129-130, 145-146, 168-
171, 173, 176, 189-190, 201,
220, 225, 230, 233-235,
242-244, 248-249, 254-
255, 260-261, 275, 277-
278, 280-281, 283, 287-
288, 290-291, 293-298,
301-302, 304-305, 310, 320,
332-333, 340, 342-343,
345, 346, 354, 379, 386-
390, 392, 395-396, 400,
410, 415, 448, 466, 492-
493, 499-500, 502-503,
513, 524, 527, 529, 567-
568; - Delta, 235, 255; - ,
Lower, 281; - Min, 290; -
Nut, 220; - Pyramid, 294;
- Sem, 513; - Iam Isis, 334;
- Seth, 302, 384; (and
Isis, 282); - Shu (and
Tefnut), 74, 286, 345; -
Sun (cf. Re²), 390; - Tut-
'ankh-Amun, 513; - ,
First-Dynasty King
Snake, 296; Eighteenth
Dynasty, 501; - Aegean,
243; - and Anatolia, 513; -
and Graeco-Roman An-
tiquity, 398; - and
Greece, 109, 111, 113, 386; -
and Mesopotamia, 145,
396, 501; - and the
Maghrib, 124; - and In-
dia, 196; - and the Chi-
nese Shang Dynasty, 145;
- and Africa, 254; 1st Dy-
nasty, 201 (King Snake,
296); Abydos, 301; Delta,
N. Egypt, 112, 235, 255,
387; - and West Asia,
387; Isis, 334; Iionine
goddess, 513; King Ram-
ses II, 387
Egypt(ian(s)), 60n, 82n,
82n-84n, 96n, 103n, 109n,
111n-112n, 124n, 127n,
144n-145n, 150n-151n,
154n-155n, 190n, 217n,
256n, 272n, 275n-276n,
279n, 300n, 321n, 333n,
347n, 357n, 387n-388n,
400n, 484n, 493n, 506n,
510n; Dynastic - , 111n-
112n, 145n; Predynastic
and Early Dynastic -
Delta, 111n; 20th Dynasty
, 83n; New-Kingdom,
347n; - Creator god,
106n; - Shu, 300n; -
Thebes, 82n; Old Egypt-
ian, a language form,
250n; - and Aegean,
300n
Egyptocentrism / -icity, 42,
173, 235, 243, 254, 388; -
and Black Athena (q.v.),
255
Egyptology, Egyptology, -
ist(s), 42, 254, 275, 346,
492, 499, 507, 513, 527,
111n, 244n, 256n; - Oum
Ndigi, 254; - and Hitti-
tology, 513
Eightsome, 396
Elaborate (Standard) Flood
Myth, 73, 417, 427, 286n,
417n; - North American,
428; cf. Standard -
Elamo-Dravidian, 502, 521
Elements, 504; Element
Cosmology, 34, 57, 263n;
cf. Cyclicity, Cyclical
Element Transformation
Elgumi, 129
El-lal, 349
Elohim, 376; cf. JHWH,
Judaism
Emergence of humankind,
308
Emic and Etic, 66
*Encyclopaedia of Religion
and Ethics* (Hastings),
557n
Endymion, 219, 330, 345
Engal, 144
England, English, 36, 52, 75,
83, 85, 92, 153-155, 241,
261, 343, 378, 483, 495,
497, 502-503, 564, 579-
580, 86n, 288n, 381n,
479n, 510n, 563n, 576n;
English Christian, 289
Engulfing Monster, 348
Enki, 281, 217n
Enkidu, 106
Enlightenment, 85, 86-87,
99, 105, 108, 317, 37n, 85n-
86n, 332n; Post- , 555; -
Romanticism, 100; -
myth, 86
Enlil, 106, 310
Enma Dai-Ō, Japanese
Lord Death, 282
Ennead, the nine primal
gods of Egypt, 112, 113,
297; cf. Bull of the -
Enoch, 397
Entering Heaven (q.v.) by a
Trick (AT), 338; cf. Trick-
ster
Entering Heaven by a Tric
(AT), 338
Entombed Princess, 339
Enuma Elish, 93, 291, 302
Epimetheus, 420
Epistula ad Pisones
(Horace), 72n
Equator, 134
Er, 84

- Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 33, 117
- Erechtheus, 107
- Erginus, 107n
- Eri, a name of Luwe, *q.v.*, 509
- Erichthonius, 384, 386, 388-389
- Erinyes, 302
- Erishkigal, 106
- Eros, 107, 503
- Erythraea(n(s)), 254; Erythraean Model (Frobenius), 248
- Erzählen der Welt, 'narrating the world', myth as (Dupré), 88
- ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table on Ethnogenesis in South and Central Asia, 184, 149n-150n
- Escape from the Ogre (NarCom), 225, 227, 265
- EskAI = Eskimo-Aleut
- Eskimo-Aleut, 352, 425, 567, 451n, 514n
- Essenes, 493n
- Ethiopia(n(s)), 121, 250n
- Ethnogenesis in South and Central Asia, Kyoto 2005, 184, 149n, 150n; *cf.* Pre-Symposium
- Ethnogenesis in South and East Asia and Comparative Mythology, conference, Harvard, Cambridge MA, 246, 246n
- Ethnographers, Ethnography, 35, 104; *cf.* fieldwork
- Etic, 66; *cf.* Emic
- Etruscan(s), 301, 341, 502, 518
- Etsingol, 128, 129
- EuBR5W& = European, Berber, South West Asia, 451n
- Euenus, 300
- Euphemus, 107n
- Euphrates, river, 302
- Eur-African, 510
- Eurasia(n(s)), 43, 58, 79, 116, 119-121, 134, 137-139, 144-145, 163-164, 174, 217, 223, 248-249, 253-254, 256-258, 261-263, 266-268, 270, 273, 275, 277-279, 291, 294, 297, 300-301, 305, 308, 310-312, 315-316, 338, 379, 390, 396, 410, 416, 432, 450, 494, 508-510, 514, 524, 540, 561, 567-568, 581; - Steppe, 120, 122, 141, 248-249, 301, 304; - Steppe to East Asia, 270; - and the Upper Palaeolithic, 267, 412; - China, 59; - Neolithic Proto-Pelagian Realm, 398; - and Oceania, 174; - and America, 173-174; - and North America, 34, 57, 431, 563; - and the New World, 449; - and Africa, 121, 267; - Back-Indo-Africa, 174, 305, 308; Inner Eurasia Skull Cult, 300
- Eurasia(n(s)), 72n, 142n, 265n, 269n, 281n, 416n, 432n, 514n, 568n; - and African, 264n; - Mythologies, 309n; - Steppe (to East Asia), 140n, 293n; West -, 72n, 308n, 375n, 378n, 41n; Eurasia and North America, 232n
- Eurasianic, a linguistic macrophylum comprising Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, Dravidian, Kartvelian, *etc.*, 71, 123-124, 134-135, 139, 237, 256, 258-259, 265, 291, 351-352, 373, 380-381, 502, 504-506, 542, 567; Proto-, 505; - and Afroasiatic, 259; - and Bantu, 499; - Proto-African, 139; -, Afroasiatic and Sinocaucasian 259
- Eurasianic, 83n, 124n, 139n, 258n, 357n, 396n, 499n; Proto-Eurasianic, 506n; - and Afroasiatic, 499n
- Eurocentric(ity) / -ism / -ist(s), 180, 235, 243-244, 246, 449, 497, 75n, 153n, 173n, 411n, 449n, 574n; Moderate -, 181n
- Europe(an(s)), 18, 33, 49, 58, 65, 76, 78, 102-103, 107, 110, 123, 125, 129, 131, 134-135, 138-140, 150, 157, 162, 167, 171, 173-174, 180, 185, 187-191, 195-196, 210, 214-215, 220, 223, 225, 230-231, 234-235, 238, 242-244, 248-249, 254, 260, 263, 268, 277, 280-281, 284, 296-297, 300, 302, 310-311, 333, 337-338, 343-344, 350, 385-387, 389-390, 396-397, 399, 402, 425, 430, 449, 455, 480, 487, 495-496, 502-503, 507, 526, 533, 539, 542, 569, 583; - Palaeolithic, 199 (Upper -, 545); - and Neanderthaloids, 209; - Neolithic, 189, 281; - Iron Age, 300; - Antiquity, 524; - Christian, 300; - Melusine, 297; - Middle Ages, 344; - Renaissance, 108; - and Africa(n(s)), 138, 141, 263, 292; - and Ancient Near East, 214; - and the Near East, 115; - and Asia, 138, 150, 187, 209-210, 252; - Renaissance -, 242
- Europe(an(s)), 37n, 51n, 116n, 134n, 153n-154n, 215n, 293n, 310n, 400n, 451n, 454n, 486n, 194n, 550n, 563n; - Renaissance, 47n; - rock-art, 456n; - and Asia, 494n; - and West Asia, 60n; Western -, 550n
- Eurybatus, 107n
- Eurydice, 111, 112, 113n, 451n; *cf.* Orpheus, Aristaeus
- Eurynomus, 107n
- Eurypylus, 107n
- Eurytion, 107n
- Eurytus, 107n
- Euthymus, 107n
- Evander, 107
- Eve, 295, 387, 420, 510
- Evenmar, 107
- Evil, 272
- Evolution of Human Languages project, *cf.* Tower of Babel / Starostin & Starostin, 258
- Evolution, 203
- Ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen (Nietzsche), 410, 409n
- Exalted Insider, 116, 170, 542; *cf.* Sacred Outsider
- Excluded Third (Aristotle), 177
- Exclusion, drastic form of ethnic response, 252
- Exodus, Out-of-Africa (*q.v.*) - of Anatomically Modern Human, 41, 135, 138, 150, 171, 180-181, 186, 193, 224, 230, 234, 257, 262, 268, 291, 294, 303, 308, 396, 416, 421, 475, 150n, 331n, 412n, 415n; legendary - of the Israelites out of Egypt, 83n, 150n, 494n; Pre-(Out-of-Africa) -, 150, 181, 264, 309, 421, 309n; Exodus, Bible book, 292, 295, 304, Exodus, 83n, 150n; Pre-Exodus Africa, 96n, 123n, 309n, 494n; *cf.* (1) *Bible*; (2) *Out-of-Africa*
- Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge MA, 2010, 580
- Expressions of Traditional Wisdom From Africa and Beyond* (van Binsbergen), 34
- Extended Fertile Crescent, 109, 119, 121, 145, 150, 165, 168-172, 179, 186-187, 196, 215-216, 218, 227-228, 231, 234-235, 265-266, 567-568, 388n
- Eye-Athabaskan, 567, 568
- Eye of Horus, 283
- Eyes removed but replaced (AT), 272
- Fables of the Veld* (Posselt), 496n
- Fabricius, an Early Modern German collection of tales, 293
- Fabula*, a journal, 560n
- Fabulae* (Hyginus), 345-346, 331n
- Factor, result of multivariate factor analysis, 426, 427-430, 443, 454, 467, 471, 474, 466n
- Fafnir, 107
- Fairy, fairy-tale character, 272
- Falcon, bird, 505, 506
- Fall of Man, 283, 297, 351, 428, 449
- False Bride (AT), 497
- Fama, Roman goddess of rumour, 297
- Fang, 396
- Fascism, -ism / -ist(s), 87, 101, 575n
- Fasti* (Ovid), 386
- Father Ate Me (AT), 338
- Father Heaven, 68, 152
- Father of Shikanda, 295n; *cf.* Tatasikanda, van Binsbergen, Wim
- Faunus, 107
- Faustian, in the manner of Goethe's *Faust* character in the drama of that name (morally compromising hubris), 64, 65, 85, 100

- Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 76
 Felis serval, 518
 Felis sylvestris, 516
 Feminine Arts, *cf.* the Spider (NarCom), 216
 Fenda Madia, an Angola
 Bride story, 497
 Fertile Crescent, 150n; *cf.*
 Extended -
 Festschrift for Hedin, 125
 Festschrift in honour of W van Binsbergen (Mosima 2017), 47n; *cf.* *A Trans-continental Career* (Mosima)
 Fezzan, 125, 126, 130; Fezzanais, 130
 Field of Tension, 101n
 Fieldwork, 241n
 Fight against Dragon (*q.v.*), 271; *cf.* Combat, Hero
 Filemaker Pro™, 436
 Fille du Roi, 497
 Finland, Finnish, 72, 295, 396, 398; - myth, 72, 396
 Fire, 35, 45-46, 75, 96, 140, 145, 176, 220, 267, 281, 283, 288-289, 293, 296-297, 305, 418-420, 429, 431, 438, 464-465, 510, 529, 533-534, 540, 545, 547-548, 96n, 106n, 177n, 213n, 263n, 284n, 289n, 387n-388n, 419n, 428n, 465n, 506n, 529n; - Dance, 545, 547; - Giant, 296; - god, 544 (Hephaestus, 290); - In Japan, 529, 529; - drake, 107; - and Water, 296; - Fire cult, 547
 Fish Eagle, 288
 Fish, 201, 438, 451; *cf.* Matsuya
 Fitchers Vogel (Grimm), 338
 Flanders, Flemish, 38, 102
 Flood, 37, 41, 45, 68, 73-75, 77, 120, 140, 152-153, 156, 160-162, 169, 179, 184, 188, 191-192, 197, 200, 212-215, 220, 227, 229, 233, 246, 264-265, 267-268, 271, 281, 283, 286-288, 293, 295-296, 302, 305-306, 331, 333, 342, 347, 375, 378, 384, 400, 407-409, 416-433, 438-441, 443, 445-446, 448-468, 470-476, 72n, 74n, 88n, 112n, 140n, 192n, 213n, 263n, 269n-270n, 284n-289n, 296n, 300n, 307n-308n, 380n, 407n, 417n-419n, 423n, 428n, 431n, 433n, 440n, 445n, 451n, 455n, 457n, 460n-466n, 470n-473n, 550n, 568n, 576n; - Alternative, 428, 454; - and Second Creation, 293; - and Tower, 163, 284, 287; - Causer and the - Hero, 428, 428; - Causer, 462, 462, 468, 472; - Hero, 333, 340, 409, 415-418, 421-423, 426-433, 438-440, 446-447, 451, 453, 456, 462-463, 468-474, 476; - heroine, 214, 220, 297, 334; - Hero as Trickster, 439, 468; - Hero and the Earth Diver In, 431; - Hero As Trickster, 439, 468; - Hero Deucalion, 420; - Hero Manu, 451, 451; - Hero Noah, 34, 340; - Myth, 73, 429; - Myth From South Central Africa Featuring Mwene Manenga, 287; - Sender, 467, 471-473; pre-, 427; Post -, 464; Post-Extra-ordinary Reproduction, 419; Post-flood Repopulation Abnormal But Not Stone, 428; - associated with Tower (*q.v.*), 287
 Flood (myth), Elaborate, 286n
 Flood Hero(es), 423n, 431n-433n, 462n; - stated or implied to direct Earth Diver, 423n; - Noah, 550n
 Flute, 263n; *cf.* Music Orpheus Flute Reed (NarCom)
 Fly Isl., 347n
 Folk-lore Journal, 496n
 Folk-Lore of the Fjord (Den-nett), 497n
 Folk-lore of The Old Testament (Frazer), 283
 Folk-tales of Angola (Chate-lain, 497, 497n)
 Fomhoriens, 144; *cf.* Ireland
 Food production, 460; *cf.* Neolithic, Modes of production
 Neolithic, Modes of production
 Forbidden Chamber (AT), 496
 Ford-Foundation, 61
 Forgotten Fiancée (AT), 338, 339
 Forked Branch / Pole, 284, 556, 285n, 557n; *cf.* Bud-dhism
 Forsaken Fiancée (AT), 339
 Fortunatus (Early Modern German collection of tales), 339
 Four, Foursome, 263n; *cf.* NarCom 29
 Fourth Annual Meeting of the International Association For Comparative Mythology (*q.v.*), 67n
 Fragment, 298; *cf.* Stesichorus
Fragmente der Vorsokratiker (Diels), 83n
 Fragmented Monster Becomes the World or Humankind, 263n; *cf.* Pan Ku, Ymir, Hainuwele
Fragments, 302; *cf.* Empe-docles, ed. Leonard
 France, French, 76, 131, 239, 289, 340, 344, 412, 450, 497, 551, 48n, 85n-86n, 241n, 311n, 514n, 563n, 574n
 Francistown, Botswana, 240-242, 531-534, 537, 539, 550, 276n
 Franco-Cantabrian Upper Palaeolithic, 133, 199, 131n
 Frankenstein (Mary Shelley), 297
 Fredun, 107; *cf.* Thraetaona
 Free University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 58
 Freya, 283
 Frey, 296
 Frigg, 115
 Frog, 495; - Person, 305
 Fruit That Grows Horns (Fabricius), 339
 Fu Hsi, see Fu Xi
 Fu Xi, 220, 333, 503, 524-526, 115n, 140n, 183n, 270n, 510n
 Fulani, 496
 Fulfulde, language spoken by Fulani people, 496
 Fung Po, 107
 Gabon(ese), 396, 397, 520
 Ga-gorib, 347; *cf.* Spelled-ness, Leopard
 Gaia in Ancient Greek mythology, 550n
 Gaia, 79, 153, 297, 299, 344-346, 384; and Uranus, 345; Pan-Gaia(n) (Witzel) = worldwide, 153, 563, 568
 Gale, 507, 509; Gale Mwari, 511, 511n
 Galerie Hermann, 382
 Galla, 129
 Gallabat, Sudani border village, 129
 Gallic, 526; *cf.* Celtic, Gaul
 Galliformes, 300n
 Gambaga, Ghana, 130
 Games Contests Combats (NarCom), 263n
 Ganda, 94, 277, 494
 Gandhi, 533
 Ganges, river, 123, 286n
 Gara, 509; name variant of Mwali, *cf.* von Sicard
 Garama, Libyan Desert, 122; Garamantes, 122
 Garuda, 107, 144, 283, 288; Garuda-bird, 271
 Gasulla cañon, Spain, 136n, 218n
 Gauguin, 48n
 Gaul, Gallia, 293; *cf.* Celts
 Gayere, 509; a name cognate to Mwali, *cf.* von Sicard
 Geb, Egyptian Earth God, 106, 112, 296
 Gebelein, 129
 Geli, 509; name variant of Mwali
 Gender, 287n; *cf.* Men, Women, Sexuality, Language
 General Linguistics, 242, 581
 'Genesis contribute to religious inclination' (McGee), 573n
 Genesis, 35, 74, 93, 131, 161, 166, 188, 215, 246, 287, 291, 295-297, 303, 343, 351, 384, 387, 419-420, 448, 464, 469, 472, 534, 557
 Genesis, Bible book, 74n, 95n, 103n, 177n, 215n, 260n, 286n, 333n, 380n, 387n, 428n, 454n, 468n, 576n-577n
 Genetic types, 211
 Geneticists, 148
 Gentiles, 316, 98n
 Geomantic Divination, Geomancy, Geomantia, Geomantic, 36, 533, 548; *cf.* 'ilm, Sand Science, Hakata, Ifa, I Ching
 StGeorge, 107
 Georgian, language, *cf.* Kartvelian, 352
 Georgica (Virgil), 111n

- Gepid, a East Germanic people, 300
- Geras, 107n
- Germania* (Tacitus), 551
- Germany, German(s),
 Germanic, 52, 78, 83, 87, 190, 195, 246, 270, 297, 300, 302, 338, 382, 564, 577; – and Celtic Europe, 281; – Frigg, 115; – Yggdrasil, 190; – Ymir, 282; – and Celts, 551
- Germany, Germanic, German(s), 140n, 484n, 508n, 563n; – Ancient, 378n, 538n; – Nazis, 508n; – Africanist 563n; – Ancient Historian, 256n
- Geryon, 107, 296, 300, 60n, 485n
- Gesta Romanorum*, 496, 496-497
- Gestalt-like, tending towards a psychologically-anchored model, 71, 157
- Ghana, Ghanaian(s), 130, 547, 310n; Nyame, 291
- Ghandara, Indian style period, 216
- Ghendt University, Belgium, 96n
- Giant, 107, 271, 287, 293, 296, 302, 348; Young – , 339, 343; Giant and Flood (q.v.), 220, 333; Giant Vegetable (AT), 339; Giant Whose Heart Was In an Egg (AT), 339, 343, 396; cf. Gigantes
- Gibraltar, 388
- Gigantes, Greek, 107
- Gilbert Isl, 217n-218n
- Gilgamesh and Glaucaus, 484n
- Gilgamesh, 106, 161, 281, 306, 386, 432, 508
- Ginnungagap, Nordic mythical primordial void, 219, 331, 343
- Girgire, 106
- Girl Helps the Hero Flee (AT), 338, 339
- Girls Who Married Animals (AT), 339
- Glaucaus, 107, 107, 386, 484n
- Glimpses of Homa, Conference, Harvard, 2010, 534
- Global, world-wide, 41, 292, 303-304, 398, 546
- Global Bee Flight* (van Binsbergen, abortive MS), 244, 278, 111n-112n, 244n, 279n
- Global Etymology (Bengtson and Ruhlen), 260
- Globalisation and the Construction of Communal Identities, WOTRO national research project, 243n
- Glooscap, 384, 387
- Glory of Hera* (Slater), 299n; cf. Heracles
- Glottochronological, dating languages by statistical analysis of lexicon, 259
- God, 77, 79, 91, 106-107, 111-112, 144, 161, 190, 245, 267, 288, 290-291, 294, 296, 301-302, 340, 343, 348, 384, 390, 415, 428, 446, 451, 456, 463-464, 472-473, 474, 510, 527, 544-545, 581; – as Ally of Flood Hero, 427, 471, 474; – of Creation, 418, 428; – of Tears, cf. Balder, 301; – dess, 293; – s of Creation, 34; – Engai, 144; – Enki, 281; Primordial Gods, 79; Goddess, 214, 220, 290, 297, 334, 513; – of lightning, 106; – Skanda, 294; cf. Rebellion of the – God, 380n, 486n, 575n, 578n; Spirit of God, 380n; Celestial and Terrestrial Gods, struggle between, 566n
- Gold Coast, see Ghana
- Golem, artificial human in Jewish tradition, 297
- Gondwana (Witzel), 41, 42-43, 68, 150, 152-153, 166, 174, 177, 187, 231, 248, 315-318, 407, 563, 566-568, 581, 231n, 257n, 264n-265n, 307n, 309n, 409n, 416n, 494n, 560n, 566n, 572n, 575n; Gondwana and Laurasian, 570, 232n, 265n
- Google Book, 239
- Google Earth™, 49
- Gorob, 522n; cf. speckledness, leopard
- Graeco-Roman, 102n, 135n, 140n, 190n, 270n, 276n, 321n, 333n, 342n, 378n, 484n, 508n, 563n; – and Germanic, 378n; – Hades, 485n
- Grail, Holy – , 272, 293; cf. Cauldron
- Granulation, Granulated Surface Texture, cf. speckledness, leopard-skin symbolism, 264
- Graubunden, 136n
- Grave-Cattle, see Kalunga Ngombe
- Graven Image, production of – s prohibited in Judaism and Islam, 91
- Great Britain, see UK, British
- Great Forest Snake, 295; cf. Mwendanjangula
- Greece, Greek(s), 57, 65, 83-84, 98, 106-107, 109-113, 115, 140, 144, 173, 190, 235, 238, 242-243, 248, 255, 260, 281, 286-287, 290, 297-298, 300, 302, 304, 331, 333, 345, 351, 379, 384-388, 466, 503, 526-527, 534, 543, 545, 42n, 82n-83n, 99n, 103n, 106n, 112n, 136n, 142n, 150n, 276n, 294n, 311n, 333n, 387n, 389n, 432n, 465n, 484n, 486n, 494n, 507n, 541n, 561n, 566n; – mythology, 550; – and Trojan, 503; – Apollo and Artemis, 74; – Argonauts, 305; – Athena, 384; – Chaos, 219; – Circe, 282; – and Fire, 529 (Fire-god Hephaestus, 290); – Flood, 428; (Flood Hero Deucalion, 420); – Hades, 282; – Pandora, 297; – Penelope, 334; – Presocratic, 58; – Python, 190; – and Egypt, 109, 242-243, 555; – and the Bible, 173; – and Oceanian (parallels!), 220, 333; – to Ancient Egypt, 242; – Rhea, 550n; cf. Graeco-Roman
- Greek Orthodox Church, Tokyo, Japan, 580
- Greek translation of the Hebrew (q.v.) Bible (q.v.) in Hellenistic (q.v.) Alexandria (q.v.), 162; cf. *Septuaginth*
- Green, possible translation (next to 'Snake') of the Egyptian name W3d (q.v.)
- Greenland, 71, 523
- Greenland, 96n
- Grendel, 107
- Grimm's Tales* (Grimm), 338, 343
- Gucumatz, 107
- Guide to Greece*, see: *Descriptio Graeciae* (Pausanias)
- Guinea Bissau, Guinéan(s), 240, 287n, 241n, 287n
- Guinea, Upper – Coast, 240, 241n,
- Guinevere, 343; cf. Arthur
- Gulf of Biscay, 425
- Gumede, Mr Smarts, 532n
- Gundestrup Kettle, 293
- Grub, 507; name variant of Luwe (q.v.)
- Gvrydion, 281
- Gwari, 288
- Gwenoi, 519
- Gwerei, 519
- Gypsy, 162, 292, 301, 316, 293n; Proto-Gypsy, 493n
- Habiyu, Lame – , 496
- Hades, 107, 282, 296, 298, 341, 348, 113n, 299n, 485n; cf. Pluto
- Hadza and Sandawe, 521; cf. Khoisan
- Hagen, 107
- Haida, 283, 430
- Hainuwele, 282
- Hair: One-Hair, Forehead-Hair, Hair-Back-of-the-Head, alleged modes of address among deceased Pawnee Indians, 304; cf. Kahare with One Hair
- Hai-uri, unilateral monster in Nama mythology, 144
- Hakata, 36, 256, 142n; cf. geomancy
- Haliaeetus, 288
- Ham, Biblical figure, 417n; cf. Hamitic
- Hamites, Hamitic, 131, 146, 508; Hamitic Hypothesis / Thesis, 120, 130-131, 508, 138n, 146n, 254n-255n; cf. Hamito-Semitic, Ham
- Hamran, 129; cf. Lindblom 1935
- Han Xiaorong, 293
- Hand, Ancient Egyptian goddess, 387n
- Hänsel und Gretel (Grimm), 338, 344
- Hänsel und Gretel, 338
- Harappa, 552
- Hare, a trickster figure, 308
- Harmonia, weaving goddess, 115
- Harun Al-Rashid, Baghdadi Sultan, 305, 496
- Harvard Round Table, 183n,

- 479 (- Kyoto 149);- and the Annual Meetings of the International Association for Comparative Mythology IACM, 232n, 246n
- Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, 150n, 183n, 318n, 407n, 416n, 479n, 563n
- Harvard University, Cambridge MA, USA, 33, 46, 107, 184, 246, 310, 312-314, 529, 534, 536-537, 562, 576, 578-580; - Sciences Building, 534; - Senior Staff Club, 579; - Square, 533; - Yard, 534, 537; - Homa (*q.v.*), conference, 561; - Round Table, 48, 187, 211, 246, 261, 314, 564
- Hase, Noriko, 149n, 150n
- Häsichenbraut, 338
- Häseebu Kareem ed Din, 496n
- Hassle, Sweden, 294
- Hathor, 287
- Haumärchen* (Grimm), 296, 305
- Haussa, 289; Haussaland
- Hava, 295; *cf.* Eve
- Havelock Island, Andaman Isl., India, 571
- Hawai'i (USA), Pacific Ocean, 305, 349, 397
- Hawk, 95, 288, 505-506; - and Buzzards, 288; - and Eagle, 506n
- Hayagriva, 545
- Hayle, place in Cornwall, England, UK, 497n
- Head-hunting, 300
- Heaps of Gold, 496
- Heart, 338; - In a Tree, 496
- Heart Sutra*, 530, 530n-531n; *cf.* Buddhism, Sangoma
- Heaven, 68, 72, 106-107, 111-112, 152, 156, 161, 166, 168-171, 184, 189, 197, 199, 220, 225, 264, 267, 272, 281, 283-285-287, 290, 296-297, 302, 308, 310, 314, 333, 342, 344-346, 349, 377, 390, 396, 410, 415, 427-428, 431, 438, 446, 454, 456, 458-459, 461-462, 471, 511, 541, 550, 555, 154n, 166n, 213, 218n, 287n, 291n, 300n, 307n, 389n, 411n, 417n; Heaven and Earth, 71, 74, 79, 144, 156, 161-162, 170-171, 179, 184, 196-198, 202, 213, 215, 220, 224-225, 227, 264-265, 267, 286-287, 302, 310, 333-334, 341, 345, 349, 371, 373, 377, 410, 417-418, 421, 427-429, 431, 439, 446, 448, 454, 458, 467, 469; Cow of -, 263n; - in the Upper Palaeolithic, 389n; - and Earth, 72n, 218n, 221n, 426n, 432n, 448n, 467n; - and Underworld, 300n; *cf.* Re-connection, of - 471; Heaven and Earth, *cf.* Separation, 41; Heaven and Underworld, 428; *cf.* Celestial
- Hebrew, 287, 297, 351, 502, 507-508, 527, 150n, 162n, 285n, 508n, 576n; - Leviathan, 190; - Bible (*q.v.*), 267, 291, 294, 304 (in Hellenistic (*q.v.*) Alexandria (*q.v.*)), 162; in the *Septuagint* Greek version, 150n
- Hebraicist, 162n
- Hegel, Hegelian, 87
- Hehe, a Tanzanian language, 519
- Heimdall, 310, 417n, 550n
- Heir Apartment, 166
- Heitsi-Eibib, 201, 291, 298, 347, 375n
- Hekate, 107
- Hel, pre-Christian (*q.v.*) Underworld (*q.v.*) concept, 107
- Helena, Helen, 72, 144, 219, 297, 331-332, 344-345, 397, 72n, 220n, 333n; - and Clytemnestra (*q.v.*), 332; - and the Dioscuri (*q.v.*), 190
- Heliopolis, Heliopolitan, city in Egypt, 111, 122n; Heliopolitan Ennead, 112; *cf.* Sun
- Helius, 297, 390; *cf.* Sun
- Hellenes, Hellenic, = Greek, 82n; Hellenoi and Barbaroi, 1, 74-75, 42n; *cf.* Greece
- Hellenism, Hellenist, Hellenistic, syncretic form of Hellenic and Oriental culture after Alexander the Great's conquests, 59, 102, 216, 450, 503; - Alexandria, 162, 577; - and Imperial, 446
- Hephaestus, 140, 289-290, 296-297, 384, 386, 529, 83n, 106n, 387n; - Fire god, 544
- Hera, 107, 115, 286, 294, 305, 310, 386, 397, 290n, 300n, 311n, 508n; - and Heracles, 299n
- Heracles, 107, 115, 294, 298-301, 340, 346, 386, 290n, 300n; - and Gilgamesh, 508; - and Hera, 286, 299n; *cf.* Hercules
- Herb of Life, 269n
- Hercules, Herculean, 47, 115, 296, 300, 388, 580, 60n; *cf.* Haracles
- Hereditary Prince, proposed etymology (Bemal) of Orpheus, 112
- Hermeneutic, art of systematic explanation espec. interculturally and across time, 165, 149n
- Hermes Trismegistus, 446, 307n; Hermetic, 446, 42n
- Hermes, 107, 307n, 375n; - and Athena, 293
- Hermopolis / -itan, Egypt, 305, 396, 112n; Her-mopolitan Ogdoad (*q.v.*), 112n
- Hero(es), 68, 107, 152, 267, 273, 295, 407-408-410, 415-417, 421-422, 426-430, 432, 438-439, 446-447, 469, 454n, 462n, 468n-470n, 472n-473n, 476n; Hero and Ark, 427, 454; Hero and Earth Diver, 431; Hero and the Flood, 438; Heroic Combat, 428, 467; Hero (young) and his Mother, 34n; *cf.* Flood myth
- Heroides* (Ovid), 345, 72n, 331n
- Heroine, female hero (*q.v.*), 339
- Heroine Rescues Herself and Her Sisters (AT), 338, 339
- Heros of Temesa, 107n
- Heyoka Society, among the Sioux, North America, 294
- Ĥam, Biblical figure, 131, 420
- Ĥava, Biblical figure, see Eve
- Hiawatha, 576, 576n; *cf.* YHWH
- Hierakonpolis, 125, 126, 129, 145, 129n; Hierakonpolis Tomb 100, 127
- High-God (*q.v.*), 245, 96n, 291n, 380n, 440n, 506n, 572n, 576n; - in West Africa and Western Central Africa, 507n
- High Priest of the Mwali cult, 578n
- Hill Tribes In North-Western Thailand, 552; Hill Tribes Museum, 551, 552
- Hill, Primal Hill, 281, 446, 451; *cf.* cosmogony
- Him of the River Bank, Graves's dubious proposed etymology of Orpheus, 112
- Himalaya, 128; Trans-Himalaya, 128
- Hina-A-rauriki, 333, 220n
- Hindu(s), - ist, -ism, 87, 105, 107, 220, 144, 233, 271, 283, 289, 292, 294, 296, 300, 310, 317, 333, 347, 390, 451, 529, 537, 544-545, 549, 557, 567, 493n, 578n; Hindu(ism) and Buddhism, 529, 539, 551 (Fire / Homa, 46, 532); Hindu Sun god, 390, 544; Hindu war god Skanda, 294
- Hippodameia, 300
- Hiroshima, Japanese city destroyed by nuclear bomb, 1945, 307n
- History, Historical, 68, 152, 216, 218, 336; A-historical, 492, 494, 523, 416n; Ancient Historian(s), 150n, 256n; Historiography, 279; Protohistory, 34; *cf.* Recycling
- Historia Romana* (Dio Cassius), 300-301
- Historiae* (Herodotus), 300, 304, 220n, 300n
- History of Ideas, 48, 64, 245, 566, 42n, 77n, 181n, 312n, 465n, 574n
- Hittite, 190, 351, 387-388, 400, 448, 84n, 109n, 577n; - Illuyanka, 190; - Weather God / Thunder god, 106, 190; - Luwian, 351; - and Germanic, 190; King Hattusil and the Egyptian King Ramses II, 387; - Telepinu Epic, 111n
- Hmongic, language in SE Asia, 550n
- Hochwolkersdorf, location in Central Europe, 129

- Hod, 301; killed his brother Balder (*q.v.*)
- Hoggar / Hogger, Sahara, 122; – Tuaregs, 130
- Holda, 107; *cf.* Underworld
- Holocene, 140, 162, 169, 179, 355, 377, 389, 401, 448, 450, 532, 538, 567, 700, 134n, 142n, 215n, 269n, 484n, 546n, 568n; – South East Asia, 188; – Sundaland, 568
- Holofemes, 106
- Homa, 46, 529–532, 534, 537–539, 561; Homa and Sangoma, 553; Homa and Fire, 529, 533; Homa and Southern African, 530
- Homer, Homeric, 59, 84, 86, 246, 332, 334, 345–346, 299n; – Catalogue of Ships, 246
- Homer Hymns* (pseudo-Homer), 385
- Homo erectus, – erectus, 508; – pekinensis, 508
- Homo Fabulans: Origins and Dispersals of Our First Mythologies* (Witzel, original MS), 559n
- Homo sapiens, 209
- Honey, 197, 264, 281, 83n; Honey and Bee, 281; Honey and Honey-beer, 156, 170, 185; Honey-beer, 156, 170, 185, 264
- Hong Kong City University, 256
- Hoofddorp, Netherlands, 584
- Hopi, 281, 283, 390, 493n
- Horizon of the Bee, *cf.* A] Bit, 295
- Horizontal relationships, as indispensable complements of a genetic / generic perspective, 575n
- Horse, 526, 547; Horse-riding, 545
- Hortus, a Palaeolithic site in France, 503
- Horus, III, 189, 283, 103n
- Hottentots, see Nama
- House of Skulls as Murderer's Abode (AT), 272
- How Afrocentrism Became An Excuse To Teach Myth As History* (Lefkowitz), 567
- HRAF, see Human Relations Area Files
- Hsi Wang Mu, 107
- Hsiung-nu, 300
- Hubbard and Earle Frank, makers of an ethnographic film, 130
- Human Relations Area Files* (HRAF), 62, 62n
- Human(s) / -(kind), 166, 175, 260, 267, 283, 286, 263n, 41n; Proto-Human, 178, 227, 264; *cf.* Anatomically Modern Humans, Unity (– 's fundamental –), Human Revolution, 41n
- Humbaba, 106
- Humbu, 273; – War, in Nkoya (*q.v.*) history, 343n
- Humour, 578n
- Hunahpu, 107
- Hunchback and the Blind Man (AT), 485
- Hungary, Hungarian(s), 129, 380
- Huns, 300; Hunnic, 293n
- Hunters-and-gatherers, 142n; Hunter, see Chibinda
- Hupasias, 106
- Hurons, Algonquian people (*q.v.*), North America, 387
- Hurrian(s), 106; – god of lightning, 106
- Hyaenidae, 523
- Hydra, 107
- Hymenoptera, 281
- Hymir, 219, 220, 333; *cf.* Thor
- I Ching, Chinese classic wisdom book, 37, 57, 524, 533, 276n; *cf.* Divination
- [n]ktomi, 290, 218n; *cf.* Spider
- IACM, International Association for Comparative Mythology (*q.v.*), 33, 42–43, 46–47, 48, 318, 407, 556, 564, 578–581; IACM Annual Meeting of, 46; Board of Directors of the –, 33, 407, 579
- Iberia (Western – = Spain, Portugal), 140n, 270n; *cf.* Caucasus
- Iberian peninsula, Western, = Spain and Portugal, 202, 356; the original Iberia / Hiberia was in West Asia
- Ibis, 82n
- Icarus, 219, 331, 345; *cf.* Daedalus
- Ice Ages, 332, 355, 448
- Iceland, 73
- Iconography, 195, 196
- Idealism, Strong, 181n
- IE = Indo-European
- Ifa, West African divination method, 36, 256, 532, 142n; *cf.* Geomancy
- Ifriqa, 180, 140n, 270n; *cf.* Africa
- Ifriqiyya, 180
- IIAS (International Institute for Asian Studies), Leiden University, Netherlands, 81n
- IJsselmeer, Artificial inland sea, the Netherlands, 389
- Ikizu, 519
- Il, El, West Asian name for God, 106
- Ila, 134, 284, 290, 297–298, 304, 285n, 557n
- Ilaland, Zambia, 285n
- Ila-Tonga language cluster, Zambia, 134
- Iliad* (Homer), 246, 287, 290, 302, 332, 299n
- Illuyanka, 106, 190
- ilm al-raml*, Geomantic divination system, 36, 533, 276n
- Ilmarinen, 283
- Imagines* (Philostratus), 385, 83n
- Imangassaten Tuaregs, 130
- Imbi, element in the name of the West and Central African theonym Nyambi, according to Dennett, 291
- Imdugud, 106
- Immanentalism and Transcendentalism, 115
- Imperial, 446; *cf.* Rome
- In Salah, 'Ain Salah, Algerian town, 130
- Inanna, 106, 220, 290, 332–333, 348
- Inaras, 106
- Incarceration, 340; *cf.* Ogre
- Incessant Mating, 342; *cf.* Delayed Cosmogony, 79; *cf.* Uranus and Gaia, Rangì and Papa, duduwa and Obatala
- Incest, 74, 284, 287, 296, 344, 385, 419, 421, 428, 439, 446, 448, 217n, 286n, 294n, 333n, 431n
- Independence, Guinean war of – (1956–1973 CE), 241n
- India(s), 72, 107, 126, 129, 144, 161–163, 176, 196, 277, 281, 283, 289, 292, 294, 296, 301, 317, 347, 351, 379–380, 387–389, 395, 397, 451, 495–497, 502–503, 505, 521, 533–534, 547, 559, 568, 571, 578, 286n, 493n, 538n, 563n, 566n; –; – asvamedha, 293; – Ramayana, 540; – and Nepal, 389; – and East Africa, 496
- Indian Fire god Agni, 388n
- Indian Ocean, 120, 150, 157, 185, 193, 263, 286, 355, 521, 532, 544, 547, 310n; – and the Atlantic Ocean, 42, 350
- Indo China, 495n
- Indo-Aryan, 162, 285n
- Indo-European, 46, 71–72, 83, 109–110, 115, 123, 220, 228, 234, 249, 258, 293, 296, 300, 333, 351–352, 381, 389, 398, 400, 425, 447, 502–503, 505–506, 512–513, 517, 521, 542, 567; Pre- – substrate in Northwestern Europe, 390; Proto- –, 179, 224, 260, 300, 351, 505–506, 514
- Indo-European(s), 72n, 83n, 111n, 139n, 285n, 308n, 357n, 382n, 451n, 484n, 538n, 566n; Proto-Indo-European, 484n, 506n
- Indo-Iranian, 123, 214, 234
- Indological, 575; Indologist, 578
- Indonesia(n(s)), 46, 75, 78, 140, 161, 163, 208, 389–390, 395, 448, 521, 539, 544, 546–547, 549, 210n, 215n, 269n, 275n, 539n; Proto- –, 389; – and China, 547; – and Africa, 546 (and the Mediterranean, 450)
- Indo-Pacific, 236, 256, 355, 378, 388, 392–393, 451n; Indo-Pacific cluster of languages, 567; Indo-Pacific and Super-Nostratic, 425; Indo-Pacific and Oceanian regions, 393
- IndPac = Indo-Pacific
- IndPac/A = Indo-Pacific and Australian, 451n
- Indra, 220, 296, 333, 347, 387
- Indus, 115, 170, 196, 225, 230, 235, 317, 355, 389, 552,

- 568, 579, 269n; cf. Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro
- Inertia, Comparative Mythology predicated on the assumption of considerable cultural –, 97n, 341n
- Inferno* (Dante), 84n
- Infidels, 316; cf. Islam
- Ino, cf. Leukothea, 294
- Insider, see Exalted Insider, Outsider
- Institute for African Studies, UNZA (q.v.), 61
- Institute For Research on World Systems, 136n
- Institutes of Vishnu (Jolly), 390, 493n, 530n
- Interbellum, between WWI and II (q.v.) 285n
- Intercultural, 245; – Philosophy, 34
- Intercultural Encounters* (van Binsbergen), 241, 530, 286n
- International Association For Comparative Mythology IACM (q.v.), 33, 261, 408, 533, 560, 56, 47n, 318n–319n, 407n, 479n, 560n; – 2016 Annual Meeting at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, 555
- International Conference 'Myth: Theory and the Disciplines', 12 December 2003, University of Leiden, 81n
- International Conference For the Comparative Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2013, 571n
- International Conference on Comparative Mythology, Beijing, 2006, 183n, 417n
- International Institute For Asian Studies IIAS, Leiden, Netherlands, 81n
- Internet*, 37, 66, 108, 245–246, 31, 395, 513, 196n, 315n, 512n
- Intralacustrine region, East Africa, 134
- Invention of the Sail, 79
- Io, 107
- Iolcus, 300n
- Ionian(n(s)), 398, 530
- Ippunu, 519
- Iran(ian(s)), 163, 300, 347, 387, 397, 400, 165n, 538n; Iranian Plateau, 395
- Iraq, 167, 389, 397, 276n; cf. Mesopotamia
- Ireland, Irish, 102, 144, 281–282, 293, 347, 76n, 102n; – Fomhoriains, 144; – James Joyce, 102; N. –, 76; Old Irish (a language), 83
- Iris, 190
- Irkutsk, Siberia, Russian Federation, 137
- Iron Age, 170, 228, 265, 276, 300, 492, 416n, 541n; – Europe, 293
- Iroquois, Algonquin people (q.v.), North America, 387
- Ishtar, 106
- Isis, 581, 103n; – and Osiris (q.v.), 346
- Iskander, 102; cf. Alexander the Great, Skanda, Shikanda
- Islam, Islamic, Muslim(s), 36, 61, 91, 101, 116, 151, 162, 166–167, 174, 188, 214, 216, 239, 242, 251, 273, 278–280, 283, 292, 306, 347, 417, 420, 424, 448, 452, 491, 496, 532, 534, 539, 543; Islamic Flood (q.v.), 438, 452–453; Islam and Christianity, 165, 249; Pan-Islamic saints (q.v.), 167; Islamic and Hindu, 87; Islam In Northern India, 292; Islamisation of Central Asia, 292; Islamist, insistence on formal Islam, 105; Qur'an, 161; cf. Qadiriyya
- Islam, Islamic, Muslim(s), 99n, 102n, 276n, 486n, 493n, 541n; – North Africa, 241n, 549n; African –, 151n; – and Christianity, 310n, 462n; – and the Third World, 99n; cf. Muslim
- Isolde, 343; cf. Tristan
- Israel, 106, 191, 220, 333; Israelites, 74, 106, 282, 289, 293; Israel and Is-lam, 91; cf. Judaism, Jews, Bible, YHWH
- Israélite(s), Ancient –, 42n; – Exodus, 83n; – and Egyptians, 150n
- Issedones, people in Central Eurasia, 300; cf. skull cult
- Italic, of Ancient Italy, 351
- Italy, Italian(s), 113, 125, 300, 302, 347, 385, 497, 471, 495n, 531n
- Ithaca, Aegean, Ancient Mediterranean, 432n
- Itherther, 60n
- St Ives, Cornwall, UK, 497n
- Ivory Coast, 497
- Izanagi, 107, 220, 225, 302–303, 378, 288n
- Izanami, 107, 220, 302–303, 333, 289n, 381–388n; – and Izanagi, 220, 225, 378, 288n
- Jabbok, stream in Palestine, tributary of the Jordan river, 303, 74n
- Jabuti, mythical taoistae, Amazon valley, 495
- Jacob, Biblical figure, 287, 303; – 's Ladder, 198, 200
- Jahweh, JHWH, Israelite God, 576n
- Japan(ese), 35, 39, 47–48, 78, 107, 140, 184, 216, 219–220, 246, 281–282, 293–294, 301, 303, 312, 314, 331, 340, 347, 350, 378–381, 397, 400, 529, 561, 568, 579–580; – Mythology and Folklore (Anonymous website), 198; – Sun Amaterasu (q.v.), 290; – and China, 562; – and South Central Africa, 380; – and Madagascar, 380; Japanese Storm god, 107, 302, 340, 581
- Japan, Japanese, 150n, 184n, 217n, 288n–289n, 387n, 495n, 563n, 566n, 572n; – delusions of superiority, 575n; – Buddhist, 286n; – Fire god and myth, 388n; Japanology, –ist, 572n
- Japhet, Biblical figure, son of Noah's, 34, 417n
- Jason, 115, 297, 305, 300n, 508n
- Jataka*, collection of stories on the Buddha's (q.v.) earlier incarnations and childhood, 272n, 557n
- Java, Indonesia, 549; – and Bali, 539; – Man, 508
- Jeanne d' Arc, 340
- Jegu, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164
- Jendoubah, Tunisia, 59
- Jephthah, 480
- Jericho, 298
- Jerusalem, 302
- Jesus of Nazareth, 220, 332–333, 340, 342, 466, 469; cf. Christianity
- Jew(ish), 252, 267, 289, 297, 316, 424, 452, 583; Jews and Aryans, 316; Jews and Gentiles, 316; Jews and Muslims, 282; cf. Judaeo-, Judaism
- Jezebel, Biblical figure, 103n
- Jian, unilateral bird in Chinese mythology, 144
- Jinga, Nzingha, Mbundu (Angola) Amazon Queen, 294
- Johannes, brother or cousin to Francistown Sangoma leaders MmaShakayile and MmaNdlovu, 550; considered to be incarnated in the Sangoma Johann Sibanda
- John of Chyanorth, 497n
- John*, a Bible book and its author, 466, 103n
- Jonah*, Biblical prophet and Bible book, 340, 387n; Jonah and the Whale, 342
- Jordan(ian(s)), 145
- Joseph Karst: *As a Pioneer of Long-Range Approaches to Mediterranean Bronze-Age Ethnicity* (van Binsbergen), 35
- Joshua, Bible book and Biblical figure, 291
- Jotun, Germanic mythical giants (q.v.), 297
- Joukahainen, 295
- Journal of Religion In Africa*, 241
- Journal of Religious History*, 560n
- Journal of The Traditional Cosmology Society*, 45, 404
- Judaism, Jew(s), Jewish, Jewry, 101, 283, 302, 417, 448, 452, 421, 59, 98n, 102n, 508n; Judaeo-Christian, 303; Judaeo-Christian-Islamic, 214; Judaeo-Christian-Islamic Flood, 438, 452–453; Judaeo-Islamic, 188, 282; Rabbinical, 289, 384; – and Islam, 493n; – Moroccan, 495n
- Judas, Biblical figure, 103n
- Judeao-Christian-Islamic Flood hero Noah, 214, 438, 452–453
- Judges (Bible book), 291,

- 304, 480
Judith, Biblical figure, 106
Jungfrau Maleen (Grimm), 339
Kymtʼf, 'Bull of his Mother', 112
Kababish, Arab tribe, 129
Kabambi, Nkoya king
Mwene Kahare -, 44, 108n, 295n
Kabombo, town in Zambia, 295
Kabundungulu, 295
Kabwe, 210
Kabyliya, Kabyli, Kabylian(s), Algerian region, 163, 344, 60n
Kachari in Assam, 496n
Kachirambe, 348
Kadhi na Mtoto, 496n
Kafue River, 130, 134, 132n-133n; - and the Zambezi River, 253n; - / Zambezi River, watershed, 273
Kagutsuchi, Japanese Fire (q.v.) God, 387n, 388n
Kahare, Mwene, royal title among the Nkoya, Zambia, 44, 162, 273, 292, 304, 557, 293n; - Kabambi, 108n, 295n; Kahare with One Hair, 304
Kaikēyī, 107
Kaiserwald, 129
Kalanga, ethnic and linguistic identity, South Central Africa, 533, 533n; - and Tswana, 531
Kale, 'Black One', common Gypsy name; also nickname of the Nkoya Kahare royal title, 162, 292
Kalevala, Finnish epic, 281, 283, 295
Kali, 115, 300, 503, 530, 534
Kalilua, 130
Kalunga-Ngombe, 295, 341
Kama, 281
Kamakokwa, river in Nkoyaland, 44
Kambotwe, 'Frog Person', Nkoya royal title, 44, 305
Kame-Tara, 349
Kampe, 107
Kamunu, 287
Kanhuhu, Zuni culture hero (q.v.), 219, 331, 349
Kandy, 551
Kanioka, people, South Central Africa, 288
Kansabwe, figure in Malawian suitor story, 483, 490-491
Kant, and Heidegger, 85; Neokantian, 99; cf. Casirer, Neo-Kantianism
Kaoma District, Western Province, Zambia, 166, 557
Kaoma, 198
Kaonde, 44, 284, 294, 297
Kaphes, 162, 271-272, 285, 556-557, 285n, 286n-287n; - Kamununga Mpanda, 161, 283-284, 556; - Who Joins the Forked Poles, 556; - Joining Forked Branches / With A Sibling, 285
Kaphiri-ntiwa, 94, 277, 494
Kaposhi, Chokwe clan, with totems (q.v.) Owl (q.v.) and Nightjar (q.v.), 286
Karaites, 289
Karakorum, 126
Kare-Kare, people, N. Nigeria, 130
Kariong, an Australian archaeological site, 387n
Karmmapa, an Ogre, 349
Kartvelian, 352, 381, 502, 567, 139n, 300n, 311n, 357n; Proto-Kartvelian, 300n
Karumba, 507n
Karumbi, name variante of Luwe (q.v.), 507
Kashyapa, 557, 285n, 557n
Kassala, state, Eastern Sudan, 129
Kassite, 123
Katere, 273, 280; - and Luhamba, 74, 281, 286, 294; cf. Reed
Kathlamet, Native American group, NW USA, 302
Kathmandu, 534; Valley, 561
Kavirondo, 130
Kayambila, 272-273, 276, 297-299, 300, 492-493
Kayoni ka Mwene, 'the king's Bird (q.v.) person', Nkoya mask, 288
Kazakhstan, 123, 147, 400
Kazanga Festival, 253n, 275n
Kazanga, 288, 298
Kazo, 44
Kebaran, Upper Palaeolithic culture, West Asia, 258
Kecak Dance, Bali (q.v.), 545
Kelabit of Borneo, 379
Kelto, 107
Kenoyer, Mrs, 579
Kenya(n(s)), 286, 347, 515, 520, 548
Kepheus, 107
Ker, 107
Kerebei, 518
Keto(s), 106-107
Khan, East European to Central Asian king, 300
Khara Khoto, abandoned city, Western Inner Mongolia, 128-129
Khemnu, 112n; cf. Her-mopolis
Khenchela, city and province, NE Algeria, 130
Khodumodumo, an Ogre, 349
Khoe, see Khoi
Khoekhoe, see Khoikhoi
Khoi, 260-261, 347, 375n; cf. Khoisan
Khoikhoi, 261
Khoisan, 110, 115, 124, 134, 163, 165, 168, 207, 222-224, 229-230, 234, 249, 256-258, 260, 291, 298, 337, 374, 395, 520-524, 542, 124n, 134n, 213n, 258n, 261n, 357n, 396n, 522n; Proto-Khoisan, 178, 224, 227; - and Niger-congo, 116; - and Nostratic%, 523; - Heitsi-Eibib, 291; - In Southern Africa, 542; - and North Caucasian, 139n
Kholumulume, an Ogre, 349
Kibaraka, a Swahili collection of stories, 495, 496, 496n; Kibaraka Velten, 496
Kibosho, a Bantu language, 518
Kiev, Ukraine, 300, 304
Kikuyu, a Bantu language, 518
Kilegi, a Bantu language, 518, 518
Kimbiji kia Malenda a Ngandu, 'Two Persons', a monster with Crocodile Scales(?), 295
Kimbu, a Bantu language, 519
Kimochi, a Bantu language, 518
King, exalted office-bearer, King(ship), Kingdom, 95, 111, 201, 272, 282-283, 287-289, 292-295, 300-301, 304, 338, 341, 390, 71n, 448n; - As Death Demon, 276; - Kayimbila, 390; - Kayambila As Death Demon, 492; - Snake, 296; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earthn; - of the Sky, 287n; - Shihokla Nalinanga, 333n
Kinga, a Bantu language, 519
Kings, I and II, Bible books, 103n
Kingu, Tiamat's (q.v.) consort, 106, 302
Kinioka kia Tumba ('Snake / Snake-skin of Tumba'), 295; 341
Kintu, 94, 277, 494
Kiokwe, gorup in South Central Africa, 286
Kipini, coastal town in Kenya, 497
Kirti, name of a particular syncretistic ritual specialist, Sri Lanka, 531, 530n
Kiseri, Bantu language, 518
Kitosh, place in East Africa, 130
Kiziba, NW Tanzania, 130
Knoist un sine dre Sühne (Grimm), 339
Kojahk, an Egyptian month, 304
Kojiki, Japanese classic, 281, 302, 334, 378, 580, 299n
Kokugakuin Shinto University, Tokyo, Japan, 561, 580
Kokytus, river, 302; cf. Styx
Kololo, 493, 286n
Konkomba, 130
Kordofan, 129
Korea(n(s)), 216, 243, 283, 300, 397, 495n
Korean Games (Culin), 551
Krimhild, 107
Kriulu, 241n
Kshatriya, warrior caste, 530, 530n
Kube, 507; name variant of Luwe
Kulturkreis, 563n
Kumarbi Epic, 106, 281
Kunimond, Gepid (q.v.) king, 300
Kurgan, 258
Kurya, Pecheneg Khan, 300
Kushim, Biblical people, see Cushites
Kwakiutl, NW Coast Native American group, 283
Kyamweru, 509; name

- variante of Luwe
 Kyoto Round Table, 155
 Kyoto, city, Japan, 48, 49, 51, 179, 184, 188, 212, 246, 312, 314, 149n, 150n, 315n-316n
 Kyrgyz, 281; - Epic *Manas*, 283; 294
La Divina Commedia (Dante Alighieri), 84n
La Pensée Sauvage (Lévi-Strauss), 59, 177n
 Labbu, 106
 Lacinuis, 107n
 Lacus Tritonis, 83n, 140n, 270n; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, Shoff' al-Jerid, Athena
 Ladon, 107n
 Lady, 276; Ladies, The Two, -, Egyptian royal title, 112; Lady of Avalon, 296; Lady Tower, 287
 Laistrygones, 107n
 Lake Baikal, 137, 200
 Lake Chad, 130, 163, 258
 Lake Dilolo, 287
 Lake Neusiedler, 129
 Lake Victoria, 134
 Lakka, 130
 Lamia, 107
 Lamu, 286
 Lancelot and Guinevere, 343; cf. Tristram and Isolde
 Land, 35, 74, 79, 200, 219, 265, 272, 296, 305, 333, 340, 351, 431, 446, 451, 465, -, 140n, 270n, 344n, 380n, 432n; Land of Yomi, 303; Land and Water, 421, 428, 446; Land and Water, cf. Separation of, 446; Land-producing Mother of the Waters, 432
 Landscape, mythical, 166
 Lango, several East African groups and regions, 129
 Language: Linguistics, 59 (Long-Range -, 35); Philologists, 48, 317; Pre- and Proto-language forms of myth, 234; Articulate -, 413n; - and Transcendence, 475n; cf. *Borean, Tabooed Waters, General Linguistics
 Lanham, UK, 497n
 Lanna (ethnico-political cluster group in Thailand) Buddhists, 286n
 Lanna / Thai Folklore, Museum of, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 284, 551, 552, 285n
 Laogoras, 107
 Laomedon, 107
 Laoshang Chanyu, an East Asian ruler, 300
 Lapiths, 492n
 Lascaux, Upper Palaeolithic site, France, 34, 574n
 Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, 40, 139
 Latin, 83, 238, 301, 351, 378, 526, 311n; - and French, 311n; Latinisation of Greek, 150n
 Laurasia (Witzel), 33, 43, 68-70, 74, 77, 152-153, 166, 168, 174, 231, 248, 315-317, 407, 563-564, 567-568, 570, 581, 71n, 231n-232n, 257n, 264n-265n, 307n, 409n-410n, 416n, 494n, 560n, 566n, 572n, 575n; - and Gondwana (q.v.), 41, 150, 174, 187, 566, 309n, 566n; Pre- -, 410n; St Laurence River, St, 389
 Lawwe, Nkoya clan, 96
 Law, 294, 548; Law School, Harvard, 576
Le Phenomene Humain (Teilhard de Chardin), 50n
 Leda
 Leda, 72, 144, 332, 396-397, 333n; - and Zeus (q.v.), 72n; cf. Zeus, Swan, Cygnus, Dioscuri, Helena, Clytemnestra
 Leg-Child, child born otherwise than through the normal birth channel, 388, 392, 584, 389n
 Leiden, Netherlands, 33, 48, 196, 246, 256, 314, 580, 61n, 70n, 81n, 110n, 120n, 150n, 183n, 315n, 479n, 494n, 507n
 Leiden University, the Netherlands, 81n, 507n
 Lemba, 291
 Lemnos, Aegean isl., 289; cf. Sintians, Hephaestus
 Leningrad, 67
 Leopard, 46, 109-110, 113-117, 156, 170-171, 185, 195, 201-202, 210, 245-246, 261, 264, 286, 502-504, 509, 511-514, 516-527, 60n, 96n, 111n, 115n-116n, 300n, 375n; - and -skin, 81; - and Lion, 115, 499, 504, 513, 499n, 511n; -skin, 35, 36, 46, 79, 81, 116, 139, 163, 170, 201, 231, 245, 304, 420, 503, 513, 81n, 98n, 300n, 578n; -skin and speckledness, 35; -skin chief, 304; -skin Earth priest, 503; Leopardus, 523
Leptailurus (serval), 518
Les Formes Elementaires De La Vie Religieuse (Durkheim) 504, 521
Les serfs Fezzanais, 130
Les Trois Mousquetaires (Dumas), 559n
 Les Trois Vaisseaux (Junod), 497
 Leto, 107
 Leukothea, 294
 Levant(ine), 43, 173, 209-210, 312, 513, 333n, 347n; - Mesolithic, 218n; Palaeo-Levantine, 513, 510n
 Leviathan, 106, 220, 333, 396, 432, 387n
Leviticus, Bible book, 289
 Lewis-Williams School of rock art studies, 54n
Lexicon (Suidas), 287
 Leza, 290, 218n
 Li (Chinese ethnic minority), 396, 400
Li Ki, Chinese classic text, 524n
 Libupe, Nkoya mythical ancestress, 280
 Libya(n(s)), 111, 112, 122, 126, 128, 130, 299, 140n, 270n
 Lickers, Nkoya clan, 96n
 Life, Elixir of -, 497
 Lightning, 106, 168, 169, 176, 189-190, 224, 390; - Bird, 150, 156, 168, 171, 178, 184, 186, 189, 195-196, 198-201, 210, 224, 227, 229, 264, 96n, 213n; - Bird Narrative Complex, 198; - Bird and World Egg (q.v.) 264; - and the Rainbow (q.v.), 94, 166, 277, 494; Lightning wizard, 73
 Likambi Mange, 271-272, 273, 295-296, 296n, 333n; cf. Shihoka
Likota Iya Bankoya (Shimunika), 71, 95, 273-274, 276, 279, 288, 345, 390, 286n
 Lilith, 297, 447; cf. Adam, Eve
 Lingongole, Rainbow
 Serpent (q.v.), 295
 Linguistic Turn, 56n
 Linus, 107
 Linyati ('Buffalo') river, 522n, cf. Chobe
 Lion, 115, 116, 499, 504, 509, 513, 516-521; - and Leopard (q.v.), 114-116, 509, 504, 512, 514, 516-517, 527, 522; lionine goddess, 513; Lion, - skin, 300n; - and Leopard (q.v.), 522n
 Lipepo, 272
 Literalist, 431n
 Lithuania(n(s)), 83, 397, 398
 Little Brother (AT), 339
 Little Red Riding Hood, 348
 Little Sister (AT), 339
 Lityerses, 107n
 Liverpool, UK, 289
 Lluta, place in N Chili, 136n
 Lo Shu number symbolism, 532
 Loa, creator god, Marshall Isl, Micronesia, 386
 Loew, Rabbi, of Prague, 297
 Logic, cf. Range semantics, Excluded Third, Cyclical element transformation, difference, recursion, Trinity
 Lohengrin, 107
 Loki, 283, 343, 376, 375n
 Long-range, 260, 351-352, 382n; - Linguistics, 35
 Lord of Flies, 347n; cf. Ba'al ze-Bub
 Lord, 58, 95, 291; - Death, 272, 273-274, 276, 280-282, 397, 492, 275n, 343n; - of the Town (cf. Melqart, Ba'al), 294; cf. Death
 Lorelei, 107
 Lot, Biblical figure, 74, 419, 74n, 286n, 431n
 Lotophagi, 347
 Lotuho, 556
 Louvain, Belgium, 44n
 Love, Romantic - Is Not A Universal Category of Culture, 486n; Lover, 156, 171, 185; cf. (Virgin) Mother of the Waters
 Löweneckerchen (Grimm), 338
 Lower Palaeolithic, 170, 195, 314, 473, 411n, 439n, 507n, 572n; - and Middle Palaeolithic, 114, 180, 233, 375, 480, 440n, 541n
 Lozi of the Upper Zambezi,

- 274, 274, 279, 286-287, 286n, 296n; - Flood, 287; cf. Kololo, Luyana, Barotse, Nkoya
- Luba, 286, 287; Bantu language, 519; - and Nkoya (*q.v.*), 96n, 288n
- Lubumba, Prophet, Nkoyaland, 271-272
- Luchazi, 274
- Lucius Postumius Albino, 300
- Luenta River
- Lugalbanda, 106
- Lugbara, 144
- Luhamba, 74, 273, 280-281, 286, 294
- Luke, Bible book, 38, Bible book, 103n
- Lukolwe, 295
- Luminaries, 428, 454
- Lunar, 555; cf. Moon
- Lunda, 273, 276, 280-282, 288, 308, 490, 492, 493n; - and the Nkoya, 282
- Lung, 296n
- Luonnotar, daughter of the creation god in Finnish myth, 72, 396
- Lusoga, Bantu language, 518, 519
- Luvale of North Western Zambia, 274, 279; - and Chokwe, 287; - and Lunda, 490
- Luwe, generic term for the unilateral mythical being, 115, 116, 142, 201-202, 310, 397, 487, 503-511, 513-514, 520, 524, 142n, 507n, 510n-51n, 513n, 522n; - and Mwali, 510, 511, 524; - and Mwari, 510
- Luweji, 282, 283n
- Luwian, 351; cf. Hittite
- Luyana, 274, 286n; - State, 493Luyi, 274, 286, 295; cf. Luyana, Lozi, Barotse
- Lyambay, see Zambezi river, 521-522
- Lycurus, 294, 107n
- Lycus, 294, 107n
- Lydia(n(s)), 106, 347; - Ogre, 347
- Ma Lin, Chinese painter, 525
- Maas, Meuse, river, 578
- Mabinogion, 293, 297
- Machame, Bantu language, 519
- Madagascar, Malagasy, 39, 161, 170, 241, 281, 291, 380, 449-450, 521, 532, 544, 546; - , and the Comoro Islands, 276n
- Madela, 73
- Madi, people in East Africa, 129
- Mafdet, Egyptian feline goddess, 499
- Maghrib(ine), 124, 134, 146, 167; Pan- , even Pan-Islamic, saints (*q.v.*), 167
- Magic, 272, 338; - Belt, 339; - Bird Heart, 338, 339; - Carpet, 497; - Flight, 68; - Mirror, 497
- Mahabharata, 102, 162
- Maka, 130
- Makapansgat Cave, South Africa, 195
- Makhua, Bantu language, 518, 519
- Mal'ta, Lake Baikal, Siberia, Russian Federation, 137, 200, 135n
- Malagasy, see Madagascar; Malagasy Sikiy, 36
- Malawi(an(s)), 45, 76, 94, 130, 277, 479-481, 483, 485-488, 490, 494-495, 498, 479n, 484n, 486n, 586n, 550n
- Malawian Suitor Stories (Schoffeleers), 480, 483
- Malay, 357n
- Mali(an(s)) 396, 450
- Malila, Bantu language, 519
- Malsum, North American leg child, 384, 387
- Malta, Mediterranean island state, 11n
- Mambwe, 288, 519
- Mampussi, Ghanaian (*q.v.*) people, 130
- Man and Ogre Share the Harvest (AT), 339
- Manas, Kyrgyz Epic, 283, 294
- Manchester, UK, 577n
- Manchester School of anthropology, 48, 61, 94, 577n
- Manchester United, 104n
- Mandae(an)s, 397
- Mandva, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164
- Manenga, Queen / Mwene, 272, 287, 302-303, 305, 300n
- Mangala, 'Planet Mars', Hindu and Nkoya name, 162
- Mangus, Tibetan / Mongolian mythical hero, 348
- Manjaco(s), 240, 217n, 241n, 287n
- Mankala, board game, 41, 142-143, 547-548
- Mansir, Arab tribe, 129
- Manthara, 107
- Mantis, 156, 168, 185, 201-202, 227, 229, 264-265, 354
- Mantodea, 375n
- Manu, 451
- Maori, 219, 333, 349, 357n
- Mara, evil spirit of material attachment, Buddhism, 272n
- Marandellas, see Marondera
- Maravi, proto-Malawian, 94, 277, 494
- Marawa, 217n, 218n
- Märchen und Erzählungen, 496n, 381n
- Märchentext I (Frobenius), 286
- Marduk, 106, 302, 388n; - in *Enuma Elish*, 291
- Marondera, region in Zimbabwe, 197
- Marriage, 338; Pre-marital sexuality, 483
- Mars, planet, 294; cf. Ares, Mangala
- Marshall Islands, 86, 386, 388
- Marsyas, 106
- Maruts, 220, 333, 347
- Marxian, Marxism, Marxist, 76, 89, 158, 177
- Mary, mother of Jesus of Nazareth (*q.v.*), 333n
- Masaba, Bantu language, 518-519
- Masai, 144, 161, 223, 337, 218n
- Masaryk University, 555n
- Masculinisation, trend of gender (*q.v.*) change among Bronze Age Old-World deities, 169, 265; cf. gender
- Mashasha, Eastern Nkoya (*q.v.*), 44, 134, 280
- Mashelegabedi, village in NE District, Botswana, 539
- Massachusetts Institute for Technology MIT, 316
- Massachusetts, USA, 246, 576
- Massong, region in Papua New Guinea, 384, 386
- Master of Animals, 125, 506, 508
- Matit, an Egyptian lion goddess, 513
- Matkhandoush Natural Museum, 125, 126, 128
- Matola, protagonist in Malawian suitor story, 483, 485-486, 489
- Matriarchy, 307; cf. Woman, Mother
- Matshya, mythical fish and Flood rescuer, avatar of Vishnu (*q.v.*), 451
- Maui In Maori myth, 219, 333
- Mauritania to the Scandinavian North Cape and the Bering Strait, 96n
- Mauritania(n(s)), 505
- Mawese, 177n
- Maya, mother of the Buddha, (*q.v.*), 388
- Mayas, Meso American people, 289, 300
- Mayowe, Dr Stanford, 298
- Mbedzi, 160, 162
- Mbona, 94, 277, 494
- Mbote, mead (Nkoya), *q.v.*
- Mbouda, town in Cameroon, 552
- Mbunda, people in Western Zambia (*q.v.*), 286; - and Luchazi, 274
- Mbundu, 294
- Mbunze, 95, 96
- Mbwela, 'Westerners', 272, 284; cf. Nkoya
- Mead, honey-beer, 280
- Mecca, 292
- Medb, 282
- Medea, Medeia, 297, 311n; *Medea* (Euripides), 294
- Medieval, 340, 343; Medieval and Early Modern, 289, 397; - Europe, 297
- Mediterranean, 35, 40, 93, 109, 115, 120, 131, 137, 139-141, 173, 189, 215, 223, 235, 246, 248, 257, 283, 288, 301, 303, 307, 338, 350, 379, 388, 390, 397, 400, 405, 448, 450, 510, 543, 568-569, 60n, 109n, 111n, 140n, 244n, 256n, 276n, 279n, 310n, 376n, 416n, 465n, 484n; - Mesolithic, 544; - Protohistory, 34; - Neolithic, 255; - Bronze Age, 40, 235, 281, 548; - Antiquity, 543; - Pelagian, 140-141, 126n; (Realm, 140-141, 269); - and West Asia, 254, 291, 300; - and Africa, 421; -

- and North Atlantic Europe, and Central to East Asia, 17; Palaeo-Mediterranean, 510; – and the Celtic World, 270, 140n; – Bee Symbolism, 11n
- Mediterraneanist, 33, 562
- Medusa, 106, 389; – and Chrysaor, 387
- Mega-Nostratic, 179, 267; Proto-Mega-Nostratic, 224, 227; *cf.* Super-Nostratic
- Megara, town in the isthmus of Corinth, Greece, 304
- Mehit, 513
- Melanesia(n(s)), 35, 347, 348, 372, 217n; – Nauru, 218n; – Spider, 218n
- Meliae, ash-tree nymphs, 302
- Melicartas, 294
- Melissae, 'Bees', priests and priestesses, 281; Melissa in Asia Minor and the Aegean; *cf.* Bee, 11n
- Melisseus, 281; *cf.* Bee
- Melqart, 106, 107, 294
- Melusine, 297; – and Blodeuwedd, 297
- Menelaus, 115, 297, 300n, 508n
- Menet, 513
- Menschliches Allzumenschliches* (Nietzsche), 97n
- Menstruation, 263n
- Mentally Equipped Humans (van Binsbergen), 584
- Mentit, 513
- Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare), 497
- Mercury, 375n; *cf.* Hermes
- Merutig, a Bantu language, 518-519
- Meso America(n(s)), 289, 300, 304, 375, 415, 455, 400n, 454n; – and South America, 216, 570; – and the Ancient Near East, 455
- Mesolithic, 169, 170, 172, 178-179, 202, 258, 356, 449, 544, 156n; – Natufian culture, 259; – Spain, 197
- Mesopotamia(n(s)), 58, 91, 106, 111, 123, 161, 190, 220, 242, 254, 281, 290, 302, 333, 340, 348, 396, 432, 447, 450, 501, 512, 544, 92n, 269n, 387n; – Tiamat, 190; – and Egypt, 277, 395, 493, 125n; – and Greek, 484n
- Metal, 296; Metallurgy, 159
- Metamorphoses* (Ovid), 294, 297, 302, 345-346, 386, 11n, 387n, 468n. *Metaphica* (Aristotle), 84n, 41n
- Method, 193; Methodology, 70
- Metis, 334, 346, 349
- Mhammad, Sidi, NW Tunisian saint and shrines, 59-60, 239, 60n, 506n; – Junior, 49
- Miao, 396, 400, 550n; Proto-Miao-Yao, 260, 261; Miao, Yao and Li as Chinese minorities, 396
- St Michael, 107, 578
- Microcosmic God* (Sturgeon), 49
- Micronesia, 386, 217n
- Middle Ages, 344, 37n, 42n
- Middle East, 267, 250n
- Middle Palaeolithic, 114, 168-170, 227, 233, 264, 375, 265n, 376n, 418n, 440n, 456n, 541n, 561n, 572n
- Midgard Snake, 107
- Midge, mosquito, 354
- Migration of the Nations, 300
- Min, Egyptian god, 290
- Mind, 61, 334
- Minerva, 332, 140n; *cf.* Athena
- Minos, 219, 331-332, 344-346, 397, 294ntaur, 344, 346; Minoan, Middle Bronze Age Crete, 281, 389, 11n; – and Crete, 333n; *cf.* Daedalus, Pasiphaë
- Miraculous birth, 220; *cf.* Leg child
- Mishna*, 420; *cf.* Judaism
- Mist Wader, 297
- Mistress of the Primal Waters, 265, 428, 450, 457
- MIT, see Massachusetts Institute for Technology
- Mitanni, 162
- Mithras, 397; Mithraic and Orphic, 400
- Mitochondrial DNA (Deoxyribo Nucleic Acid), see MtDNA
- Mkuu, Bantu language, 518-519
- MmaShakayile Elizabeth-Mabutu, Francistown (*q.v.*)
- Sangoma* (*q.v.*) leader, 537, 550, 532n
- Moabites and Ammonites, 74
- Moatsü Mong agricultural festival, of the Ao people (*q.v.*) of Nagaland, India, 289
- Models of Thought, 238, 420
- Moderate, modality of theoretical or ideological position, 251, 256, 181n; *cf.* Strong
- Modern(ity), 36, 46, 87, 99, 102, 128, 174, 181, 202, 241, 249, 277-279, 293-294, 297, 317, 334, 343-344, 347-348, 377, 394, 396, 415, 455, 461-462, 468, 476, 481, 491, 504-505, 517-518, 536-537, 555, 578, 37n, 42n, 47n-48n, 98n, 145n, 154n, 176n, 285n, 306n, 308n, 332n, 381n, 465n, 490n, 572n, 576n; – African, 131, 162; – Europe, 129, 180, 480; – North Atlantic, 411, 412, 584; Pre-Modern(ity), 151, 192, 292, 37n (Pre-modern Europe, 289); Modernist, 86, 99, 99n, 177n, 252n; Modernity and Postmodernity, 75n, 575n
- Modes of Production, 149, 154, 158-159, 177, 185, 211, 439, 453-454, 456-460, 263n, 412n, 415n, 454n
- Moghul, 277, 493n; Muslim –, 343n
- Mohendjo-Daro, 503
- Moirai, 107
- Mokerkialfi, 297
- Mong, see Moatsü Mong
- Mongo, Congolese group, 342
- Mongolia(n(s)), 139, 144, 277, 298, 300; – and Tibet, 348
- Mongolian, an Altaic language cluster 300
- Mongols, 300; – and Kyrgyz, 281
- Monkey and the Porpoise, 496
- Monkey, 496
- Monster, 220, 333, 348; Engulfing –, 348; Monster Becomes the World or Humankind, 263n
- Moon, 72, 100, 111, 156, 166, 168-169, 179, 185, 189, 224, 227, 229, 264, 271-272, 282-283, 285, 287, 306, 308, 330, 334, 344-345, 397, 421, 428, 283n, 284n, 294n; – Beam, 196; *cf.* lunar, Selene
- Morality: A-moral, 491
- Morgan(a), – le Fay, 295-296, 333n; Morgause and Morgana Le Fay, 295
- Morning Star, Venus, 390
- Moro tsong, ruin near Khara Khoto (*q.v.*), 128
- Morocco, Moroccan(s), 495n; – Jewry, 495n
- Morte d'Arthur* (Malory), 295, 343
- Moscow, Russia, 256
- Moses, 220, 303, 333
- Mossi, West African people, 288
- Mot, Death (*q.v.*), 106, 332, 342, 347, 397, 275n; *cf.* Death
- Motacilla* (wagtail, *q.v.*), 378, 380, 288n
- Mother Killed Me (AT), 338
- Mother Tongue* (journal), 560n
- Mother, 107, 265, 295, 339, 388, 462, 503, 542; – Earth, 68, 152, 253, 140n, 270n, 341n; – Goddess, 267, 377; – of the (Primal) Waters, 34, 200, 282, 287, 291, 296-298, 303, 340, 349, 377, 410, 432, 447, 463, 465, 72n, 112n, 192n, 296n, 300n, 344n, 380n, 432n, 451n, 550n
- Mountain, 263n; as Re-Connection between Heaven and Earth
- Mousterian, 232, 503; *cf.* Neanderthal
- Mouth, 156, 169, 185, 228, 264-265
- Mozambique, Mozambican(s), 286, 348, 516, 288n; – Ronga, 497; – to Angola, 543
- Mpungumushi sha Munde-ba (village buzzard', Luba / proto-Nkoya), 96
- Mrile, 509; name variant of Mwali
- MtDNA, 203, 224; – Types, 187, 197, 203, 209, 211-212,

- 228, 232, 262, 264-265, 455, 331n, 357n; - Types of Anatomically Modern Humans (*q.v.*), 227, 266; - Type A, 236; - Type B, 45, 212, 214, 449, 418n, 445n, 450n; - Types A and B, 222, 223, 338; - Type L, 216, 218; - Types M and R, 236; - Type N, 223; - Types N and M, 222, 337; - Type R, 216; - Types R and M In The, 215; - Type X, In the New World, 236
- Mtoto, see Kadhi na Mtoto ['Woman with Infant' ?]
- Mufuenda, 'Dead Man Walking', 272
- Muidir Plateau, 130; *cf.* In Salah
- Mulambwa, Luyana king, 276, 279, 287, 493
- Multicollinearity as a Problem In Multivariate Analysis, 423
- Multivariate Analysis, 423-424
- Munda, 357n
- Mundang, 288
- Mundemba, *cf.* Mpungumushi
- Mungala, Mungalo, name variants of Mwali, 162, 509; *cf.* Mangala
- Munungampanda, see kapesb
- Munyar, name variant of Mwali, 509
- Mupumani, 285n, 557n
- Musée de la Blackitude (sic), Yaounde, Cameroon, 302
- Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium, 516n
- Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 430
- Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark, 130
- Museum of Thai / Lanna Folklore, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 284, 551-552, 285n
- Musi-A-Tunya, 521n; *cf.* Victoria Falls
- Music Orpheus Flute Reed (Narcom), 263n
- Music, 263n
- Muslim(s), 282, 421n; - and Infidels, 316; - Moghul, 343n; *cf.* Islam
- Musumba, Emperor Mwaat Yamv's capital, 276, 492-493, 493n
- Mut, Egyptian culture goddess, 288
- Mutanga, 507; name variant of Luwe
- Mutilated god (AT), 271
- Mutondo, Nkoya royal title, 162
- Muvadila, primal woman in Pende cosmogony, 177n
- Mvidi, 509, name variant of Mwali
- Mvula, Nkoya Rain (*q.v.*) Demiurge (*q.v.*), 95, 288, 292, 302, 96n
- Mwaat Yaa(m)v, 272, 273-274, 276, 280-283, 291, 492-493, 343n, 493n; *cf.* Mwati Yamvo, Lord Death
- Mwale, 509; name variant of Mwali
- Mwali, High God, South Central Africa, 245, 503-504, 510-511, 520, 524, 530, 534, 578n; *cf.* Mwari
- Mwana Lesa, 'Child of God', nickname of the witchfinder / prophet Tomo Nyirenda, Zambia, c. 1925, 77
- Mwari, 115, 509-510-511, 511n; *cf.* Mwali
- Mwati Yamvo, 274, 281
- Mwendanjangula, 202, 271-272, 295, 303, 487-488, 488n
- Mwene, Nkoya title, pl. Myene, 95-96, 287-288, 557; - Kahare and - Mutondo, 162; - Kahare Kambambi of the Mashasha Nkoya, 44, 108n, 295n; - Kapesb, 557; - Manenga, 287, 302-303, 300n; - Nyambi, 95, 96n; - Shihoka Nalinanga, 295; - Shikanda, 44
- Mwera, Bantu language, 519
- Mwili, 509; name variant of Mwali
- Myene, see Mwene
- Myrrha, 346, 386
- Myth and Method* (Patton & Doniger), 574n
- Myth of the Bagre* (Goody), 310n
- Myth of the State* (Cassirer), 87
- Myth(ical), mythology, mythological, 33, 46, 51, 83, 86-87, 89, 92, 117, 149, 159, 193-194, 220, 314, 555, 560, 562, 571, 72n, 81n, 86n, 92n, 103n, 149n, 555n, 575n, and *passim*; Mythological Continuities, 580 (and *passim*); Myth of Er, 84; Myth of the Cave, 331; Mythical Snake, 271; Mythically Equipped Humans, 584; Mythology of Death and Dying, 580; Myth From South Central Africa Featuring Mwene Manenga, 287; Definition of - , 96; Mythological Inertia (*q.v.*), 289n, 341n; Mythology of Death and Dying, 318n; Mythology Project, Asia Center, Harvard University, 183n; Mythologies, African and Eurasian, 309n, 318n; *cf.* Comparative Mythology
- Myth: Theory and The Disciplines, Leiden conference, 2003, 33; *cf.* Schipper, Merolla
- Mythopedia* (van der Sluijs), 155
- Myths and Legends of The Bantu* (Werner), 495
- N Ameri = North America N&EasAm = North & East Asia and Americas], 451n
- Na-Dene, 110, 135, 425, 357n, 451n; *cf.* (Dene-) Sino-caucasian
- Nagaland, India, 289
- Nagasaki, Japanese city destroyed by nuclear bomb in 1945, 307n
- Nahusha, 107
- Naipande, wife of Masai (*q.v.*) Flood hero (*q.v.*) Tumbainot (*q.v.*), 161
- Nakal, Meso-American Orpheus-like (*q.v.*) mythical figure, 304
- Nakh, Westcaucasian language, 425
- Nakisawame-no-Mikoto, Japanese goddess of wells and clear water, 302
- Nalut, Libya, 128
- Nama, formerly Hottentot (pejor.), people in Southern Africa, 144, 522-524
- Nambija, Masai mythical figure, *cf.* Biblical Cain, 161
- Names*, literal translation of the Hebrew name שְׂמֹנֶט, *Exodus* (Bible book), 150n
- Namibia(an(s)), 201, 202, 298
- Namuci, 107
- Namwanga, Bantu language, 518
- Nanai, people on the Amur, East Siberia, 397, 400
- Nandi, ethnic group in East Africa, 130
- Nape, name variant of Luwe, 509; *cf.* Nyambe, 507
- Naqada IIc, Egypt, 125, 127, 129n
- NarCom, see Narrative Complex; NarCom 15a, 217
- Nareau 217n; - the Older, 218n; - the Younger, 218n
- Naresh Bajracarya, 534, 537
- Narrative Complex, 41, 67, 149-150, 153-154, 156-158, 161, 164-178, 184-202, 209-216, 218-219, 221-225, 227-232, 261-263, 308, 320, 347, 416, 454-455, 96n, 155n, 184n, 187n, 190n, 213n, 215n, 223n, 226n, 230n, 263n, 265n, 281n, 321n, 331n, 412n, 428n, 538n; - and MeDNA Types R and M, 215; - Earth, 189, 224; - of the Spider, 189, 236; - Rain-bow, 224; - the Lightning Bird, 224; - In Africa, 233; - In North Africa, 223, 338; - In Meso and South America, 216; - In West to Central Asia, 223, 337; - NE Asia, 222, 337; - In South East Asia, 393; - In Pandora's Box (*q.v.*), 224, 262, 337; - In the Proto-Neolithic, 215; - In West Asia and Europe In the Neolithic, 189
- Narrative Themes, 150, 150
- Nashlah, 107
- Nasilele, wife of Nyambi (*q.v.*), 286
- Nasin Batsi, 217n, 287n
- Naste Etsan, 218n
- Nata, Central Botswana, 245, 578n
- National Archaeological

- Museum of Taranto, 385
 National Socialism, Nazism, 86, 508n, 570n, 575n; – and Fascism, 87
National Treasures of China, 524n
 Native American(s) (*q.v.*), 98n, 105n, 375n, 493n; – – West African continuities, 217n
 NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 570n Natufian Hypothesis, 259
Natura Artis Magistra, Amsterdam Zoo, Netherlands, 500
 Nature, 159, 456–458, 462, 473, 488, 37n, 283n
 Naucratis, 82n
 Naumba, Queen of the Sala (*q.v.*), 294
 Nauru, island state, Oceania, 218n
 Navajo, 219, 281, 290, 331, 348, 218n
 Nazareth, 466, 469
 Nazca lines, Peru, 356
 Nazis, Nazism, see National Socialism
 Ndebele, 297, 518, 522, 533; Ndebele and Swazi of South Africa, 532; – and Kalanga, 531n
 Ndembu Lunda, 308
 Ndjuka Maroons, Surinam, South America, 576n
 Ndorobo, 130
 Neanderthal(s), 43, 187, 203, 209–210, 233, 242, 311–312, 332, 340–341, 203n; Neanderthaloid(s), 187, 195, 209–211, 227, 265, 341, 371n; Neanderthaloids and Anatomically Modern Humans, 210
 Near East, 109, 115, 203, 428; *cf.* Ancient –
 Nearctic, the whole of North and Meso America as a biogeographic realm, 110, 410, 417n
 Nectar, 271
 Need-fire, extinguishing and re-kindling fire for magical protection as a folklore institution in NW and E Europe, 289
 Neith, Egyptian goddess of the Waters, warfare, and weaving, 112, 83n, 113n, 300n, 387n
 Neleus, king of Pylos, Greece, 107
 Neo-Kantianism, 86, 99; *cf.* Cassirer
 Neolithic, 40, 45, 79, 115, 124, 141, 144–145, 150, 165–166, 168–173, 176, 179, 189, 196–197, 215, 217–218, 224–225, 227–228, 230, 233, 236, 243, 255, 263, 265, 281, 298, 310, 354, 372, 374, 397, 399–400, 410, 413, 418, 453–455, 459–462, 465, 467, 473, 475, 485; 502, 504–505, 512–514, 523, 567–568; Pre–, 165, 453, 514; Pre-Pottery – a, 512; Proto–, 215–216, 224, 227, 231, 234, 255, 265–266, 475; – Revolution, 460, 460; – and Bronze Age, 186, 216, 256, 447; – to Iron Age, 170, 228, 265; – Anatolia, 255, 513; – West Asia, 215, 234, 449, 546–547; – Extended Fertile Crescent, 119, 121, 172, 179, 187; – and Bronze Age West Asia, 215; – and Bronze Age Ancient Near East, 415; – and Bronze Age West Asia, 307; – Central Asia, 140, 146, 268, 449; – Proto-Pelagian Realm, 398; – Sahara, 115; – Africa, 235; (and Luwe, 116); – Narrative Complexes, 172; Post-Neolithic, 397
 Neolithic, un, 150n, 154n, 165n, 192n, 230n, 281n, 389n, 400n, 417n–418n, 439n, 445n, 450n–451n, 455n, 460n, 462n, 476n, 488n, 507n, 512n; – and Bronze Age, 257n, 507 (– West Asia, 145)
 Neopagan, 293; *cf.* Pagan
 Nepal(ese), Nepali, 197, 389, 530, 536, 561; – Buddhist Homa (*q.v.*), 534
 Nephthys, 112
 Nereus, Greek sea god, child of Gaia and the latter's son Pontus, 428, 457
 Nergal, 106
 Nestis, 302; *cf.* Neith
 Netherlands, 33, 39, 42–43, 58, 64, 117, 196, 242, 246, 314, 389, 479, 500, 561, 578, 61n, 102n, 243n
 Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study In The Humanities and Social Sciences, NIAS, Wassenaar, the Netherlands, 1995–1996, 243n, 276n
 Netherlands Organisation For Scientific Research NWO / ZWO, 81n
 Neusiedler, Lake, 129
 New Age, 561n
 New Comparative Mythology (*q.v.*), 47, 558
 New Guinea, 135, 152–153, 159, 161, 164, 167, 169, 174, 193–194, 204, 207–208, 222, 228, 231, 264–266, 315, 338, 348–349, 371–372, 384, 387, 395, 398–399, 455, 567–568, 376n, 387n, 61n, 265n, 387n, 455n; – and Australia (*q.v.*), 78, 120, 161, 164, 222, 263, 337, 371, 210n, 376n, 451n
 New Technology Studies, 64n
 New World (North America, Meso America, South America, and adjacent islands), 107, 110, 236, 375, 378, 449, 546, 213n, 307n, 576n
 New Zealand, 201, 219, 333, 349, 397
 Ngali, 509; name variant of Mwali
 Ngambala, Nkoya: Speaker, Prime Minister, 291
 Ngano, people in N Nigeria, 130
 Ngao, place in East Africa, 497
 Ngoli, NW Bantu language, 518
 Ngoma, musical and ecstatic complex in Bantu-speaking cultures, 532n
 Ngorongoro, 296n; *cf.* Rainbow (– Serpent)
 Ngqangi, 509; name variant of Mwali
 Ngumbangumba, a giant, 348
 Nguni, Southern African ethnic and linguistic cluster, *cf.* Sotho, Ndebele, Zulu, Sotho, 532–533
 Nhbt, Egyptian vulture goddess, 112
 NIAS, Netherlands Institute For Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Science, Wassenaar, the Netherlands, 1995–1996, 243n, 276n
 Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle), 320n
 Niger, river in West Africa, 122, 134, 515, 520, 310n
 Nigercongo, 116, 124, 134, 137, 139, 163, 168, 174, 179, 233, 228, 234, 243, 248–249, 256–257, 260, 270, 282, 295, 308, 337, 374, 380, 395, 399, 425, 504, 514–515, 517, 520, 542, 548, 568, 69n, 134n, 140n, 213n, 241n, 258n, 310n, 514n; Pre–, 124; Proto–, 146, 224, 542; – >Bantu, 168; – and Nilosaharan, 146, 258, 357n; – and Khoisan, 207; – as Branch of *Borean, 124n; – and Sinotibetan, 451n
 Nigeria(n(s)), 130, 130, 283, 333, 341, 397, 509, 550/551
 Nigerkordofan, see Nigercongo
Nihonshoki, Japanese classic, 580
 NIHU, Kyoto, Japan, 184, 150n
 Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 33, 578–579
 Nile river, 120, 122, 134, 137, 302; Nile Valley and Anatolia, 145; Nile, *cf.* White Nile, Blue Nile
 Nilosaharan, 128, 146, 179, 207, 228, 234, 249, 256, 258, 374, 399, 447, 515, 520, 542, 568; Proto–, 146, 224, 124n, 357n, 514n; – and Nigercongo, 124, 139, 257, 213n, 258 (as Branches of *Borean, 124); – and Afroasiatic, 134; – and Khoisan, 395
 Nilotic, ethno-linguistic cluster in East Africa, 128, 283; – Dinka, 302; – Earth, 170; – Leopard-skin (*q.v.*), 116; – Leopard-skin Earth priest (*q.v.*), 503
 Nimhursage, 217n
 Nimrod, *Biblical* figure, 166, 287, 291n
 Nirurta, 106
 Niobe, 302
 Nisus of Megara, King, with One Hair, 304
 Njala-Gobe, a name for Luwe, 509
 Njonjolo, stream and valley in Nkoyaland (*q.v.*), 44
 Nkomba, Nkoya clan, 96

- Nkonze, Nkoya clan, 96
- Nkoya, people in Western Zambia, 34, 42, 44, 48, 61, 69, 71, 74, 92-95, 134, 139, 162, 239, 248-249, 252-255, 271-277, 279-284, 286-298, 300-308, 341, 376, 492-494, 518, 521-522, 550-551, 555-557, 577;
- Nkoyaland, 44, 275, 276, 492-493, 285n, 296n; - and Luyana, 274; - Reed-and-Bee, 280; - King Kayimbila, 390, 492; - King As Death Demon, 276, 492; - and Africa, 307; - and Celtic, 281, 282, 293; - and Gilegamesh, 306; - and Western Eurasia, 277, 494; - and-Eurasia, 273; - Kapes, 285n; - and Lozi, 296n. *cf.* Mashasha
- Nkwehe, Eagles (*q.v.*), Nkoya clan, 95
- Noah, Noahic, Noahite, Biblical figure, Flood hero, 73, 131-132, 144, 162, 213-214, 220, 296, 333, 415-420, 424, 426, 429, 431-432, 448, 452, 462, 417n, 431n, 454n; - 427, Flood, 188, 432; - Flood Hero, 416
- Nommo, 74, 286
- Nordic (North European, Germanic, Scandinavian), Nordic Europe, 219-220, 223, 283, 293-294, 296, 298, 304, 333, 338, 343, 410, 508n; Nordic Ginnungagap, 219, 33; Nordic Apocalypse, 296 (*cf.* Ragnarok); Nordic Odinn, 305; Nordic Sun-god Balder, 301; Nordic and Sanskrit Asia, 293; - Fire giant, 296
- Normandy, NW France, 551
- Norse, 190
- North Africa(n(s)), 39, 115, 131, 166, 223, 338, 540, 543, 103n, 151n, 241n, 255n, 276n, 506n, 541n, 549n; - As A Region Where Apparently Very Ancient Mythological Material comes to the fore, 60n
- North America(n(s)), 34, 57, 93, 152, 315, 375, 424, 428, 563, 568, 213n, 232n, 294n, 308n, 375n, 454n-455n, 576n; - Flood myth, 428,
- North Atlantic region, 38, 44, 46, 52, 60, 69, 71, 99-102, 104-105, 108, 143, 151, 153, 186, 191, 214, 216, 235, 242, 244, 248, 251, 253, 255, 277, 279, 302, 317, 374, 388, 411-412, 415, 419, 447, 472, 495, 516, 551, 568, 577, 584, 37n, 75n, 99n, 111n, 124n, 153n, 254n-256n, 265n, 400n, 486n, 499n, 532n, 541n, 574n; - Modernity, 304, 416; - Africanist, 108
- North Cape, Norway, 523, 96n
- North Caucasian, linguistic complex, 124n, 138n, 139n, 258n, 357n
- North East District, Botswana, 538
- North Sea, 389
- North West Coast, North America, 283
- North-East Africa, 150n; and West Asia, 165n
- Northern Africa, 131, 137, 374, 568; - and the Mediterranean, 189; - and the Middle East, 250n
- Northern and Southern mythologies: disparate (Witzel) or continuous (van Binsbergen), 314
- Northern Europe, 416n; - Odin, 510n; *cf.* Nordic
- Northern Hemisphere, 41
- Northern Rhodesia, see Zambia
- North-South, 137, 306, 570, 308n, 494n
- Nostratic, 78, 109, 123-124, 179, 256, 352, 502, 506, 517, 521, 542 Nostratic, 83n, 96n, 124n, 258n, 382n, 499n, 506n, 514n; Nostratic / Eurasianic, 258; Nostratic Hypothesis, 259; Proto-Nostratic, 179, 514, 542; Super-Nostratic, 425; Nostratic and Afroasiatic, 291; Nostratic% (= Bomhard & Kerns conception of Nostratic, which includes Afroasiatic), 508, 514, 523-524; Nostratic% ... Proto-Nostratic(%), 524, 96n, 506n, 527n; Nostratic% and Khoisan, 523; Nostratic and Bantu, 499n; *cf.* Mega-Nostratic
- Notable De Neuf Mr Touoym Sr, 552
- Nr-Mr, 1st Dynasty Egyptian king, 201
- Nsenga, 288
- Ntabi, Nkoya clan, 96
- Nu Kwa, see Nu Wa
- Nu Wa, Chinese primal goddess and Flood heroine (*q.v.*), 214, 220, 297, 334, 342, 400, 83n, 115n, 140n, 270n, 417n, 510n; - and Fu Xi, 333
- Nuah, see Noah
- Nuberu, Spanish mythical figure, 305; *cf.* Manenga, Jason, Hera, Flood
- Nubia(n(s)), 130, 162, 249, 277, 493, 501
- Nuer, East African people, 129
- Numbers, Bible book, 296, 524n
- NUMBERS, a factor identified in the multivariate analysis of Flood myths worldwide, 429
- Nupe, 288
- Nut, Egyptian goddess of Heaven, 106, 111, 220, 333, 342
- NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, 8n
- Nyakyusa, Bantu language, 518
- Nyali(c), 509; name variant of Mwali
- Nyambi, Nyambe, 95, 95, 115, 170, 286-288, 290-291, 296, 302, 375-378, 96n, 288n, 291n, 507n, 510n; *cf.* Nzambi
- Nyanja, Bantu language, creolised version of Cewa widely used in South Central Africa especially in Zambian towns, 495
- Nyasaland, 496; *cf.* Malawi; *cf.* Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland
- Nyaturuwil, a Bantu language, 519
- Nyau, Malawian (*q.v.*) mask society, 486n
- Nyembo, Nkoya clan, 96; *cf.* Bee
- Nyiha, Bantu language, 519
- Nyuh Kuning, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 549
- Nzamb(i), name variant of Nyambi (*q.v.*), 115, 291, 376
- Nzingha, Angolan Queen, 294; *cf.* Jinga
- Oannes, 450, 387n
- Obatala, Yoruba god of Heaven, 550, 550n; - and Oduduwa, 79
- Oceania(n(s)), 79, 135, 158, 169, 174, 181, 213-214, 220, 222-223, 236, 248, 258, 290, 297, 302, 333, 336-338, 349-350, 377-378, 384, 386, 388, 392-393, 395, 397-398, 401-402, 410, 448, 568, 70n, 140n, 217n-218n, 221n, 265n, 378n, 451n, 521n, 550n; - Papa and Rangai = Earth and Heaven 331; - mythological parallels with Western Eurasia, 220, 333, 269n; - and Australia, 388, 449; - and Madagascar, 449; - and North America, 93, 315; - and the Americas, 138, 310, 374, 378
- Oceanus, 106-107, 107, 159
- Odin, Norid trickster High God, 107, 305, 507, 375n, 510n
- Oduduwa, 79, 550n
- Odyssey (Homer), 86, 220, 282, 287, 332, 334, 345-348
- Odysseus, 86, 220, 282, 332, 345-346, 348, 432n
- Oedipus, 100n; Oedipal Conflict (Freud), 482n
- Oenomaus, 300
- Og, 220, 333, 397
- Ogdoad, the Eight (principal gods of Egypt), 396, 112n; *cf.* Egypt
- Ogier the Dane, 107
- Ogma Cermait, 281
- Ogre, 41, 44, 67, 106, 156, 169, 179, 185, 210, 219-221, 223, 225, 227, 264-265, 330-352, 397, 427, 223n, 331n, 333n, 341n; - s Kill Their Own Children, 338; - In Turkish tradition, 346; - In Western tradition, 346; - Narrative Complex, 222, 334; - of Annihilation, *cf.* Non-Being, 333; - Wife, 349; - With the Primal Waters, 219, 331
- Ogun, Yoruba war god, 290, 218n
- Ogygus, 107

- Old Testament*, 279, 284, 507, 534, 72n, 74n, 524n; *cf.* *Bible*
- Old World, i.e. Africa, Asia and Europe, 34, 35, 142, 156, 175, 186, 320, 327, 374, 524, 578, 60n, 96n, 142n, 190n, 221n, 281n, 307n, 321n, 419n, 426n, 488n, 495n, 506n, 524n, 549n, 568n, 576n; Pan- , 146; – and the New World, 375, 546; – and the Nearctic, 417n; – Mythological Continuities, 190n; Western –, 484n
- Oll' Rinkrank (Grimm), 339
- Olympia, Greece, 300
- Olympian gods (q.v.), 451n; *cf.* Pelasgians
- Olympiana Carmina* (Pindar), 83n
- Omaha Native Americans, 304
- Omotic, linguistic phylum within Afroasiatic, 502, 567, 357n; –and Chadic, 250n
- Omphale, 106
- Omtrent Deedee* (Claus), 38, 102, 103n
- Onan, Biblical figure, 387n
- One-eyed person (AT), 272
- One-Hair, 304; *cf.* Kahare
- Ontological Turn, in anthropology, 561n
- Open Sesame (AT), 339
- Opening Up a Belly / Een Buik Openen* (van Binsbergen), 50
- Opening-of-the-Mouth ritual, Egypt, 503
- Opera et Dies* (Hesiod), 222n
- Ophion, 107; *cf.* Serpent, Snake
- Oppenheimer–Dick–Read–Tauchman Sunda (q.v.) Hypothesis, 70n, 484n
- Orange and Citron Princess, 496, 497
- Origins of The World's Mythologies* (Witzel), 46, 51, 314, 560, 562, 571
- Orontes, 106
- Orpheus, 112, 113, 115, 220, 304, 332–333, 398, 503, 263n, 300n, 508n; Orphic, 115, 400
- Oshomo, son of Tumbainot (q.v.), 161
- Osiris, 106, 111–113, 115, 221, 334, 340, 342–343, 346, 466, 526–527 115n; – and Neith (q.v.), 112
- Our Drums Are Always on My Mind* (van Binsbergen), 61
- Ouranos, see Uranus
- Outcast Animals Find a New Home (AT), 338
- Out-of-Africa, Out-of-Africa Exodus, Hypothesis, 40, 50, 150, 171, 173, 180, 186, 190, 230, 256, 261, 263, 267, 395, 416, 475; Out-of-Africa Hypothesis, 40–41, 43, 67, 69, 78, 109, 138, 149–154, 156–157, 161, 163–164, 167–174, 178, 184–185, 187–189, 191–193, 196, 198–200, 203, 208, 220, 229, 231, 235, 246, 248, 255, 261–262, 313, 337, 371, 568, 96n, 123n, 150n, 265n, 331n, 411n–412n, 445n, 567n; pre- – Africa, 494n; Out-of-Africa Narrative Complexes, 173, 262; Pre- and Post-Out-of-Africa history of Old World, 156; Pre-Out-of-Africa, 41, 43, 79, 137–138, 150–151, 163, 169, 171, 173, 174, 185–190, 196, 200, 204, 229, 231, 235, 254, 263, 314, 337; (Lower Palaeolithic, 170; Middle Palaeolithic 168–169, 170, 227, 264); – and the Neolithic In West Asia, 234; Out-of-Africa Exodus, 193; *cf.* Sally, Back-into-Africa
- Overeating In The Pantry (AT), 338
- Ovid's Flood (q.v.), 419
- Oxford, 129, 479; – Museum, 130
- Oxford University Press, 46, 314, 560, 570
- Pacific (Ocean), 120, 122, 141, 216, 290, 300, 349–350, 399, 455, 568, 580, 207n, 455n, 550n
- Pagan(ism), 316, 567
- Paghat, West Asian mythical hero, 106
- Painted Tomb 100, Naqada IIc, Egypt, 125
- Paka a, Hawai'ian God, inventor of the sail, 397; *cf.* Daedalus
- Pakhet, Egyptian lionine goddess, 513
- Palaeoanthropology, 153n
- Palaeolithic, 51, 57, 78, 131, 167–168, 170, 179–180, 195, 199–200, 227, 231, 265, 298, 375, 377, 431, 447, 469, 475, 488, 514, 181n, 299n, 380n, 541n; – Neanderthal, 312; – to the Bronze Age, 416; *cf.* Upper, Lower, Middle –
- Pale Fire* (Nabokov), 38, 103n, 284n
- Palermo, Sicily, Italy, 499
- Palestine, Palestinian(s), 162, 191, 210, 252, 258, 42n, 150n, 493n; – and Jordan, 145
- Pali, South Asian language of Buddhist (q.v.) literature, 530n, 531n
- Pallas, 107; *cf.* Athena
- Pan Ku, 220, 282, 333, 396, 400
- Pan, Greek God, 107
- Pan-Babylonian (q.v.), 255
- Panchatantra*, 496
- Pandera, alleged father of Jesus of Nazareth, 333n
- Pandit Amoghavajra Bajracharya, 534
- Pandora, Greek mythical figure, 298, 420, 221n
- Pandora's Box (van Binsbergen), pre-Out-of-Africa (q.v.) shared cultural heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans (q.v.), 41, 45, 50–51, 67, 121, 135, 137–138, 175, 184–185, 189–191, 198, 200, 204, 210, 214, 216–218, 221–224, 227, 229, 231, 233–236, 248, 261–264, 266, 296–297, 307–308, 315–316, 334, 337, 350, 371, 374, 384, 390, 394–395, 416, 420, 447, 452, 465, 475, 569, 581, 584, 136n, 166n, 185n, 187n, 194n, 207n, 221n–222n, 309n, 331n, 341n, 445n, 455n, 484n, 486n, 575n; – and Route A, 217, 218
- Pandora's Box Prised Open* (the present book), 34, 50, 569
- Pangwe (people in Gabon, Africa), 397
- Panthera* (Leopard (q.v.), Panther), 503, 509, 516, 523
- Papa, Oceanian god of Earth (q.v.), 302, 331–332, 550n; Papa and Rangī (q.v.), 79
- Papua New Guinea, 347, 348, 384, 386, 388
- Papyrus Harris, 302
- Parable of the Cave In Book VII of *De Re Publica* (Plato), 84
- Paradigm, 77, 77n
- Paradise, 296, 428, 449, 454
- Pare, Tanzanian (q.v.) people, 286
- Parent of Drought, see Shihoka Nalinanga
- Parker Library, 36
- Parthenon, Greece, 300
- Parzival, 107
- Pasiphaë, Queen, 344, 294n
- Patagonia(n)s), 349, 350
- Path A, see Route A
- Patna, N. India, 286n
- St Patrick, 221, 334, 347
- Pauly-Wissowa Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 342n
- Pavoninae*, 300n
- Pawnee, 304, 390
- Paysan, Klaus, photographer, 382
- PC, see : Politically Correct, 317
- Pecheneg, Eastern European people, 300
- Pegasus, 387, 388–389
- Peking Man, 298, 508; *cf.* Sinanthropus
- Peking University, Beijing, 183n
- Pelasgian(s) / Pelasgian Hypothesis, 40, 58, 120, 133, 137, 140–141, 146, 230, 248, 255, 257, 269–270, 277, 282, 289, 293–294, 303–304, 307, 339, 350, 400–402, 543, 545, 548, 70n, 124n–125n, 136n, 139n–140n, 145n, 255n–256n, 270n, 276n, 285n, 287n, 300n, 399n, 451n, 488n, 494n–495n, 567n; – Creation Myth, 451n; – Hypotheses, 34, 40, 119–120, 137, 139–140, 147–148, 249, 268, 270, 306–307, 494, 548, 584; Proto- , 400 (Proto-Pelasgian Realm, 398); Primary , 141; Primal and Secondary – , 269; – Realm, 101, 140–141, 145, 269, 283, 288, 293, 306, 398, 54, 139n, 140n, 265n; – Realm In

- Neolithic West Central Asia, 140, 268; (and the Mediterranean, 120); – and Sunda, 400, 401, 545; – Creation Myth, 451n; – Realm, ; – West Asian, 279n; – and Sunda Models, 70n; – and the Hamitic Hypothesis, 146n
- Pele, Hawai'ian goddess of Fire (*q.v.*), 305
- Pelias, 300n
- Pende, people in Congo, 177n
- Penelope, 221, 334, 581; *cf.* Odysseus
- Pentecostal, variety of Christianity, *q.v.*, 104n
- People of the West, see Mbwela
- Pepo ('Wind'), shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164
- Peri-Clymenus, 107n
- Periodic System of Elements (*q.v.*), 504, 312n
- Peripheral and Central (*q.v.*) branches of disintegrating *Borean, 265; Branch, 135, 236, 258-259, 307, 373, 374, 380, 395, 567-568, 258n, 308n, 357n, 381n
- Perkunas, Perkunas, Baltic meteorological god, 293
- Perseus, French Late Medieval narrative collection, 289
- Persecuted Heroine, 339 (AT)
- Persephone, 107; *cf.* Demeter, Hades
- Perseus, 106, 107, 387
- Persia(n)(s), 107, 496-497, 448, 547; *cf.* Iran(ian)(s)
- Persian Gulf, 254, 355, 388, 450, 521, 568
- Persian Tales*, 496n, 497n
- Peru(vian)(s), 356
- Peterborough Bestiary*, 36
- St Petersburg, Russia, 579
- PGM, *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechische Zauberpapyri*, I-II, ed. K. Preisendanz *et al.*, Stuttgart: Teubner, 2nd ed., 1972-74, 298
- Phaenicians, legendary Homeric people, 432n
- Phaedra* (Seneca), 345, 331n
- Phaedrus* (Plato), 82, 545; – Fragment On Thamus and Thot (Plato), 82n
- Phaeton, 387n; *cf.* Sun
- Pharmacopaea, traditional, Southern African, 532n
- Pharmacopoeia Commission (China), 532n
- Pharus, 12, 297, 332, 345; *cf.* Alexandrie, Proteus, Helenaq
- Philippines, 73, 397, 495n
- Philosophical approaches to myth, 82
- Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 17, 577n
- Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (Husserl), 252n
- Phineus, 107n
- Phlegyan(s), 300, 492n
- Phlegyas, 107
- Pho (tree), 286n; *cf.* Bodhi tree, Buddhism
- Phoebus Apollo (*q.v.*), 298
- Phoenicia(n)(s), 106, 287, 294, 392, 450, 502, 568, 376n; – Earth, 106; – Heaven, 106
- Phoenix, mythical bird, 379
- Phorbas, 107, 300
- Phorcyx, 107n
- Photoshop™, 126
- Phrygia(n)(s), 287, 334
- Pig, 493n
- Pihassassa, Hittite Storm God of Lightning, 190
- Pillars of Hercules (*q.v.*), 388
- Pima, North American people, 281
- Ping, 107
- Pitt River Museum, 129
- Plain of the Kings (Nkoya), 341; *cf.* Egyptian Valley of the Kings?
- Pluto, Plutus, 282, 296, 341; *cf.* Hades
- Poine, 107
- Pole, 448n; Pole Into Heaven, 213n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, Forked – , Heracles
- Political Correctness, 99, 317, 567, 75n, 124n, 145n, 256n; Politically Incorrect, 570, 581
- Political Oratory, 102
- Pollock Hall, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 39
- Pollux, one of the Dioscuri (*q.v.*), 72, 144, 332
- Polydectes, 107n
- Polynesia(n)(s), 220, 333, 341, 349, 220n
- Polyphemus, 345, 346-347
- Pontus, Pontic, see Black Sea
- Porpoise, 496
- Portugal, Portuguese, 78, 240, 496-497, 241n, 293n, 486n; – and Italy, 497; – and African, 497
- Poseidon, 107, 298-299, 343-345, 387, 389, 83n, 270n, 299n, 417n, 432n; – and Demeter, 545; – and Medusa, 389; *cf.* Poshaiyankayo
- Poshaiyankayo, 349; *cf.* Poseidon
- Postcolonial Theory, 69
- Postcolonial Tum, 561n
- Postmodern(ity), 87, 99, 105, 256, 311, 583, 37n, 75n, 575n; – Philosophy, 99n; – Age, 420; – Tum, 64, 561n
- Potiphar, *Biblical* figure, 297; his wife sought to seduce *Genesis* son of Jacob (*Genesis* 37:36 *f.*), 333n
- PowerPoint™, 312, 522
- Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 289
- Prague, Czech Republic, 297
- Prairie, N American Steppe, 290
- Prajapati, 301; – Daksha, 144; *cf.* Leda
- Prambanan, Hindu temple site, Java, Indonesia, 549
- Praying To The Statue's Mother (AT), 339
- Presents for The King (Grimm), 339
- Presley, Elvis, 256n
- Presocratic philosophers, Antiquity, 58, 71, 79, 83, 530, 465n, 213n, 276n, 465n
- Pre-Symposium, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) – / 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Round Table on 'Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia', organised by RIHN, NIHU / Harvard University, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, and held at Kyoto, Japan, 6-8 June, 2005, 184, 150n
- Priest, 448n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, Melissa
- Primal Being, 397
- Primal Scene (Freud), the child witnessing its parent's sexual intercourse, supposed to have drastic psychological effects, 482n
- Primal Waters, 161, 200, 219-220, 223, 265, 281-282, 287, 291, 296-298, 303, 331, 333, 337, 340, 349, 377, 390, 399, 410, 427-428, 433, 446-448, 450-451, 457, 462-463, 465, 140n, 213n, 270n, 380n, 432n; – and the Land, 426n; – and the Flood (*q.v.*), 41, 156, 169, 184, 188, 212-213, 227, 229, 264-265, 452; – and Land (*q.v.*), 200; Primal Mother of the Waters, 333n
- Primary God of Creation, 428
- Primary Pelasgian Realm, 140n
- Prince(ss), 28, 448n; Enchanted Princess In Her Castle (AT), 339; *cf.* King, Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Privileged Position, Impossibility of a – , in Post-modern Philosophy, 99n
- Problem of Evil In Central Africa* (Ranger), 76
- Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN (q.v.) and of the 7th ESCA (q.v.) Harvard-Kyoto Round Table* (Osada with Hase), 149n
- Prologue 'Music from the East', in *Sunda, etc.* (van Binsbergen), 307
- Prometheus, 281, 283, 297, 419-420
- Prophet, 448n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Proserpina and Harmonia, 115
- Protectorate, 274; *cf.* Barotseland
- Protestantism, 58; *cf.* Christianity
- Proteus, Protean, 112, 219, 272, 297, 331-332, 344-345, 428, 112n; – and Nereus,

- 457
 Proto-Neolithic, see Neolithic
Proverbs, Bible book, 58
 Ptah, 529, 106n, 387n
 Pterelaus, 304
 Pueblo Indians, 219, 331, 348-349; - Zúñi, 349
 Pumpkin, 220, 333
 Punjab, India, 123
 Putin, President of the Russian Federation, 570n; Putinism, 575n
 Pygmalion, 297, 468n
 Pygmies, 230-231
Pyramid Texts (Mercer), 294, 387; cf. Mercer 1952, Faulkner 1924
 Pyramid, 294, 387
 Pyramus and Thisbe, 281
 Pyrenees, Pyrenean mountains, 131
 Pyrrha, 428; cf. Deucalion
 Pyrrhichus, 107n
 Pyrrhus, 294
 Pythia, *ἰων*
Pythian Odes (Pindar), 287
Python (Fontenrose), 45, 56n
 Python, 107, 169, 190, 487; cf. Serpent, Snake
 Qadiriyya, major Islamic (q.v.) brotherhood, 167
 Qasavara, an Ogre (q.v.), 348
 Qat, mythical figure, Banks Isl., 348
 Quantum Mechanics and the Theory of Relativity, 306n
 Quarreling Giants Lose Their Magic Objects (AT), 339
 Queen, iii, 287; - Bee, 280; - Boadicea, 294; - Manenga, 305; - Naumba of the Sala, 294; - Nzingha, 294; - Pasiphaë, 344; - Shikanda, 44; cf. King
 Quelimane, sea port, Mozambique, 497
Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie, 33
 Quest for a Lost Bride (AT), 339
 Quest for the Vanished Princesses (AT), 339, 343
 Qur'an, 161, 188, 267, 420; cf. Islam
 Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 33
 Radcliffe Institute / College for Advanced Study, Harvard University (q.v.), 312-315, 318, 576-577, 579-580; - Exploratory Seminar on Comparative Mythology, Harvard, 2010, 310, 312, 313n, 529n
 Ragnarok, Nordic cosmoclastm (q.v.), 296, 343
 Raiko, 107
 Rain, 95-96, 186, 196, 198, 229, 267, 288-289, 292-293, 296, 301-303, 379, 390, 447, 60n, 96n, 177n, 265n, 506n; Rain and Drought, 296; Rain and Lightning, 168-169; Rain Bird, 308; cf. Mvula
 Rainbow, 94, 150, 166, 186, 190, 196, 213, 224, 277, 281, 296, 417, 448, 494, 217n, 448n; Rainbow Serpent / Snake, 156, 168, 170-171, 178, 184, 189, 198, 221, 227, 229, 264-265, 286, 295-296, 308, 334, 340, 488 (of the Palaeolithic, 469, 166n, 296n, 484n; - Yurlunyer, 341; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
 Raising the Corn Spirit (NarCom), 263n
 Rajasthan, India, 129
 Rajputana, Rajasthan, India, 129
Ramayana, Indian epic, 540, 540
 Ramses II, 387
 Range semantics, 584, 158n, 285n; cf. Logic
 Ranger School, 94; Ranger and Witzel, 69, 73
 Rangî, Oceanian god of the Heaven, 79, 302; - and Papa, 550n
 Ravana, 107
 Raven, 283, 297, 428, 430; - and Coyote, 263n; - and Eagle, 288; cf. trickster
 Ravenstein, the Netherlands, 33, 43, 314, 561, 578
 Realm of the Dead (q.v.), 303; cf. Death, Underworld
 Rebellion of gods against their ruler (AT), 271
 Re^c, iii, 301, 390, 112n, 300n; cf. Sun
 Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, 156, 168, 184, 196-197, 202, 215, 225, 230, 263-265, 288, 310, 377, 454, 464, 467, 471, 448n
 Recursion, 158n (definition)
 Recycling (Local Appropriation) of recent African scholarly Historiography as a research problem, 279
 Red Riding Hood, 338
 Red Sea, 129, 210, 254, 303, 355; cf. Erythraea(n(s))
 Redeemer, mythical figure specialising in setting people free / expiating people, 340; cf. Heracles, Dioscuri, Jesus, Bodhisattva; Redemption, 219
 Reed, 244, 280, 281, 283, 420, 427, 456; Reed and Bee (Egyptian royal title), 255, 278, 280-281, 291, 295, 305; Reed Mat and Bee Hive (cf. Katete and Luhamba), 280; Reed Person, 280-281, 306; Reed and Honey, 281; cf. Music Orpheus Flute
 Reed (NarCom)
 Regicide, 283; cf. king
 Regin-Mimir, 107
 Reid, Bill, 430
 Rekhmira^c, 501
Relativity: The Special and the General Theory (Einstein), 306n
 Religion and Magic In the Ancient Near East, NIAS Working Group, 1994-1995, 242
Religion as a Social Construct: Comparative and Theoretical Excursions In The Social Science of Religion (van Binsbergen), 34
 Religion, Religious, 241; syncretistic -, 289; Religion, definition, 90n, cf. Geertz
Religious Change In Zambia (van Binsbergen), 42, 62, 239, 62n, 415n
Religious Studies Review, 560n, 561n
 Renaissance, 36, 108, 47n; - Europe, 242
Republic (Plato), see *De Re Publica*, 84
 Rescue, 185, 219, 221-222, 264, 330, 333, 335-336, 351; cf. Ogre, Redeemer
 Research Group on Magic and Religion in the Ancient Near, NIAS (q.v.) 1994-1995, 276n
 Research Institute for Humanity and Nature
 RIHN, Kyoto, Japan, 246, 149n, 150n
 Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature (Beijing, People's republic of China), 183n
 Research School CNWS (School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies), Leiden, the Netherlands, 81n
 Rethic Alps, Europe, 136n
Revelation, Bible book, 107
Rgveda, Hindu classic, 123
 Rhea, 107, 287, 331, 346, 550n
 Rhodes, Greek isl., 281
 Rhodesia(n(s)), see Zimbabwe
 RIHN, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto, Japan, 184, 246, 149n, 150n
 Rinda, 510n
 Ritual, 157, 537; Ritual actions and words, 448n; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
 River, as entrance or barrier to Underworld, 272; cf. Izanami
 Rock art, 197, 136n, 456n
 Rockefeller, 579
 Rocky Mountains, 283
 Rodent, 439
 Rogo-tumu-here, mythical sea monster, Oceania, 333, 220n
 Roma ('Gypsies'), 292, 301, 293n; cf. Gypsy, Tzigane
 Roman Catholic(ism / -s), 384, 473, 479, 578, 480n, 486n
 Roman(s), 102, 239, 544, 135n-136n, 538n; Roman Religion, 294; cf. Rome / Roma
 Rome, Roma(n(s)), city, Italy; cf. Roman(s), Graeco-Roman
 Romanticism, 51, 100, 50
 Ronga, Mozambican (q.v.) people, 497
 Rotkäppchen (Grimm), 338
 Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 33, 117, 245
 Round Table, 48, 187, 211, 246-247, 261, 314, 564

- Route A, of AMH (*q.v.*)
 leaving Africa, 193, 198,
 200, 207-210, 217-218, 227-
 228, 230; Route B, 229;
 Routes A and B, 203, 231
- Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 33, 578
- Royal Person Going from Branch to Branch, see Luhamba
- Rozwe people, South Central Africa, 286
- Ruanda(n(s)), 288
- Rubatab, Arab tribe, 129
- Ruler of Lower Egypt, nst-bit, 11, 301; *cf.* Bee
- Ruler, 287, 295; *cf.* King
- Rumour, 297; *cf.* Fama
- Runda, 507; name variant of Luwe
- Rupture and Fusion In the Study of Myth (van Binsbergen), 81, 99, 318
- Russia(n(s)), 38, 67, 238, 283; Russian Federation, 137, 200, 579-580, 68n, 499n, 570n; Russian-American, 38; Tsarist Russia, 580
- Sabazius, 543
- Sacred Books of The East (Müller), 578
- Sacred Outsider, 116, 170, 542; *cf.* Exalted Insider
- Sacred texts, 448n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Sacrifice As Re-connection, 454, 467
- Sahara(n), 120, 122, 130-131, 134, 137, 141, 145, 149-150, 155, 167, 187, 201, 234, 270, 356, 397, 506, 523, 568, 140n, 150n, 165n, 400n; - Neolithic, 115, 255; - to Indus, 196, 235; - to China, 119, 121; - to Southern Africa, 521
- Sailing In a Bottomless Boat (AT), 339
- Saints, as mythical protagonists projected onto the local landscape in North Africa, 166
- Sais, Egypt, 281; *cf.* Neith
- Sakhet, Egyptian lionine goddess, 513
- Sala, people in C Zambia, 288, 294, 531n
- Sally Out-of-Africa (*q.v.*), I and II, 120, 121, 138, 259, 262-263, 567, 566n
- Samchara, region on the Red-Sea coast, 129
- Samson, see Shimshon
- San, 347, 532n, 541n; *cf.* Khoisan
- Sand Calligraphy, 533, 276n; *cf.* Geomancy, ilm al-raml
- Sand Science, 36, 533, 276n; *cf.* Geomancy, ilm al-raml
- Sanda, Bali, Indonesia, 544, 549n
- Sandon, West Asian mythical protagonist, 106
- Sangoma Science: From Ethnography To Intercultural Ontology: A Poetics of African Spiritualities* (van Binsbergen), 35, 40, 241, 44n, 89n, 175n, 226n, 332n, 376n, 450n, 466n, 468n, 575n
- Sangoma, Sangomahood*, ecstatic ritual specialist in North Central and Southern Africa, 46, 108, 110, 116, 245, 251, 503, 529-534, 537-540, 550-551, 553, 89n, 307n, 529n-531n, 541n, 549n, 572n; - Mmashakayile (*q.v.*) In Francistown (*q.v.*), 537; - and Bali, 549; - and Homa, 537a; - and Buddhism, 531n
- Sangu, Bantu language, 519
- Sanhedrin, division of the Talmud (*q.v.*), 420
- Sania, people in Kenya, 286
- Sankhata Press, 534
- Sanskrit, 496, 544, 530n, 531n; - Asia, 293; Sanskritist Witzel, Michael (*q.v.*), 33, 67
- Santa Fe Institute, 256; *cf.* Tower of Babel project
- Santeria, South American syncretistic religion, 289; *cf.* Voodoo
- Sargon of Akkad, 277, 493; Sargon II, 277, 493
- Sarmatia(n(s)), 304
- Satan, 106, 107, 497; -'s House, 497
- Satyros, 107n
- Savages, 177n
- Saydiyya, valley in NW Tunisia, 60
- Scamander, river in Troad, West Asia, 296
- Scandinavia(n(s)), 72, 127, 350, 375-376, 398, 566n; - and Baltic, 401
- Scholia, 83n
- Scholium ad Apollonium Rhodium*, 83n
- School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies see CNWS, Leiden, the Netherlands, 81n
- Scientism, Scientific, tendency to take an absolute view of the width, validity and relevance of science, 64
- Scotland, UK, 39, 45
- Scythia(n(s)), 106, 300, 304; - and Celtic, 300
- Sea, 190; *cf.* Yam
- Sea Peoples, Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, 35, 400, 83n, 109n, 139n
- SEAsOc = South East Asia and Oceania
- Second(ary) Creation, after cosmoclast (*q.v.*), 34, 293; *cf.* Flood
- Sedge (*cf.* Reed) and Bee, 244; *cf.* Reed, Bee
- Seeds, 267
- Seeing, as fundamental act of human knowledge (*cf.* Teilhard de Chardin), 50n
- Seifkar, Kirsten, 33, 580
- Selene, 189, 330, 345, 331n; *cf.* Moon
- Sem priest, Egypt, 503, 513
- Semele, 334, 346, 384-385, 387n; *cf.* Dionysus
- Semiramis, 106
- Semitic, phylum within Afroasiatic (*q.v.*), 291, 303, 502, 567, 250n, 357n, 576n; *cf.* Hebrew, Arabic
- Semito-Hamitic, see Afroasiatic; *cf.* Hamitic
- Seneca, Algonquin people (*q.v.*), North America, 387
- Senegal(ese), 548, 241n
- Senior Staff Club, Harvard (*q.v.*), 579
- Separation of Heaven and Earth, 37, 71, 74, 156, 168-169, 184, 196-197, 256, 263-264, 267-268, 281, 288, 302, 308, 310, 331, 377, 410, 431, 446-447, 464, 475, 213n, 296n, 426n, 448n; Separation and Re-connection (*q.v.*) of Heaven and Earth, 41; Separation of Water and
- Land, 71, 219, 267, 281, 296, 298, 331, 377, 410, 426, 432, 445-446, 475, 213n, 344n, 550n; Separation of the Waters Into the Waters Above (, Aside,) and Below, 439, 459
- Septuaginth*, Greek (*q.v.*) translation of the Hebrew (*q.v.*) Bible (*q.v.*) in Hellenistic (*q.v.*) Alexandria (*q.v.*), 162, 150n
- Serbia(n), Serb(s), 289
- Serpent, 107, 220, 271, 277, 295-296, 306, 333, 347, 469, 480; - and the Fall of Man, 449; *cf.* Snake
- Seth (I) Suteb, Egyptian (and Hiittite) god of confusion, peripheries, etc., 83, 106, 221, 282-284, 288, 303, 334, 340-343, 347, 385, 388, 526, 83n, 387n-388n; (2) third son of Adam (*q.v.*) and Eve (*q.v.*), according to Genesis 4:25, not applicable in the present book; - and Thot, 375n
- Sexuality: a-sexual reproduction, 419, 428, 466; *cf.* Incessant Mating, Incest, gender
- Shabaka, 277, 493
- Shaique, Arab tribe, 129
- Shamanism, 156, 170, 178, 185, 201-202, 227, 264-265, 448n; not Out of Africa, not in Pandora's Box? 164, 543; *cf.* Frobenius; Shamanism / Bones, NarCom, 264; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Shamash, 106; *cf.* Sun
- Shang Dynasty, Chinese, 145, 294
- Shapeshifting, 457; *cf.* Proteus, Neleus
- Sharp, Charles J., photographer, 378
- Shashi, Bantu language in Tanzania (*q.v.*), 519
- Shave, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164
- She Who Makes Drunk, *cf.* Medb
- Shell, *cf.* Cocalus, 333n
- Shem ('Name'), son of Noah, 34
- Shen Yi, Chinese mythical

- protagonist, 107
 Sheta, Nkoya clan, 96
Shi Jing, 38n
 Shihoka Nalinanga, 271-272, 294-295-296, 300, 345; – and Likambi (*q.v.*), 295, 296n
 Shikalama sha Mundemba, legendary early Nkoya leader, 96
 Shikanda, Queen, 44, 294; *cf.* van Binsbergen, Sarah
 Shilayi Mashiku, legendary early Nkoya leader, 96
 Shilluk, 129, 283
Shimmerings of the Rainbow Serpent (van Binsbergen), 38, 196n, 488n
 Shimshon, Biblical figure, 304; *cf.* Sun
 Shinkisha, 272
 Shinto (ism), 283, 561, 580-581; *cf.* Kokugakuin University, Japan
 Shipungu, Nkoya headmanship, 288
 Shoes Danced to Pieces (Grimm), 497
 Shona, 510, 518, 522
 Shooting Wild Boars (AT), 339
 Shottā al-Jerid, lake in S. Tunisia, 140n, 270n; *cf.* Lacus Tritonis, Athena / Minerva, Poseidon
 Shrine, 201; *cf.* Heitsi-Eibib, saints
 Shu, Egyptian god keeping up Heaven, 112, 169, 296, 310, 345; – and Tefnut, 74, 286, 295, 112n
 Shuli, see Acholi
 Shumbayama, 44
 Shungu, Nkoya clan, 96
 Sia, see Hopi
 Siberia, Russian Federation, 126, 137, 200, 397, 400, 580, 135n
 Sibling, 285; – Complementarity, 281; *cf.* incest, brother, sister
 Sicily, Sicilian(s), Italy, 333n
 Sidi Bu-Ḥaruba, see Bu-Ḥaruba
 Sidi Mḥammad, see Mḥammad
 Sidon, 287
 Siegfried, 107
 Siegraben, 129
 Sigiya, Sri Lanka, 557, 558, 285n; – Rock, 549
 Sigmund, 107
 Sigun, 343; *cf.* Loki
 Sigurd, 107
 Siha, Bantu language, 518-519
 Sikidy, 36, 256, 142n; *cf.* Geomancy, Madagascar
 Silenus, 107n
Silvae (Statius), 386
 Silver, 551
 Simbinga, Nkoya / Luvale prophet, 285n
 Simelberg (Grimm), 339
 Simon Chair in Anthropology, Victoria University, Manchester, 577n
 Simon Magus, 297
 Sinanthropus, 298, 508; *cf.* Peking Man
 Sinhales, ethnico-linguistic identity, South Asia, 551
 Sinhika, 107
 Sinocaucasian, 71, 123, 134-135, 259-260, 351, 373-374, 390, 542, 567n, 138n, 357n, 382n, 396n; Proto–, 261, 381; – and Austric, 256
 Sinotib = Sinotibetan
 Sinotibetan, 110, 135, 237, 258, 400, 425, 542, 357n, 451n; Proto-Sinotibetan, 261
 Sintashta-Petrovka, Central Asian archaeological culture, 123
 Sintiian(s), Sinti, Aegean people, 289; *cf.* Hephaestus, Lemnos
 Sioux, North America, 294
 Sirens, 86
 Sister, 338-339, 495; –, Elder, 296
 Sit Shamshi, famous Mesopotamian relief depicting Sun cult, ca. 1200 BCE, 493n
 Šiva, 417n, 550n
Sixteen Cowries (Boscom), 36
 Skanda, Indian war god, 294; *cf.* Shikanda
 Skin, see Tumba
 Skimir, Norse divine warrior, 296
 Skull, 272, 298, 300; – Cult, 300; – Offerings, 298
 Sky, 144, 277, 298, 310, 390, 541, 300n; Sky, Star-spangled, 299n; Sky-god, 271; Sky God Obatala, 570; Sky King, 286, 287n; *cf.* Heaven
 Slavic, Slavonic, 296, 351, 397; – and Old Irish, 83
 Sleeping Beauty (Grimm), 338, 339
 Sleipnir, 343
 Snake, 106-107, 186, 198, 220, 271-272, 295-297, 307, 333, 347, 351-352, 439, 469, 482, 484, 486, 488, 491, 308n; Snake Narrative Complex, 296; Snake Child, 296 (*cf.* Shihoka Nalinanga); Snake-man, 272, 483; Snake, Biblical, 428; Snake of Tumba (*q.v.*), 295; Snake Apep, 190; Snake-related Herb of Life, 269n; Snake son of Mountain, Zmey Gorynych, 297; *cf.* Serpent, Rainbow
 Snow White, 283n
 Sobukwe, Robert, South African freedom fighter, 252
Social Change: World Historical Social Transformations (Chase-Dun and Lerr), 136n
 Socialism, -ts, 316
 Sociological Turn, 561n
 Socrates, 82n
 Sodom and Gomorrah, 286n, 428n, 431n
 Sofia, Bulgaria, 57, 57n
 Soli, Zambian people, 288
Soma, supernatural drink in Indian myth, 283
 Somali(an(s)), 496, 543
 Son, 156, 227, 264-265, 267, 448, 496n; – and Lover, 296n, 432n; *cf.* Virgin Mother and her Lover Son
 Sonjo, Bantu language, 519
 Sorceress, 295; *cf.* Likambi Mangle
 Sotho, 274, 349, 493; *cf.* Nguni
 South Africa(n(s)), 195, 379, 503, 532, 548, 134n, 286n, 577n; – and European rock-art (*q.v.*), 456n; – Whites (*q.v.*), 486n
 South America(n(s)), 82, 216, 289, 570, 207n
 South and East Asia(n(s)), 416n, 532n; South and East Asian Fire cult / Hioma, 529n; South East Asia and Malawi, 550n, South and South East Asia, 140n, 493n, 550n
 South and West Asia, 215n
 South Asia(n(s)), 246, 254, 71n, 294n, 343n, 400n, 534n, 550n; Southern India and Sri Lanka, 142n
 South East Asia(n(s)), 42, 102, 168, 188, 223, 232, 249, 338, 393, 543, 548, 551, 70n, 140n, 269n, 286n, 451n, 484n, 493n, 550n; – and Oceania, Shihoka Nalinanga); Snake-man, 272, 483; Snake, Biblical, 428; Snake of Tumba (*q.v.*), 295; Snake Apep, 190; Snake-related Herb of Life, 269n; Snake son of Mountain, Zmey Gorynych, 297; *cf.* Serpent, Rainbow
 Snow White, 283n
 Sobukwe, Robert, South African freedom fighter, 252
Social Change: World Historical Social Transformations (Chase-Dun and Lerr), 136n
 Socialism, -ts, 316
 Sociological Turn, 561n
 Socrates, 82n
 Sodom and Gomorrah, 286n, 428n, 431n
 Sofia, Bulgaria, 57, 57n
 Soli, Zambian people, 288
Soma, supernatural drink in Indian myth, 283
 Somali(an(s)), 496, 543
 Son, 156, 227, 264-265, 267, 448, 496n; – and Lover, 296n, 432n; *cf.* Virgin Mother and her Lover Son
 Sonjo, Bantu language, 519
 Sorceress, 295; *cf.* Likambi Mangle
 Sotho, 274, 349, 493; *cf.* Nguni
 South Africa(n(s)), 195, 379, 503, 532, 548, 134n, 286n, 577n; – and European rock-art (*q.v.*), 456n; – Whites (*q.v.*), 486n
 South America(n(s)), 82, 216, 289, 570, 207n
 South and East Asia(n(s)), 416n, 532n; South and East Asian Fire cult / Hioma, 529n; South East Asia and Malawi, 550n, South and South East Asia, 140n, 493n, 550n
 Southern Africa(n(s)), 35, 44, 46, 108, 110, 165, 168, 193, 196, 198, 240, 245, 273-274, 293, 308, 347, 384, 419, 493, 510, 518-519, 521-522, 530-532, 539, 541-543, 569, 89n, 276n, 286n, 530n-532n, 578n; – Sangoma, 529n; – traditional pharmacopaea, 532n; – and East Africa, 62, 66; – Australopithecus, 508; – Hakata, 36; – Mwali, 534; – Sangoma, 116, 251, 529-530, 534, 551
 South East Europe, 116n
 Southern Hemisphere, 41, 567
 Southern Rhodesia, see Zimbabwe
 South-North, 231n, 257n, 279n, 494n; *cf.* North-South
 Sovereign Queen, see Cyrene
 Soviet, 68n; *cf.* Russian Federation
 Spain, Spanish, Spaniard(s), 197, 305, 136n, 218n
 Speaker, 291; *cf.* Ngambela Speckledness and the Leopard (*q.v.*), 35, 156, 170, 185, 195, 201-202, 210, 264, 286
 Sphinx, 107
 Spider, 34, 41, 44, 115, 138,

- 170, 179, 185, 189, 202, 215-218, 224, 227, 229, 236, 265, 286-287, 289-290, 306, 307-308, 354-356, 370-374, 376-378, 381-382, 427-428, 584, 136n, 217n-218n, 288n, 355n; Spider and Feminine Arts, NarCom 156, 217, 264; Spider and Sun, 428; Spider Supreme, 290, 371, 373-375, 377-378; Spider Woman, 290; Spider Woman Naste Etsan, 290; – and the Sun, 135n; – Areopenap, 218n; – Creator, 217n; – Inktomi, 218n; – Lord, 217n; cf. Melanesia, Nauru, 218n
- Spiked-wheel trap, 127n
- Spinning Maid, Chinese major star, = Vega (α Lyrae); cf. Altair, 51n
- Spirit, 35; Spirit of God, 380n; – and God, 343
- Spirit and the Sultan's Son (Steere), 496n
- Spottedness, see speckledness
- Springing With a Bent Tree (AT), 339
- Springs, wells, 302
- Sri Lanka(n(s)), 161, 163, 397, 530-531, 544, 546, 549, 551, 557-558, 142n, 285n-286n, 530n
- Staircase, 196; cf. Seth, Jacob
- Stalinism, 575n
- Standard Elaborate Flood (q.v.) Myth (q.v.), 75, 286-288, 295, 307, 415, 269n, 287n, 417n
- Steady-State Theory of Fred Hoyle, 394; cf. cosmology
- Stealing Moon Dishes, 283
- Stealing the Moon (q.v.), 283, 306
- Steppe, 120, 122, 141, 248-249, 300-301, 304, 400, 203n; – and Viking, 300; – to East Asia, 270, 140n
- Stones, The, NarCom, 35, 156, 169, 185, 189, 201, 225, 264, 428, 226n
- Storm god, 107, 302, 340, 581; – of Lightning, 190; cf. Sisanoo, Teshub
- Story of Siyalela and her Sisters (Kibaraka), 495
- Story of The Cast Skin (Frazer), 283,
- Story of the Cauldron of Kingship (Nkoya), 95
- Stranger, 282; cf. Hunter, Chibinda, Outsider
- Strigidae, 286
- Strong Hans (AT), 343
- Strong versus Moderate as theoretical / ideological modalities, 251, 181n;
- Strong Afrocentrism (q.v.), 181, 256, 546
- Struggle Between Celestial and Terrestrial Gods, 566n; cf. Gods, Combat
- Styx, 107, 302; cf. River, Death, Underworld
- Suage, character in Masai Flood story, apparent homologue of Biblical Abel, 161; cf. Nambija
- Subiya, people in Zambia, 286
- sub-Saharan Africa, 36, 57, 66, 69, 77, 113, 116, 120-122, 124, 131, 135, 137, 144-146, 149, 150-153, 156, 163-164, 166, 168-174, 177, 184, 187, 189-190, 215, 219, 223, 227, 229, 232-233, 234-236, 239, 243-244, 248-250, 252-256, 258, 262-264, 268, 270, 277-279, 288, 296, 305, 307-308, 310, 316, 320, 330, 337-338, 330, 374, 378, 380, 390, 396, 398, 422, 455, 464, 494, 503-504, 508-510, 514-515, 520, 530, 539-540, 545, 548, 556, 560, 567-568, 580, 60n, 69n, 111n, 140n, 142n, 149n, 154n, 155n, 184n, 190n, 213n, 217n-218n, 241n, 250n, 255n-256n, 265n, 279n, 284n, 294n, 321n, 376n, 494n, 510n, 513n, 532n, 556n; – and Phoenician, 376n; – Flood, 161; – and Japan, 378; – and North America, 79, 173 (– and the New World, Parallelism Between, 213n); – and Europe, 138, 174; – and West Asia, 174
- Su-Chou (precise location impossible to determine due to large number of homonyms and imprecise transliteration of the Chinese original), 129
- Suchum, district in Caucasus, 129
- Sudan(ese), 129, 133, 162, 283, 515, 520, 556, 256n, 511n; – Leopard-skin chief, 304; Sudanic, West African Steppe region, 511
- Sudika Mbambi, Angolan (q.v.), mythical hero (q.v.), 295, 341
- Sufis, 503; cf. Qadiriyya
- Suida, 493n
- Suk, location in Iran, 130
- Sukuma, Bantu language in Tanzania, 518-519, 518n
- Sumba, 507; name variante of Luwe (and not the Lesser Snuda island, Indonesia)
- Sumer, Sumer(ian(s)), 115, 125, 145, 310, 389, 448, 450, 502, 521, 256n; – and Neolithic Anatolia, 255; – and the Indus, 389
- Sumsumara Jitaka, 496; cf. Buddhism
- Sun, Solar, 72, 106, 111, 202, 219-220, 281, 283, 287, 290, 297-298, 301-302, 304-305, 331, 333, 340, 342, 344, 347, 356, 385-386, 390-391, 396, 428, 544, 549, 581, 135n-136n, 213n, 217n-218n, 277n, 283n-284n, 294n, 300n, 311n, 347n, 388n, 391n, 493n; Sun Beam, 196; Sun Chariot, 123; Sun-god, 106, 111-112, 298, 301, 390, 544; (Balder, 301); Sun and Moon, 100, 421; Solar, 136, 208, 356, 375, 377, 379, 555; Solar Adversary of Rain, 186; Theft of Sun, 271; Hidden Sun, 343; Dedicating a Newborn Child to the Morning –, 493n
- Sunda Pre- and Protohistorical Continuity between Asia and Africa: *The Oppenheimer–Dick-Read–Tauchmann hypothesis as an heuristic device, with special emphasis on the Nkoya people of Zambia* (van Binsbergen), 35, 341, 530, 395n
- Sunda, 40, 70, 140, 148, 162, 188, 214, 223, 235-236, 288, 302, 328, 337-338, 350-351, 354-355, 375-378, 380-382, 384, 388-389, 392-393, 395-396, 399-402, 424, 448-450, 543-544, 546, 549, 551, 568, 584, 64n, 70n, 134n, 215n, 219n, 221n, 223n, 269n, 308n, 355n, 378n, 387n-388n, 484n, 493n, 546n, 551n, 567n; – (Hypo)thesis, Model, Extended General – and Special –, 266, 269n, 546n; Proto–, 389; Sunda corridor in Africa, Northern and Southern –, 543
- Sundaland, 389, 448-449
- Sundjata, West African epical hero, and epic of that name, 102, 282
- Sung, Chinese (q.v.) dynasty, 524, 524n
- Super-Ego-type censorship, 102; cf. Freud
- Supernatural, 289n; cf. God
- Super-Nostratic, 380, 425, 124n, 258n, 451n, 514n; cf. Nostratic, Nigercongo, Nilosaharan, Kaiser & Shevoroshkin
- Supreme Being, 170, 217, 334, 439-440, 453, 467, 474, 476, 287n; Supreme Creation Deity, 354; Supreme God, 377, 415, 415-419, 424, 429, 431, 446-447, 461, 463-467, 471-474, 476, 417n, 440n; Supreme God In Ancient Egypt, 281; Supreme God In the Noaħic Flood model, 432; Supreme Deity, 217n
- SuprNost = Super-Nostratic, 451n
- Sura, 188; cf. Qur'an, Islam
- Surinam(ese), 576n
- Surt, Nordic Fire giant, 296
- Surya, Hindu Sun god, 390, 544
- Sus domesticus (pig), 493n
- Susanoo, Japanese Storm god, 107, 302, 340, 581
- Sutetj, 387, 83n; cf. Seth
- Svyatoslav of Kiev, Ukraine, 300, 304
- Swahili Tales (Steere), 496n
- Swahili, 349, 495-497, 486n, 496n
- Swallowing Monster, 348
- Swan, 298; cf. Cygnus
- Swazi of Southern Africa, 532; Swaziland, 288, 532
- Sweden, Swedish, 40, 46, 125, 294, 503
- Sweden, Swedish, Swede(s), 508n

- Sweetness Through Incest (q.v.), a FACTOR in the analysis of Flood (q.v.) myths, 428
- Switzerland, 136n
- Sybaris, 107
- Syleus, Lydian Ogre 106, 347
- Symposium* (Plato), 84, 84n
- Syria(n(s)), 106, 297, 333n; - Yam, 190
- Syrith, Nordic princess, 304
- Syro-Palestine / Palestinian (s), 259, 397, 275n; - Hellenistic (q.v.), 387n; - Levant, 347n
- Syvaldus, Nordic king, 304
- Taa, South Khoisan language (q.v.), 260
- Taāroa, Tahiti primal being, 397; cf. Pan Ku
- Table of Nations (*Genesis* 10), 35
- Tabooed Words in Long-range *Borean (q.v.) reconstruction, 389n; cf. Language
- Tabula Smaragdina*, 307n
- Tahiti, Oceania, 349, 397
- Tahoe, New World mythical hero, 107
- Taiwan(ese), 300, 568; cf. China
- Takemikazuchi, 107
- TAAANTA, archaeological journal, 242
- Talmud(ic), 220, 333, 420, 333n; cf. Judaism
- Talus, Greek legendary inventor, 297; cf. Daedalus
- Tamanrasset, Sahara, 130
- Tamil, people and language in South Asia, 551
- Tammuz, Mesopotamian god, 106, 466
- Tanach, Hebrew Bible (q.v.), 267, 291, 294, 304, 285n
- Tandeng Muna Museum, Yaounde, Cameroon, 376
- Tanganyika, see Tanzania
- Tangaroa, 333, 220n; - and Turi-A-faumea, 220n
- Tannin, 106
- Tanzania(n(s)), 286, 349, 509, 516, 518-522; - Language Survey, 519, 520, 518n, 519n
- Taoism, -ist(s), 34, 409, 429, 549, 551, 552, 510n, 524n; - China, 400; - Lo Shu number symbolism, 532
- Taphonomics, study of natural processes working on human remains, 209
- Taraka, demon defeated by Hindu war god Skanda (q.v.), 294
- Taranto, coastal city, South Italy, 385
- Tarṭun, Hittite thunder (q.v.) god, 190
- Tartarus, 107; cf. Underworld
- Tassili, Sahara, 122, 201-202, 356
- Tatashikanda, 295n; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim
- Tati, see North East District; Tati Company, 538
- Teach, Edward, a pirate, 300; cf. Thatch
- Tears, 273, 292, 301-302; Tears of The Divinity, 301; Tears of Re', 379; Tears of Mvula, 288
- Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and History In Central West-ern Zambia* (van Binsbergen), 42, 65, 94, 239, 244, 249, 274-276, 279-280, 492-493, 92n
- Tectiform, 133
- Tefnut, Egyptian goddess of humidity, 74, 111, 286, 295, 513, 112n, 513n; - and Shu, 169
- Telipinu, Hittite epic and hero, 106, 111n
- Telphusa, 107
- Temple, centre of worship, 290, 294-295, 299-303, 415, 492, 512, 540, 544, 549, 448n, 524n, 549n; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Tengri-Nor, location in Tibet, 129
- Tern, N Togo, 130
- Terrestrial (Chthonic) Gods, 566n
- Tervuren, Belgium, 516n
- Teshub, Hurrian god of lightning (q.v.), 106
- Tethys, Titaness, daughter of Uranus and Gaia, wife of Oceanus, 107
- Thache, see Teach, 300
- Thailand, Thai, 197, 284, 397, 551-552i, 286n, 357n; Proto-Thai, 484n; Thailand and Sri Lanka, 285n
- Thai / Lana Folklore Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 285n
- Thammuz, 332
- Thamus, 82, 82n; - and Thot, 82, 82n
- Thanatus, 107
- Tharaka, Bantu language, 519
- Thatch, see Teach, 300
- Thatcher, 276, 300; cf. Kayambila, the Tory politician Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013), and the pirate a.k.a. Thatch (q.v.)
- Thatching With Skulls, 272
- The Blind Man and The Hunchback, 496
- The Blues Brothers*, motion picture, 246n, 578n
- The Boy Steals The Ogre's Treasure, 343
- The Cattle-Swallower, 490
- The Colt Qeytas, 496
- The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Ragin), 574n
- The Egg, 480
- The Golden Bough* (Frazer), 282, 283, 255n
- The Heavy Axe (AT), 339
- The Ingratitude of Man, 496
- The Judge and the Boy, 496
- The King's Daughter and the Frog, 495
- The Leopard's Unchanging Spots: Long-Range Comparative Research As a Key to Enduring Patterns of African Agency* (van Binsbergen), 17
- The Magic Bird Heart, 338
- The Man who bought Three Pieces of Advice, 497
- The Merry jests of Abu Nuwās, 496
- The Pardoner's Tale (Chaucer), 496
- The Phantom Voyagers* (Dick-Read), 390
- The Sirius Mystery* (Temple), 450
- The Spirit and the Sultan's Son, 496n
- The Tree Brothers, 480
- The Unsuccessful Resuscitation (AT), 338
- The Washerman's Donkey, 496
- Thebes, 385, 501
- Theiodamas, 107n
- Theme Group on Agency in Africa, ASCL, Leiden, the Netherlands, 183n
- Theogonia* (Hesiod), 282, 297, 344-346, 386-387, 83n
- Theoretical Explorations in African Religion* (van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers), 486n
- Theory: A-Theoretical, 577; cf. Method, Hypothesis
- Thera, Greek isl., 281
- Theravada, 285n; cf. Buddhism, Sri Lanka, Thailand
- Theseus, 332, 346
- Thetis, sea goddess, mother of Achilles, 432n
- Theuth, 82n; cf. Thot
- Third World, 99n
- Thisbe, 281, 301
- Thomas, Biblical figure, 103n
- Thongs, 448n; cf. Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Thot, 82, 84, 106-107; 384, 386, 396, 82n, 83n, 375n, 388n; - and Hymir, 219, 220, 333
- Thought Faculties of Anatomically Modern Humans Have Undergone No Significant Changes, erroneous assumption to the effect that the -, 411n; cf. logic, range logic
- Thrace, Thracia, 112, 293
- Thraetaona, 107
- Threesome, 229, 233; cf. Trinity
- Thryonomiyidae*, 518
- Thunder, 390; - god, 190; cf. Lightning, Zeus, Teshub, etc.
- Thundering Smoke, 521n; cf. Victoria Falls
- Tiamat, Mesopotamian (q.v.) female deity of the primordial Chaos (q.v.), 106, 190, 220, 302, 333, 396, 432, 447, 388n; cf. Kingu
- Tibet(an(s)), 126, 129-130, 135, 298, 348-349, 397; - Buddhism, 301
- Tigris and Euphrates, rivers, Mesopotamia, 302
- Time, 227; Timelessness and the Mythical Tower Into Heaven In Present-

- day
Zambian Myth, 166
- Time and Myth: The Temporal and the Eternal, 10th Annual Conference of the IACM, Brno, Czech Republic, 2016, 555n
- Timon of Athens* (Shakespeare), 284n
- Timor, Indonesia / ex-Portugal, 78, 210n
- Tintibane, leg child (*q.v.*) in Tswana (*q.v.*) myth, 385, 387
- Tiphys, 107n
- Titans, 107; *cf.* Giant
- Titias, 107n
- Tityus, 107
- Tiwi of Northern Australia, 290
- Tlingit, people of the NW Coast N America, 283, 297
- Tocharian(s), 83, 300, 351, 505
- Togo(lese), West Africa, 130
- Tokyo, Japan, 47, 314, 561, 579-580
- Tom Thumb (AT), 338, 339
- Tomb, 126; -painting, 129; *cf.* Death, Funerary, Burial, Grave, Taphonomics
- Tomo Nyirenda, a Zambian witchfinder, 77; *cf.* Mwana Lesa
- Tonga, name of various ethno-linguistic identities in South Central and Southern Africa, 550n, 134 (Zambia), 286, 291 (Mozambique, a.k.a. Tsonga)
- Tortoise / Turtle, NarCom3n, 263n
- Totem: Connections Between Saints and Species In North Africa, 59
- Touyem Sr, Mr, 552
- Tourist-market, 547
- Touzeur, Tunisian (*q.v.*) city, 130
- Tower, 74, 160-163, 166, 169, 197, 213, 283-288, 342, 417, 448, 556-557, 217n, 291n, 448n; Tower Into Heaven, 161, 166, 284, 310, 555; Tower of Babel (*Biblical*), 95, 161; Tower and Flood, 161; Tower In Nkoya, 556; *Tower of Babel* Etymological Database, 256, 258-259, 351-352, 381, 83n, 95n, 484n, 499n, 508n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Town, Lord of the, *cf.* Melqart, 294
- Trading Places With the Trickster In a Sack (AT), 339
- Tradition, as essential aspect of myth according to Dupré (*q.v.*), 92
- Tragulus kanchil*, the dwarf deer / kantjil, 377
- Trans-African Continuities in Fieldwork, 241n
- Trans-Atlantic Exchanges, 376n
- Transcendence, 91, 447, 475n, 573n
- Transcontinental, 147; -Continuity, 584; -Pre-Or Protohistoric Cosmological Substrates Linking Africa, 34, 57; Transcontinental Continuities Between the Ancient Near East and West Africa, 256n
- Transformation, 34, 57, 272; -involving Snake, 271, 272
- Transvaal, South Africa, 532
- Träume eines Geistersehers* (Kant), 332n
- Treasure, 343
- Tree, also NarCom ('From the Tree'), 156, 169, 184, 189, 196, 200, 224, 227, 229, 264-265, 306, 308, 346, 384, 386, 447, 502, 217n, 448n, 494n, 538n; Bodhi -, 286n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth, Meliae
- Treetop-Walker, 487; *cf.* Mwendanjangula
- Triads, 285n; *cf.* logic
- Triangulation, as hermeneutical (interpretative) method to compare and date myths, 193
- Tribal Folk Tales* (Andaman Is.), 341
- Trickster, 74, 114, 159, 168, 170-171, 233, 290, 298, 308, 338-339, 371, 373-377, 410, 418, 428-429, 438-439, 446-447, 457-458, 463, 465-466, 468-469, 471-472, 476, 496, 508, 547, 218n, 375n, 468n, 472n; -and Demiurg, 469; -Heitsi-Eibib, 347; -Inktoni, 290; ; -Raven (*q.v.*), Coyote (*q.v.*), 263n
- Trinity, a logical (*q.v.*) device to handle sameness and difference (*q.v.*) at the same time, 229, 233
- Tristram and Isolde, 343
- Triton, 83n; *cf.* Lacus Tritonis, Shōtō al-Jerid
- Troy, Trojan(s), 72, 219, 297, 331-332, 344-345, 503; -War, 34, (as a Flood story) 74-75, 298, 332, 503
- Trundholm Sun Chariot, 123
- Tshiluba, *see* Luba
- Tsimshian, N American NW Coast people, 283
- Tsonga, *see* Tonga
- Tswana, ethnic group in Botswana and South Africa, 384-385, 387, 392, 518, 522, 531
- Tuamotu Isl, Hawai'i (USA), Pacific Ocean, 349
- Tuaregs, 125, 130; - of Air (Sahara), 130; Imangasaten -, 130; Hoggar -, 130
- Tuatha De Danann, 293
- Tumba, (1) Nkoya Plain of the Kings, 341; (2) in Angolan tale, 295, 341
- Tumbainot, Masai (*q.v.*) Flood Hero (*q.v.*) 161
- Tun Huang, East Asian oasis, 129
- Tungus-Manchu, an Altaic (*q.v.*) language cluster, 352, 381
- Tunisia(n(s)), 49, 59, 139, 108n, 140n, 270n, 300n, 506n; North-western -, 39, 61, 166, 239, 540, 276n
- Turi-a-faumea, 333, 220n
- Turkane, East African ethno-linguistic identity, 130
- Turkey, Turkish, Turk(s), 129, 282, 289, 304, 346, 501, 512, 512n; - of the Eurasian Steppe, 301
- Turkic, language cluster, 381; Turkish-Mongolian, 300
- Turtle, *cf.* Tortoise, 263n
- Tuscany, *see* Etruscan
- Tut-anĥ-Amun, 513
- Tutsi, 252
- Twins, 265, 448n; *cf.* Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth
- Two-Persons with Crocodile Scales, 295
- Tyche, 287
- Typhon, 106
- Typology Versus Historical Reconstruction, a research dilemma, 184n
- Tyre, 287
- Tyrrhenian(s), non-Indo-European speaking Mediterranean people of seafarers and pirates, 282; their kingship, 282
- Tyrsenian, *see* Tyrrhenian
- Tzigane, 292
- Ubari, 130
- Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, 549
- Uganda(n(s)), 144, 484n
- Ugarit, 106; Ugaritic, language, 502
- UK, United Kingdom, 39, 45, 76; *cf.* Britain, England
- Ukraine, 300, 304, 570n
- Ullikummi, 106
- Ulysses (Joyce), 102; *cf.* Odysseus
- Umbr(ian), an Italic language, 351
- Umveli, 509; name variant of Mwali
- Unas, Egyptian king, 294
- Unawatuna, Sri Lanka, 531
- Under Remus, 495, 496-497
- Underworld, 123, 166, 169, 171, 178, 199-200, 219-221, 260, 276, 282, 286, 295-296, 298-299, 303-304, 331, 333-334, 341-342, 348, 397, 417, 428, 456, 492-493, 526, 60n, 289n, 300n, 484n-485n; - and Heracles, 346; - and Odysseus, 346; - and Upper World, 227, 265, 303; Descent into -, 295; *cf.* Hel, Hades
- Unification of the Lands, Early Dynastic Egyptian narrative theme, 301
- Unilateral Mythical Being (NarCom22), 137, 142, 144-145, 287, 296, 303, 399, 480, 487-488, 142n, 213n, 488n; - Luwe, 310
- United Kingdom, UK, 36, 39, 479, 577n; *cf.* British, English
- United States (of America), USA, 39, 562, 493n, 570n; *cf.* America
- Unity, Humankind's Fundamental --, 584

- Universals / (Near) -, In Human Culture, 191
- University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 430
- University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, 503
- Untombinde Ogre, 349
- Untouchables, see Dallit
- UPELLURI, 106
- Upper Egypt, 281, 301
- Upper Palaeolithic, 34, 36, 45, 57-58, 71, 81, 115, 123, 133, 139, 150, 166, 168-170, 172, 178-179, 187, 189-190, 199-200, 257-258, 265, 267, 306-307, 311, 331, 344, 354, 375, 390, 396, 412-413, 465-466, 475, 523, 543, 545, 64n, 96n, 131n, 142n, 192n, 207n, 265n, 300n, 307n, 344n, 344n, 357n, 389n, 396n, 418n, 445n, 460n, 574n; - Central to East Asia, 45; - Eurasia, 410, 540; - of West to Central Asia, 540; - South or South East Asia, 168; - to Early Neolithic, 233; - Central to East Asia, 45; - Eurasia, 410, 540; - of West to Central Asia, 540; - South or South East Asia, 168; - to Early Neolithic, 233; - and Neolithic, 374, 410, 567; - and Lower Palaeolithic, 572n
- Upper World, 227, 265, 286, 303; Upper World and Underworld, 169
- Uralic, language phylum within Eurasianic, 72, 123, 134-135, 139, 283, 291, 295, 399, 410, 544, 567, 139n, 357n, 388n; - Yukaghir, 425, 502, 451n; - Urheimat, 258; - Northern Europe, 399; - and Germanic, 270, 140n; - and - Baltic, 398; - In Egypt, 304, 305n
- Uranus, Heaven god and planet, 107, 297, 302, 344-346; Uranus and Gaia, 79 (in Ancient Greek mythology, 550n)
- Urheimat (a language's region of origin), 258
- Urtexes, 'original narratives' of humankind, proposed aim of Comparative Mythology (q.v.) according to Thuillard, 51
- USA, United States of America (q.v.), 46, 62, 64, 73, 246, 302, 312-314, 316, 349, 390, 508, 529, 533, 570, 576, 579, 67n, 99n, 246n, 318n, 407n, 479n, 578n
- Utnapishtim, Mesopotamian (q.v.) Flood hero (q.v.), 340, 432; cf. Noah
- Uto, see Wadjet
- Utrecht University, the Netherlands, 479
- Uttu, Mesopotamian Spider goddess of weaving and warfare, 290, 217n; cf. Neith, Athena
- Vaeinaemoeinen and Joukahainen, figures from the Finnish *Kalevala* (q.v.), 295
- Vagina Dentata, NarCom 34, 263n
- Valkyrie, 107
- van Binsbergen, née Saegerman, Patricia M.M., 4, 96n, 150n, 183n, 486n
- van Binsbergen, Nezmja, 44
- van Binsbergen, Vincent Maria Matthijs, 645
- van Binsbergen, Sarah Nicolien Shikanda, 44; cf. Tatashikanda
- van Binsbergen, Dennis Willem Juliaan, 551
- van Binsbergen, Hannah Michelle Sebuka, 108n
- Vancouver, city, British Columbia, Canada, 430
- Variations of Homa, Harvard 2010 conference, 529
- Varuṇa, 283; cf. Heaven
- Vayu Purana, 72
- Vayu, Hindu god of air, of wind, 310
- Vedas, Vedic, 277, 317, 421, 495, 529, 537, 563, 310n
- Vega, α Lyrae, a major star, Chinese 'Spining Maid'; cf. Altair, 51n
- Venda, people in Southern Africa, 518, 519, 522, 532
- Venus, Roman goddess and planet, 107, 297, 390, 551; cf. Aphrodite, Morning Star, Evening Star
- Vergil, see Virgil
- Verstehen, interpretative hermeneutics, 66, 67; cf. Dilthey
- Vicarious Reflections: African Explorations In Empirically-Grounded Intercultural Philosophy (van Binsbergen), 34, 241
- Victoria Falls, South Central Africa, 522, 521n
- Victoria University, Manchester, UK, 577n
- Victoria, Lake, 134
- Viking(s), 300, 375
- Vinata, daughter of the Prajapati Dakṣha (q.v.), 144, 397; cf. Leda, Egg
- Vinland, NE North America, 375; cf. Vikings
- Viparupa, 107
- Viracocha, 302, 305, 417n
- Virgin, 171, 171, 185, 227, 265; - Creatrix, 451; - Birth, 176; - and Son, 156, 264, 296, 448; Virgin Mother of the Waters, 296n
- Virginia, USA state, 289
- Vishnu, Hindu primal god, 144, 294, 451, 545
- Vitae Parallellae (Plutarch), 346
- Viverridae, civet cats, 518
- Vladivostok, Siberia, Russian Federation, 580
- Volcano, see: Earth-Dragon Mountain Volcano (NarCom)
- Von den Machandelboom (Grimm), 338
- Voodoo, West-Africa derived ecstatic cult in the Caribbean region, 544; cf. Santeria
- Vostok, Antarctica research station, 208-209
- Voyages of Sindbad The Seaman, 347
- Vṛtra, Hindu mythical serpent (q.v.), 107, 220, 271, 296, 333, 347; cf. Drought
- Vucub-Caquix, New World mythical figure, 107
- Vunjo, Bantu language, 518, 519
- W3d, 'Snake', King, 296
- Wadjet, W3d(yt), Egyptian snake goddess, 106, 112; - and Nḥbt, 112
- Wad al-Kebir, river in N W Tunisia (q.v.), 49
- Wadoe, African people, 288
- Wagtail, 378, 380n
- Wahemba, African people, 288
- Wahlerwantschaften, Die (Goethe), 78
- Wales (UK), Welsh, Welshmen, 293, 526
- Walker of The Height, cf. Mwendanjangula, 303
- Walters Saukila, a MS collection, 496n
- Walumbwe, African people, 288
- Wa-Mwelu, 509; name variante of Mwali
- Wanda, Bantu language, 518
- Wanjji, Bantu language, 518
- War, Warfare, 290, 294, War god Skanda (q.v.), 294; World War I, 577n; World War II, 64, 59n, 570n; World War III, 570; War Memorial Museum, Tokyo, Japan, 580; War of Independence (USA), 576; War on Terror, after '9-11' (2001), 99n
- Warangs, Central Asian people, 304; cf. Vikings
- Warner First National, cinematographical company, 130
- Warning, 440, 456; cf. Flood
- Wasegu, African people, 288
- Washington, General George, 576
- Wassenaar, the Netherlands, 42, 242, 243n, 276n, 492n
- Water(s), 45, 75, 140, 145, 281, 293, 296, 302, 410, 419, 428, 431, 465, 541, 140n, 217n, 270n; - Monster, 220, 333; - Serpent, 295; Waters Above, 282, 296, 417, 447, 213n; Waters Aside, 282, 439, 459; Waters Below, 296, 417, 439, 459; - and Earth / Land, 74, 305, 419; - People, 212n; cf. Primal Waters, 161
- Wawemba, African people, see Bemba
- Weather God, 106; cf. meteorological god, Luwe, Teshub
- Weaving, 290; cf. Neith, Athena, Amaterasu, etc.
- Wene, Nkoya: kingship (q.v.), 95
- West Africa(n)(s), 161, 161,

- 497, 505, 544, 551, 155n, 217n, 256n, 271n, 276n, 507n, 550n; West African / Manjacos Nasin Batsi, 'Sky King' Native American - West African continuities across the Atlantic, 217n; - Pentecostal, 104n; - and South Central Africa, 287n; - to China, 510n; West African / South East Asian continuity, 551; West Africa and India, 505
- West Asia(n(s)), 134, 140, 162, 168, 209-210, 215, 223, 233-234, 248, 254, 291, 300, 307, 338, 387, 399-400, 449-450, 542-543, 546-548, 60n, 69n, 145n, 165n, 215n, 256n, 261n, 279n, 347n; - to Central Asia, 223, 337; - and the Mediterranean, 120, 140n; (Antiquity, 416); West Asia and Europe in the Neolithic, 189, 488n; - and North Africans, 255n; - and North-East Africa, 150n
- Western Grassfields, Cameroon, 543, 551-553; *cf.* Bamileke
- Western Eurasia, 79, 148, 268, 277, 302, 331, 390, 494
- Western Hemisphere, 568
- Whale, 342
- White Goddess, *The* (Graves), 550n
- White Nile, 129; - and Blue Nile, 134
- White Volta river, 130
- White(s), ethnico-somatic classification based on low skin pigment, often with pejorative racialist connotations, 69, 101, 123, 317, 480, 482, 486-490, 533, 549, 568, 576, 51n, 486n, 575n; White and Black, 486; White and Brown, 567; - delusions of superiority, 575n
- White, physically observable colour of objects, and its cultural symbolism, 549; - Cloth, 549, 550; Symbolism of the Colour -, 550n
- White Cloud temple, Beijing, China - present-day Taoist headquarters, 524n
- White God, 428, 428, 263n, 477n, 550n; (of Creation or Second Creation, 334, 418); White Goddess, 294, 584
- Who Ate The Lamb? (AT), 338
- Who Ate the Lamb's Heart? (AT), 339
- Wicca, Neopagan cult originating in Western Europe, 293
- Wide Justice, see Eurydice
- Wikipedia, 82n, 557n
- Wiles lectures, Terence Ranger (*q.v.*), Belfast (*q.v.*) 1978, 76
- Wind, 272, 310; Person Wind, 272; *cf.* Pepo, Aeolus
- Wishpoosh, 107
- Witchcraft Belief In Three Continents (Ranger), 76
- Witchcraft, 76; - Beliefs and Criminal Law, 75n; *cf.* sorcery, magic
- With Crocodile Scales, see Ngandu, 295
- Witwatersrand, South Africa, 503
- Witzel School of Comparative Mythology, 475
- Women, 271, 489; - and Men, 316; *cf.* NarCom
- Spider and the feminine arts, Virgin, Mother, Sister, Queen
- Woman of Revelation, *Biblical* concept, 107
- Wood, 296, 419; *cf.* Fire, cyclicality, cyclic transformation of elements
- Working Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, Netherlands Institute for Advanced[d] Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Wassenaar Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, 1994-1995, 243n, 492n
- World Axis, 200
- World Buffalo, 304
- World Egg, 156, 168, 171, 178, 184, 189, 227, 264, 96n; - In Egypt, 190; *cf.* Cosmic Egg
- World Religion (*q.v.*), 567
- World Snake (*q.v.*), 220, 333; *cf.* Serpent
- World Systems, 136n
- World Tree (*q.v.*), 190; *cf.* Yggdrasil
- World War, see War
- Wounded Knee, 213n; *cf.* Heitsi Eibib
- Wungu, Bantu language, 519
- Wunschding (wishing object), 272
- Xbalanque, 107
- Xenodike, 107
- X-Group, 1st mill. CE presence in Nubia, 162
- Xhosa, 349, 379, 396, 532
- Xibalba, 107
- Yahweh, 417n
- Yahweh, YHWH, the Israelite(*q.v.*) god, 106; *cf.* Hiawatha, Judaism, god
- Yaka, people in South Central Africa, 396
- Yam, 106, 190, 432, 387n; *cf.* Sea, Waters
- Yama, Hindu god of death (*q.v.*), 282
- Yangare, 509; name variant of Mwali
- Yanluo (Chinese Lord Death), 282
- Yao, Bantu language, 519, 519n
- Yao, Chinese minority, 396, 400, 550n
- Yaounde, city, Cameroon, Africa, 376, 382
- Yasodhara, wife of the Buddha (*q.v.*), 272n
- Yatpan, 106
- Yehovah, 576n; *cf.* YHWH, Yahwah
- Yellow River, China, 524
- Yeniseian, phylum of Sino-caucasian, 357n
- Yggdrasil, Norse (*q.v.*) mythical world tree (*q.v.*), 190
- Ygraine, 333n; *cf.* Arthur
- YHWH, 289
- Yi, Chinese mythical protagonist, 107
- Ying Lung, Chinese mythical protagonist, 107
- Ymir, Norse mythical adversary, 107, 220, 282, 298, 333; *cf.* Moon, Pan Ku
- Yomi, Land of -, Japanese realm of the Dead, 303; *cf.* Izanami, Underworld, Hades
- Yoruba, West African people, 281, 288, 290, 341, 397, 550, 281n
- Yu, mythical Chinese protagonist, 107
- Yueh-chi, 300; *cf.* Tocharians
- Yukaghir, 45n
- Zabi, *cf.* Nyambi, 510n
- Zagros mountains, 258; *cf.* Zarzian
- Zaire, see Congo
- Zamb, name variant of Nyambi (*q.v.*), 376
- Zambesian, see Zambezia
- Zambezi(an), river and region, 75, 94, 134, 272-274, 276-277, 287, 295, 492, 494, 521-522; Zambezi and Chobe, 522; Zambezi Flood Plain, 493; Zambezi-Congo Watershed, 492
- Zambezi River (and Flood Plain), 521-522, 253n, 293n, 521n-522n
- Zambia(n(s)), former N Rhodesia, 48, 61, 93-94, 134, 139, 147, 161-162, 166, 198, 239, 248-249, 251, 253, 271, 273-274, 276, 279, 286-287, 288, 290, 294, 491, 493, 521, 530, 551, 555, 108n, 132n, 218n, 253n, 415n, 484n, 541n, 549n, 555n; - and Angola, 274; - and East Africa, 161; - and Malawi, 76; Western Zambia, 42, 61, 71, 93, 108, 166, 274-276, 279, 284, 287, 295, 307-308, 378, 487-490, 493, 95n, 286n, 288n, 479n; North Western Zambia, 279; -, Western Central, 285n; - Bemba, 293n; - Nkoya (*q.v.*), 506n
- Zambia National Archives, 293n
- Zanzibar (Ingrams), 496n
- Zar, shamanic inroad into Africa (Frobenius), 164
- Zarzian, Upper Palaeolithic / Mesolithic culture of South West Asia, 258
- Zebra-woman, 487
- Zeitschrift für afrikanische und ozeanische Sprachen, 497n
- Zervan, 397
- Zeus, 72, 107, 190, 220, 281, 287, 302, 332-334, 345-346, 349, 384-385, 388, 396, 72n, 83n, 290n-300n, 387n, 417n; - and

- Athena, 388; – and Metis, 334; – and Nut, 220; – and Semele, 385; – In the Dictaeon Cave (Crete), 346
- Zhu and Khoe, 260; Proto-Zhu, 260
- Zimba (Early Modern period in Zambezi history), 277, 494
- Zimbabwe(an(s)), 76-77, 93, 130, 134, 147, 197, 283, 286, 288, 297, 507, 510, 532-533, 132n; – and Mozambique, 286
- Zinza, Bantu language, 518
- Zipporah, *Old-Testament* figure, wife of Moses (*q.v.*), allegedly the first to execute circumcision (*q.v.*) upon a male child (*Exodus 4:24 f.*), 291
- Zmey Gorynych (dragon in Slavic mythology), 296
- Zu, mythical adversary, Mesopotamia, 106, 349
- Zuiderzee, see IJsselmeer
- Zulu, 281, 349, 396, 532, 534; Lightning wizard, 73; Zululand, 509
- Zuñi, Native American people and language, 219, 331, 349
- Zuweru, Sultani, 496n

Index of authors cited

See the note on the indexes in this book, preceding the *Index of Proper Names Other Than Authors's*, above.

In general I have favoured the modern English usage for the rendering of Ancient names from the Graeco-Roman and Biblical tradition, i.e. in a Romanised version of the more original Greek; thus Hephaestus, not Hephaistos nor Hefaistos. However, given the inherent inconsistencies of that usage, I had no option but to be inconsistent, too – as is common in intercultural representation, and in orthography, anyway

- Aarne, 396, 155n
Aarne-Thompson, 75, 249, 270, 273, 338, 343-344, 347, 270n
Aarne-Thompson-Uther, 271
Aaron, David H., 131
Abdurrezzak, A.O., 397
Abusch, 540n
Achillia, Alessandro *et al.*, 73
Adams, 351
Adelaar, 260, 52n
Adler, 493n
Aesop(us), 420, 495
Aitchison, 191, 91n
Alexander, 281
Alford, 545
Alighieri, Dante, 84n
Allan, 71n
Allegro, 379, 484n
Allen, 43, 51, 389, 102n
Allen, Nick, 296, 564n, 573n
Allyn & Bacon, 136n
Alpern, 294
Alpers, 544
al-Zanati, Muhammad, 276n
Amoghavajra Bajracharya, Pandit, 534
Amselle, Jean-Luc, 110, 241, 117n, 217n, 253n
Ananikian, M.H., & Werner, A., 280
Anati, 162, 514, 510n, 572n
Anaximander, 284n
Anaximenes, 140
Anderson, 496n
Andrews, 296, 302
Anthes, 301
Anthony & Vinogradov, 123n
Anthony, 123n
Apollodorus, 281, 287, 296, 298, 346, 385-386, 83n
Apollonius Rhodius, 219, 289, 305, 83n, 111n, 300n
Appiah, 94n
Apthorpe, 288
Arca, 136n
Archimedes, 99n
Argyle, 288, 124n
Aristophanes, 84n
Aristotle, 59, 84, 177, 297, 411-412, 84n, 320n, 411n
Arkhurst, J.C., zzz& J Pinkney, 376
Armijo, R., *et al.*, 197
Arnaiz-Villena *et al.*, 142n, 494n
Arvidsson, 64n, 264n, 306n
Asante, 69, 235
Ashliman, 343, 348, 396
Astour, 83, 83n
Athenaeus, 72n
Atkinson, 94n
Atsma, 287, 72n, 83n, 342n
Auel, Jean, 209
Aunt Naomi (Gertrude Landa.), 220
Bachelard, 312n
Bachofen, 100, 305, 100n
Bäcker, Jörg, 51, 560n
Bacon, 397
Bacon, Roger, 297
Bajracarya & Lewis, 534
Baldick, 300
Ballard, C.G., 563n
Bamshad & Olson, 573n
Bandi & Maringer, 202, 356, 136n, 218n
Barbujani *et al.*, 256n
Barnes, 546
Barnes, 86n
Barthes, 89
Bartimaro & Barmao, 161
Bascom, 495n
Basset, 539n
Bastin & Mumba, 516n
Batchelor, 381n
Bateson, 539n
Batra, 332n
Baumann, 170, 173, 246, 291, 397, 511n
Baxter & Ramer, 110n
Beatty, 539n
Beaujard, 281, 291
Beck, 388
Becker *et al.*, 122
Bednarik, 210n, 376n
Belcher, 309n, 310n
Bell, 342n
Bellah, 572n
Belo, J., 540
Benett, 332n
Benett, 124n
Bengtson & Ruhlen, 260, 351
Bengtson & Blažek, 261n, 381n
Bengtson, 51, 381n
ben-Jochanan, Y.A.A. 253
Bennet, Heidemarie, 332
Bennett, 257
Benoit, P., 115
Bensa & Ottin, 539n
Bent, 145n
Berezkin, Yuri, 43, 51, 67-68, 236, 308, 456, 579, 47n, 67n-68n, 135n, 308n, 314n, 416n
Berg, 129
Berger, 334, 394
Bergman, 83n
Berlinerblau, 567, 256n
Berman, 311
Bernal, Martin Gardiner, 69, 83-84, 112, 131, 137, 139, 234-235, 242-243-244, 248, 254-256, 297, 449, 548, 562, 566, 77n, 83n, 110n-111n, 145n, 179n, 252n, 256n, 261n, 279n, 318n, 449n, 507n, 574n-575n
Bernatzik, 129
Berossus, 450
Besmer, 545

- Best 1922, 302
 Best & Kellner, 561n
 Betz, 298
 Binford, 209, 298
 Blackburn & Evans, 71
 Blacker & Loewe, 71n
 Blacker, 301
 Blain, 540n
 Blau, 58
 Blažek, Václav, 46, 51, 352,
 400, 581, 84n, 106n, 261n,
 313n, 381n, 387n, 499n,
 560n
 Bleek, 260
 Blench, Roger, 69, 256, 521n
 Blok, 294, 85n
 Bloomberg, Kristin M.
 Mapel, 115
 Boas, 563n
 Bodkin, 102n
 Bogoras, W., 514n
 Böhl, 512n
 Bomhard & Kerns, 505, 508,
 514, 84n, 96n, 499n, 502n,
 505n, 508n, 514n, 527n
 Bomhard, 258, 506, 514, 84n,
 96n, 502n, 506n, 508n
 Bond & Ciekawy, 76n
 Bonefoux, 511n
 Bonnefoy, 291
 Bonnet, 384, 386-387, 513n
 Boomgaard, 547
 Borgeaud *et al.*, 100n
 Borghouts, 276n
 Borst, 161
 Bottéro, 59, 276n
 Bouché-Leclercq, 276n
 Bouchet, 287
 Boudjou, 122
 Bourdillon, Michael, 62, 94n
 Bourignon, 544
 Bouveresse, 86n
 Bower, 129
 Boyle, 312n
 Brede Kristensen, 527
 Brehm, 129
 Brelsford, 288, 294
 Breuil *et al.*, 202
 Breuil, 130
 Brinkgreve, 396, 539n
 Brinton, 524n
 Brislin *et al.*, 62n
 Brisson, 84n
 Broers, Peter D.H., 162n
 Bromwich, 293
 Brown, 191, 259, 261, 274,
 384, 387, 392
 Brown, 41
 Browne, 149
 Brundage, 299n
 Brunel, 543
 Bruno, Giordano, 47n
 Bryant, 332n
 Buccallati, 348
 Buchanan, a museum col-
 lector, 130
 Buchler & Maddock, 296
 Buck, 283, 301, 351, 308n
 Budge, 291
 Bullfinch, 342n
 Burkert, 289, 299n, 300n
 Burton, 347
 Cagni, 281
 Caisson, Max., 382
 Callaway, 281
 Calvin, 572n
 Campbell, 565
 Cancik, H., zzz& Schneider,
 H., 342
 Cann *et al.*, 261
 Capart, 125, 126, 129
 Capello & Ivens, 291
 Capinera, 281
 Caramelli *et al.*, 209
 Carr, 133, 540, 545, 131n
 Carrasco, 563n
 Carter, 532n
 Carus, 429
 Casal, 301
 Case & Payne, 127n
 Cassirer, 85, 86-87, 99, 175,
 194, 555, 47n, 85n, 86n,
 332n
 Cavalli-Sforza *et al.*, 163, 230,
 294, 337, 374, 109n, 124n,
 171n, 203n, 258n, 261n,
 313n
 Cavalli-Sforza, 109, 113, 163,
 230, 250, 438-439, 123n,
 124n, 173n, 258n, 451n,
 573n
 Cavendish, 347
 Cavendish, Richard, with O.
 Ling, ed., 348
 Chacon & Dye, 301
 Chakrabarti, P., 331, 348, 569
 Chaloupka, 200
 Chamberlain, 281
 Chamberlin, 545
 Chantraine, 311
 Chase & Nowell, 209
 Chase-Dun, Christopher, &
 Bruce Lerro, 136n
 Chatelain, 295, 497
 Chatterjee, 395
 Chaucer, 496
 Chen Gang-long, 348
 Cherry, 525, 525n
 Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 396
 Chinn, 105n
 Chitty, 551
 Chomsky, 259, 411
 Chrétien & Prunier, 573n
 Christie, 396, 524n
 Chudeau, 130
 Cialowicz, 127n
 Cipriani, 130, 132n
 Claes, 39n, 103n
 Claessen, 295
 Clark, 283
 Clarke, 155n, 271n, 311n
 Claus, Hugo, 38, 102, 238,
 39n, 103n
 Cleemann, Mme., 382
 Clottes & Lewis-Williams,
 541
 Clouston, 293
 Cochrane, 294
 Cohen, 42n, 62n
 Coia *et al.*, 152, 69n, 121n,
 142n, 185n, 264n, 396n
 Coia, 380, 450
 Coillard, F., 275
 Collins, Brian, 560n-561n
 Colorusso, John, 51
 Colpe, 446n
 Colum, 563n
 Conrad, 289, 346
 Conze, 530n
 Cook, Albert., 428
 Coquéry-Vidrovitch, 253n
 Corcella, 300
 Cornford, 397
 Cory, 387n
 Cory, 450
 Cotterell, 144, 220, 281, 290,
 333, 340-349, 385, 387,
 396, 60n, 217n-218n, 331n,
 333n
 Cottrell 1989, 3980
 Coudrette, 297
 Coult & Habenstein, 62n
 Coupeze, 516n
 Cowling, 42n
 Cox, 495n
 Cressey, 385, 386
 Cronise, F. M., zzz& Ward,
 H. W., 376
 Crooke, W., 291
 Crowfoot-Payne, 127n
 Cruciani *et al.*, 152, 69n,
 109n, 121n, 142n, 171n,
 185n, 264n, 396n
 Cruciani, 380, 450
 Culin, 142, 256, 547, 551
 Cumont, F., 115
 Cunnison, 280
 Currat & Excoffier, 209
 Cusack, 560n
 Cushing, Frank, 104n
 d'Errico *et al.*, 198, 208
 Dalby, 257, 124n
 Danby, 420
 Dang Nghiem van, 287n
 Dante, see Alighieri
 Darwin & Wallace, 312n
 Dasgupta, 71n
 Davidson, 289, 86n
 Davis-Kimball, 294
 Davison, 283
 de Benyowsky, 380
 de Buck A., 284
 de Heusch, Luc, 277, 494,
 286n
 de la Fontaine, Jean, 420
 de Man, Paul, 332n
 de Mecquenem, 501
 de Raedemaeker, 83n
 de Saussure, 412, 504
 de Vries, Hugo, 571
 de Vries, Jan, 87, 162, 85n,
 269n, 285n, 407n, 526n,
 575n
 de Zoete & Spies, 539n
 Décsy, 191
 Degh, Linda, 115
 Delatte & Delatte, 276n
 Deleuze & Guattari, 541n
 Deleuze, 87, 245, 252
 Demeersman, 60n
 Demetrio, 397
 Dennett, 291, 497n
 Deren, 545
 Dermenghem, 60n
 Derrida, 82, 83, 87, 252, 412,
 505, 82n, 87n, 253n
 Descartes, René, 297, 412
 Desarmet, 341
 Detiene, 84n
 Devisch & Nyamnyoh, 561n,
 574n
 Devisch, René, 396, 44n,
 104n
 Devitt, 396
 di Cosmo, 123n
 Dickie, 86n
 Dick-Read, 40, 232, 355, 389-
 390, 544, 70n, 215n, 308n,
 484n
 Dickson, 281
 Diels, 83n
 Dietz, Ton, 37n
 Dilthey, 66
 Dio Cassius, 300
 Diodorus Siculus, 112, 345
 Diop, 235, 254-255
 Djunatan, Stephanus, 43
 Dodds, 544
 Dodson, 456n
 Dolgopolski, 352
 Dolisane-Eboss Nyambx,
 161
 Domenichini, Luca, 531n
 Donald, 175, 194
 Doniger, Wendy, 375
 Doombos, Martin R., zzz&
 van Binsbergen, Wim
 M.J., 52
 Dorsey, J.O., 428
 Dosrev, 281
 Douglas, 381n
 Draffkom Kilmer, 281, 347n,

- 448n
 Driver *et al.*, 493n
 Driver, 493n
 Du Bois, W.E.B., 235, 255
 Duan Qing, 183n, 313n, 315n
 Dubuisson, 86n
 Dumas, 559n
 Dumézil, Georges, 87, 407n,
 565n-566n, 575n
 Dunbar, R.A., 376
 Dundes, 161, 408, 74n, 287n,
 407n, 495n
 Dupré, Wilhelm, 87-89, 92,
 84n, 87n, 89n, 91n
 Durkheim & Mauss, 59, 412
 Durkheim, Emile, 59, 481,
 504, 571, 86n, 97n, 194n,
 341n, 389n, 504n, 563n,
 572n-573n
 Duyvendak, 547
 Dylan, Bob, 318n
 Eagle, 546
 Ealy, 340
 Earle Frank, W., 130
 Edel, 282
 Edison, Thomas, 297
 Edmonds, 84n
 Edwards *et al.*, 298
 Edwards, 281
 Egberts, 261n, 507n
 Ehret, Christopher, 490,
 84n, 124n, 258n, 400n
 Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 573n
 Eickelkamp, 341
 Einstein, Albert, 85, 571,
 307n
 Eliade, Mircea, 87, 92-93,
 175, 286, 396, 565, 71n,
 151n, 540n, 575n
 Eliseev *et al.*, 300
 Ellwood, 87n
 El-Shamy, 155n, 271n
 Elson & Smith, 289-290
 Elwin, 545
 Elwood, 573n
 Ember & Ember, 62n
 Emery, 281
 Emley, 130
 Empedocles, 57, 58, 140, 302
 Endicott, 566n
 Engels, 305
 Engelstad, 129
 Erdoes & Ortiz, 281
 Euhemerus, 84, 98
 Euripides, 294, 344, 345, 385,
 220n, 333n
 Evans, Arthur J., 289, 389,
 Evans, Arthur, 1988, 541n
 Evans-Pritchard, 66, 131, 251,
 283, 304
 Eze, 318n
 Fabian, J., 574n
 Fahd, 276n
 Fairbrother, 349
 Farmer *et al.*, 300n
 Farmer, Steve, 47, 51, 188,
 517, 47n, 252n, 411n, 417n,
 578n
 Farnell, 294, 407n
 Faulkner 1924, 194, 294
 Fauth, 261n
 Fauvelle *et al.*, 252n
 Favret-Saada & Contreras,
 75n
 Feddema, 397
 Feder, 342n
 Feldman, 286
 Feldman, 288n
 Fernandez, Jim W., 76, 396
 Fester, 331, 344
 Festugière, 446n
 Fewkes, J. Walter, 363
 Finnegan, 87, 87n, 93n
 Fishbane, 302
 Fleming, 123, 412, 139n, 396n
 Flight, 257, 124n
 Fonseca, 293n
 Fontenrose, 45, 106-107, 191,
 271, 273, 276, 281, 287,
 294, 298, 300, 347, 429,
 151n, 407n, 482n, 492n,
 561n
 Ford, 407n
 Forster, 120, 203-206, 208-
 209, 211-212, 214, 258-259,
 262, 266, 424, 449, 452,
 264n
 Forte, M., zzz& Siliotti, A.,
 357
 Fortes, 66, 131
 Fortescue, 258, 399
 Foucault, 87, 99n
 Francis, 379
 Frank, 289
 Fraser, 294
 Frauenfelder, 87n
 Frazer, James, 74, 85, 100,
 161, 275-276, 281-283, 286,
 289, 302, 379, 386, 408,
 448, 483, 493, 565, 74n,
 213n, 255n, 287n, 407n,
 493n
 Freud, Sigmund, 100, 571,
 100n
 Freyberg, 86n
 Friedrich, 351
 Frobenius, 42, 116, 125-126,
 130, 161, 163-164, 172-173,
 186, 207, 231, 246, 248, 251,
 254, 283, 286, 161n, 255n,
 269n, 563n
 Frymer-Kensky, 281
 Furst, 540n
 Furtwängler, 301
 Gadamer, 84n
 Gahs, 298
 Gaisford, 220n
 Galestin, 382
 Gamble, 313n
 Garcia Quintela, 87n
 Gardiner, 244, 293, 396, 527,
 84n, 527n
 Garlake, 198
 Garman, 503
 Garvey, 235
 Gasser, Christoph, 120n,
 127n
 Gatzemeier, 71n
 Gay, Peter, 85n
 Gebauer, P., 382
 Geertz & Geertz, 539n
 Geertz, Clifford, 92, 90n-
 91n, 485n, 539n, 573n-
 574n
 Geider, 349
 Geisau, 484n
 Gellner, 191, 304, 572n
 Gerland, 282
 Geschiere, Peter, 530, 75n,
 76n, 243n
 Geschiere, Peter, with Fisiy,
 75n
 Giacobini & Mallegni, 203n,
 313n
 Giddens, S., zzz& Giddens,
 O., 495
 Gimbutas, 281, 396, 100n,
 111n
 Ginzburg, 539, 75n, 151n
 Girard, 253n
 Girardot, 396
 Gluckman, 94, 251, 275n
 Goethe, 78
 Goldberg, 344
 Goldman, 347
 Goldschmidt, 420
 Goldstein & Goldstein, 312n
 Gonda, 387, 388n
 Goneim, 281
 Goodman, 540n
 Goody, Jack, 87, 87n
 Gordon, 392, 376n
 Gorfain & Glazier, 347
 Goris & Dronkers, 539n
 Goto, 109n
 Graber, Gustav Hans, 115
 Grant & Hazel, 342n
 Grassi, 102n
 Gratius Faliscus, 129, 135n
 Graves, Robert, 100, 112, 162,
 293, 551, 584, 100n, 281n,
 285n, 299n, 451n, 550n,
 563n-564n
 Gray & Atkinson, 258
 Grayson, 283
 Great National Treasures of
 China, 525
 Greenberg, 191
 Griaule & Dieterlen, 223,
 337, 396, 450
 Griaule, 66
 Griffiths 1980, 106
 Griffiths 1989, 534
 Grimal, 342n
 Grimm & Grimm, 75, 296,
 305, 338-339, 342-343, 348,
 396, 495, 497, 283n
 Groneman, 549
 Grosseteste, Robert, 297
 Gruppe, 299n
 Gu Zhenkun, 313n, 315n
 Guattari, 541n
 Guattari, 87
 Geertz & Geertz, 539n
 Guliaev, 294
 Gundlach, 281
 Gupta, 105n
 Gurshtein, 456, 314n
 Guthrie, Malcolm, 257, 260,
 291, 301, 303, 515-516, 520,
 523, 124n
 Guy, 293n
 Guyer, 332n
 Haarmann, H., 74
 Habermas, 320n
 Hamayon, 540n
 Hammer *et al.*, 152, 174, 380,
 450, 69n, 109n, 121n, 142n,
 171n, 185n, 264n, 396n
 Han Xiaorong, 294
 Hancock, 293n
 Hannig, 112, 84n, 387n
 Haraway, 297
 Harding King 1925, 130
 Harding, 106
 Harding, Sandra, 105-106,
 239, 246, 99n, 106n, 252n
 Harris 1982, 548
 Harris, Joseph, 579
 Harrison, Jane, 100, 301,
 300n
 Harrod, James, 51, 314, 569,
 196n, 313n
 Hart, 112, 301
 Hartland, 59
 Hartman, 527, 527n
 Hartman, Nicolai, 48n
 Hastings, 161, 283, 293, 218n,
 557n
 Hatab, 84n
 Havelock, 87, 87n
 Hawking, 334, 394
 Hawkins, 191
 Headland *et al.*, 66
 Hedin, Sven, 125, 126, 128
 Hegel, 46, 232, 249, 317, 84n
 Heidegger, 85, 84n, 332n
 Heideman, 297
 Heine-Geldern, 217n
 Heinze, 397
 Helck, 168, 281, 291, 295, 354
 Heller, 420

- Hendel, C.W., 86
 Henschel, 298
 Henshilwood *et al.*, 198
 Heraclitus, 140
 Hermes Trismegistus, 446
 Herodotus, 106, 300, 304, 220n, 300n
 Hertz, 297, 481
 Hesiod, 261, 282, 297, 302, 341, 344-346, 386-387, 83n, 222n
 Hesychius, 484n
 Heyerdahl, 392
 Higley, 297
 Hobart, 539n
 Hoffman, 343, 256n
 Hogue, C.L., 355
 Holmberg, 388n
 Homer, 290n
 Hook, 532
 Hoover, 282
 Hopfner, 302, 346
 Horace, 72n
 Horkheimer & Adorno, 86, 86n
 Homer, Nils, 128
 Horstman, 87n
 Horton & Finnegan, 572n
 Horton & Peel, 462n
 Horton, 396, 462n
 Houlihan, 281, 501
 Hountondji, 86n
 Howe, Leopold E.A., 540
 Howe, N., Rosciszewska, J., zzz& Persram, R.J., 341
 Howe, S., 252
 Hoyle, Fred, 394, 176n
 Hrozny, 261n, 577n
 Huang & Williams, 532n
 Huard & Leclant, 127n
 Hubbard, W.D., zzz& W. Earle Frank, 130
 Hubert, 572n
 Hulbert, 300
 Hulstaert, 342
 Hultkrantz, 540n
 Hunger, 102n
 Huntington, 570
 Huserl, 47n, 252n
 Hutton, 289
 Hyginus, 345, 346, 331n
 Ibn Rusta, 300
 Idel, 297
 Idinopolos, 289
 Illich-Svitych, 351, 352
 Ingrams, 496n
 Innes, 282
 Inoue Nobutaka, 580
 Ions, 144
 Ingaray, 311
 Irwin, 547
 Isaac, Mark, 37, 45, 161, 212, 281, 287, 404, 408, 422, 432, 434, 446, 449, 452, 70n, 74n, 187n, 263n, 282n, 287n-288n, 307n, 408n, 421n, 451n, 568n, 576n
 Isbister, G.K., 355
 Ivie, 86n
 Jackson, H.C., 1923, 1926, 129
 Jackson, H.M.G., 1923, 534
 Jackson, Michael (not the pop star), 104n, 574n
 Jacobsen, Thorkild, 91, 92n
 Jacotet, 272, 286, 290, 292-293, 295, 303, 378, 280n, 309n
 Jacques, n.d., 258
 Jacques-Meunié, 60n
 Jaeger, 297
 Jakobsdóttir, 281, 283
 Jakobson *et al.*, 59, 413n
 Jakobson, 59, 504, 476n
 Jakobsson, 344
 Jalla, 286, 287, 292
 Jameson, 76n, 561n
 Janmart, 198, 199
 Jansen, 282
 Janzen, John, 279, 104n
 Jasanoff & Nussbaum, 261n
 Jaulin, 104n
 Jay, 540n
 Jayatilake, 551
 Jaynes, 41n
 Jeffreys, M.D.W., 361
 Jener, Henry, 497n
 Jensen, 162, 286
 Jett, 120, 308n
 Jiang, 532n
 Jobling, 344, 341n
 John, author of a Bible book, 103n
 Johnson & Hook, 289
 Johnson, 396
 Johnston *et al.*, 131
 Johnston, 130
 Jolly, 390, 493n, 530n
 Jones & Jones, 297
 Jones, 232, 283, 546
 Jongmans & Gutkind, 61n
 Jongmans, Douwe, 61
 Jowett, 82n
 Joyce, James, 102, 103n
 Joyce, n.d., 129
 Julien, 144
 Jung & Kerenyi, 100n
 Jung, Carl, 1, 87, 100, 157, 259, 397, 565, 98n, 100n, 103n, 341n, 407n, 575n
 Junod, 291, 348, 496-497, 497n
 Jurewicz, 289
 Kaberry, 489
 Kadanoff, Leo P., 431
 Kahler-Meyer, 161
 Kaiser & Shevoroshkin, 179, 224, 380, 124n, 258n-259n, 514n
 Kammerzell, 46, 115, 499, 501-509, 511-515, 517-518, 520, 523-524, 526-527, 60n, 111n, 499n, 507n, 510n, 513n, 527n, 575n
 Kamuwango, 287
 Kant, Immanuel, 85, 87, 99, 249, 317, 331, 571, 105n, 332n, 563
 Kao & Alter, 574n
 Kaplony, 281
 Karafet *et al.*, 540n
 Karipa Te Whetu, 349
 Karlgren, 260, 261
 Karst, Joseph, 34-35, 162, 180, 299, 303, 548, 74n, 83n, 270n, 494n, 573n-574n
 Kassibo, 142
 Katz, 541n
 Kaul & Martens, 294
 Kaul *et al.*, 294
 Kaviratna, 530n
 Kawanga, 274
 Keith, 294
 Kelsen, 287, 302
 Kemp, 281, 127n
 Kenoyer, John, 579
 Kenrick, 293n
 Kerenyi, 281, 397, 407n
 Kerslake, 332n
 Kesselmeier, 89n
 Keyes Adenaika, 62
 Kiernan, 76n
 Kimambo, Isariah, 42n
 Kimmerle, 99n
 King N.Q., 71
 King, L.W., 292
 Kipling, 574n
 Kirkbride, 145n
 Kirwan, 162
 Kitching, 129
 Klein, 203n
 Klimov, 300n
 Klindt-Jensen, 294
 Kluge, 526n
 Knipe, 281, 283
 Köbben, 61n
 Köçümülküzi, Elmira, 284
 Koetting, E.A., zzz& De-Prince, Baron, 368
 Kolakowski, 89, 90, 47n, 89n, 91n, 573n
 Koltuv, 297
 Kotschy, 129
 Kraeling, 397
 Kritsky, G. & Cherry, R.H., 355
 Kropp Dakubu, M.E., 376
 Krzyzaniak & Kobusiewicz, 400n
 Kuhn, Herbert, 48, 77n
 Kuper, 288
 Kurth, 83n
 Küsters, P.M., 539
 Labat, 501
 Labov, 575n
 Lacoste-Dujardin, 341, 342
 Lagercrantz, 127n
 Lambert & Millard, 281
 Landa, Gertrude, 220
 Landis, John, 578n
 Lang, 85
 Lange, Dierk, 161, 256n
 Langer, Suzanne, 86
 Lawuyi, Olatunde Bayo, 94n
 Layton, 541
 Leach, Edmund, 40, 307, 483
 Leakey, 508
 Leclant & Huard, 127n
 Leeming & Page, 304
 Leeming, 380n
 Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, 51, 243, 244, 566, 256n
 Lefkowitz, Mary, 567
 Legge, 381n, 524n
 Leibniz, 312
 Leiris, 66
 Leonard, 302
 Leroi-Gourhan, 131n
 Leroi-Gourhan, 133, 199
 Levinas, 253n
 Levinson, 62n
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 40, 45, 52, 59, 82-83, 85-86, 100, 109-110, 114, 234, 319, 340, 412, 428, 479, 483, 485, 502, 504-505, 510, 513, 557, 565, 569, 577, 59n, 177n, 289n, 381n, 407n, 504n, 573n
 Levy, 1934, 299n
 Levy, 1993, 540n
 Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, 85n
 Lewis, 1971, 540n
 Lewis, 2006, 287n
 Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 540, 569, 456n
 Lewis-Williams & Clottes, 456n
 Lewis-Williams, 198, 456n
 Lhote, 115, 141, 294, 397, 400n
 Li Anshan, 547
 Liddell & Scott, 84
 Lienhardt, 572n
 Lincoln, 82n, 563n
 Lindblom, 40, 119, 125-133, 145, 119n, 129n, 131n-132n, 134n-135n, 148n
 Linnaeus, 516
 Linton, 390

- Lips, 129, 130-131
 Litaue & Grouwel, 123n
 Little *et al.*, 85n
 Little, R.B., 355
 Littleton, 575n
 Liu, 396
 Liverpool, H.U., 290
 Livi, 300
 Lloyd, 129, 300n
 Loeb, 397
 Lombard, 102
 Lommel, 197, 198
 Long, 289
 Longfellow, 576
 Looby, 297
 Lorimer & Lorimer, 347, 496n-497n
 Lorimer, 496n, 497n
 Los, 282, 300-301, 304
 Love, 524n
 Lovell-Smith, 343
 Lowie, 397
 Lucianus, 72n
 Luke, author of a Bible book, 103n
 Lurker, 102n
 Lycophronis, 72n, 83n
 Lyle, Emily, 51, 410, 47n, 560n
 Lyon, 122
 Lyotard, 87
 M., F.W.H., 125
 Macalister, 293
 MacCulloch, 293, 341n
 MacDonald, 332n
 MacGaffey, 94n
 MacGregor, 289
 Mackenzie, 296, 301
 Mackintosh, Catharine Winkworth, 288n
 Maenchen-Helfen & Knight, 293n
 Magness, 397
 Maho, 257, 124n
 Mainga, 275n
 Malinowski, 66, 504, 504n, 563n
 Malory, Thomas, 295, 343
 Mann, 518n
 Mannheim, Karl, 86
 March, J.R., 342n
 Marciniak 381
 Margalith, 304
 Maringer, 298
 Maringer, 572n
 Marler & Robbins Dexter, 287n, 43n
 Marsico, 91n
 Marushiakova & Popov, 293n
 Mason, 94n
 Maspero, 155n, 271n
 Matsumura, Kazuo, 39, 43, 51, 579
 Matthe, 286
 Mauny, 141
 Mauss, 59
 Mayowe, Stanford, 299
 McCormick, 293
 McCulloch, 488n
 McDermott, G., 376
 McDowell, 88
 McKee, 573n
 McKena, 253n
 McLoughlin, 1974, 576n
 McLoughlin, 2006, 344
 Mead & Bateson, 540n
 Meadows, Barbara, 538
 Meara, 293
 Meder, 578
 Meek, 130
 Meussen, 257, 260, 516, 523, 124n
 Meillet, 31n
 Meistere, 293
 Melic, A., 355
 Mellaart, 298, 501, 512n
 Melland, 489, 488n
 Mellars & Gibson, 411n
 Mercer 1952, 294, 387
 Mercier, 71n
 Merolla, Daniela, 33, 246
 Mestel, 43n
 Meyer, 1884, 131, 294
 Meyer, B., 1998, 1999, 294, 104n
 Meyerowitz, 255n, 256n
 Middleton, 71n, 573n
 Mikkelsen, 332n
 Milankovitch, Michael, 208
 Militarev & Shnirelman, 259
 Militarev, 259
 Miller, 94n
 Mills & Gray, 538n
 Mithen, 411n, 572n
 Momiigliano, 85n
 Monaghan, 305
 Moncrieff & Moncrieff, 342n
 Mond, 346
 Monet n.d., 283
 Montagu (a.k.a. Ashley-Montagu), 252n, 573n
 Montelius, 131
 Montet, 60n
 Montgomery, 298
 Mookerjee, 289
 Moore, 62n
 Moorehead, 396
 Morgan 1871, 305, 294n
 Morgan 2000, 84n
 Mori, Fabrizio, 125
 Morton, 94n
 Mosima, 47n, 574n
 Mozley, J.H., 387
 Much, R., 551
 Mudimbe, Valentin, 69, 179n, 311n, 450n, 574n
 Muhammad, Prophet, 167; *cf.* Islam
 Mulhern, 495n
 Müller, Karl Ottfried, 85
 Müller, Max, 85, 100, 91n
 Mumba, 516n
 Muntimba, 298
 Murdock & White, 62n
 Murdock, 62n
 Murray, 129, 289
 Musaeus-Higgins, 272n, 557n
 Mutumba, 390
 Muuka, 275n
 Nabokov, 38, 238, 103n, 284n
 Namafe, 287
 Nance, Morton, 497n
 Naroll & D'Andrade, 62n
 Naroll, 62n
 Nattier, 530n
 Ndigi, 296
 Needham, Joseph, 71n
 Needham, Joseph, with Ling, 409
 Needham, Rodney, 40, 59, 429, 479-480, 483
 Neopagan, 293
 Nestle, 84n
 Neville *et al.*, 547
 Neville, 396
 Newall, 396, 397
 Newcomb, 281
 Newton, Isaac, 305, 571, 42n, 306n-307n, 312n
 Ngunga, 519n
 Niethammer, 390, 493n
 Nietzsche, 97, 410, 418, 97n, 99n, 409n, 575n
 Nobutaka, Inoue, 580
 Nonnus, 346, 386, 111n
 Noort, 42n
 Northern, Tamara, 382
 Nugent, 94n
 O'Meara, J.J., 294
 Obenga, 235, 254
 Ode, 260
 Oguibéline, Boris, 43, 51, 577, 67n
 Oguibéline, Boris, & Yanchevskaya, Nataliya, 184n
 Okpewho, 93n, 94n, 407n
 Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, 94n
 Oliver & Simiyu Wandibba in Oliver *et al.*, 124n, 258n
 Olmsted, 294
 Olufsen, 130
 Omidasalar, 387
 Ong, 87, 87n
 Oosten, 110
 Oosterling, 86n
 Opler, 493n
 Oppenheimer, Stephen, 39, 40, 45, 140, 148, 188, 232-233, 266, 268, 308, 355, 375, 384, 386, 389, 401, 424, 448-450, 568, 70n, 207n, 215n, 269n, 308n, 387n, 449n, 546n
 Ortiz De Montellano, 374, 217n
 Osada, 149n
 Otto, 85, 281
 Oum Ndingi, 254
 Ovid, 294, 297, 302, 345-346, 386, 419, 72n, 111n, 331n, 387n, 468n
 Packard, 94n
 Panofsky, 102n
 Papstein, Robert, 279, 490, 490n
 Paracelsus, 297
 Parada & Förllag, 304
 Pare, I., 384
 Parfitt, 291
 Paris, 130
 Park & Song, 301
 Parker, 546
 Partridge, 83, 300, 505, 83n, 506n
 Patterson, Nick, 316
 Patton & Doniger, 574n
 Pauly / Wissowa, 342n
 Pausanias, 386, 72n, 111n
 Payne, Richard K., & Witzel, Michael, 529
 Peeters, Koen, 44n
 Peiros, 261, 484n
 Penglas, 297
 Penner, 397
 Peny *et al.*, 573n
 Peregrine, 61n
 Perrault, 334
 Perry, 387, 392, 387n
 Peters 1999, 312n
 Petrie, 301
 Pettersson, 291, 94n
 Pharmacopoeia Commission, 532n
 Philippi, 281, 378, 288n
 Philostratus, 385, 83n
 Pico della Mirandola, 47n
 Pike, 66
 Pilbeam, David, 312, 313n
 Pindar, 287, 83n, 111n
 Plato, 82, 84, 106, 331, 545, 47n, 82n, 84n
 Plutarch, 334, 346, 387, 526-527, 527n
 Pobiter, 129; *cf.* von Kadich
 Pokorny, 260, 351, 83n, 308n, 484n
 Pollard, 397
 Pollux, Julius, 129, 135n

Popov, Nikolay, 61n
 Popper, 58, 565, 320n
 Poser, 82n
 Posselt, 496n
 Pötscher, 293, 299n
 Prestwich, 431n
 Pringle, 540n
 Prins, 275n
 Pritchard, 93, 111n
 Puhvel, 293, 396
 Pullikkattil, 312n
 Purwo, 540n
 Putnam, 99n
 Quest, 293
 Quibell & Green, 129, 127n
 Quispel, 446n
 Rabinow, 99n
 Radcliffe-Brown, 566n, 574n
 Radin, P., Kerényi, K., zzz&
 Jung, C.G., 337n
 Ragin, 574n
 Raison-Jourde, Françoise,
 380
 Ranger & Kimambo, 277,
 494, 42n, 94n, 462n
 Ranger, Terence, 45, 61-62,
 65-67, 69, 73, 75-76, 42n,
 62n, 76n, 94n
 Rappenglueck, 396, 456,
 545, 300n, 341n, 574n
 Rasing, Thera, 489, 293n,
 51n
 Rassers, 540n
 Rattray, 496n
 Ray, 111n, 276n, 513n
 Razafiarivony, Michel, 39
 Reefe, 286, 95n
 Reichard, Gladys A., 115
 Reiche, M., 359
 Reichhoff, 439n
 Reichling, 90
 Reid, 129
 Reinhold, 431n
 Renfrew & Zubrow, 411n
 Renfrew, Colin, 258, 411n,
 572n
 Renggli, 390, 493n
 Renne, 550
 Reynolds, 488n
 Rhys, 293, 296
 Rice, 281, 256n
 Richardson, 397
 Richer, 346
 Richter, Daniel S., 335
 Richter, W., 347n
 Ritter, 544
 Roberts, 286
 Robinson, 145n
 Rockhill, 129
 Rodd, 130
 Rodrigues de Areia, 396
 Roheim, 191
 Roland Holst, Adriaan, 102n
 Rollefson, 546, 145n
 Rooke, 287
 Rooth, 495n
 Rorty, 99n, 561n
 Rose, 91n, 111n
 Rosenberg, 298, 575n
 Ross, 332n
 Rountree, 289
 Ruska, 307n
 Russell, 397
 Rust, 522
 Rydberg, 304
 Sahlins, M., 294
 Said, 562
 Salminen, 575n
 Salomon & Urioste, 302, 305
 Sampson, 297
 Sanchuniathon, 398, 450
 Sanders, 131
 Sanders, 508n
 Sapir, 493n
 Saxo Grammaticus, 294
 Scarborough, 82n
 Schadeberg, 520, 507n
 Scheer, 72n
 Schelling, 85, 87
 Scheub, 302
 Schiller, 497
 Schipper, Mineke, 33, 246
 Schlosser, 73
 Schmidt, N., 1921, 397
 Schmidt, Wilhelm, Fr, 473
 Schoffeleers & Roscoe, 480
 Schoffeleers, Matthew /,
 Matthijs, 45, 62, 94, 277,
 479-483, 485-491, 494-
 495, 498, 42n, 95n, 104n,
 278n, 479n-480n, 486n,
 494n
 Scholz *et al.*, 209
 Schoolcraft, 576
 Schott, 281, 332n
 Schreiber, 300
 Schrempf & Hansen, 82n
 Schroeder, 253n
 Schülz, 273
 Schwartz, 302
 Seal, 304
 Seawright, n.d., 387
 Segal, 86n
 Seidel, 497n
 Seidlmayer, 499n
 Seki, 301
 Seligman, 131, 255n, 256n,
 508n
 Selous, 297
 Sem, n.d., 398
 Seneca, 345, 331n
 Serruys, 300
 Sethe, 281
 Seznec, 102n
 Shaked, 82
 Shakespeare, 281, 497, 283n-
 284n
 Shell, 332n
 Shelley, Mary, 297
 Shepherd, 300
 Shepperson, 95n
 Shevoroshkin, 425
 Shi Yang, 39, 428
 Shimunika, Johasaphat, 95,
 274, 276, 279, 493, 96n,
 277n, 493n
 Shreeve, 149, 514, 510n
 Sierksma, 305
 Siikala, 540n
 Silantjew, 129
 Simons, Jack, 577n
 Simons, Jon, 332n
 Simonse, Simon, 283, 556,
 491n
 Simpson, 546
 Skeat, Walter W., 298
 Slater, 299
 Smith & Dale, 162, 292, 297-
 298
 Smith 1907, 291
 Smith 1919, 283
 Smith, 255n, 287n, 342n
 Smith, F.M., 2013, 561n
 Smith, Grafton Elliot, 390,
 213n
 Snellgrove, 397
 Snow, 547
 Sobukwe, Robert, South
 African freedom fighter,
 252
 Socrates, 82n (via Plato)
 Soffer *et al.*, 137n
 Sokal *et al.*, 256n
 Solmsen, F., *et al.*, 298
 Sommer, 281
 Song, 397
 Soyinka, 94n
 Sparks, 128, 133
 Sparreboom, 123n
 Spencer, 281
 Spitz, 423
 Squire, 293
 Sreenathan & Rao, 566n
 Sreenathan, 566n
 Staal, 540n
 Starostin & Starostin, 71, 83,
 260-261, 300, 351-352, 374,
 412, 440, 83n, 259n, 261n,
 285n, 300n, 308n, 311n,
 382n, 389n, 396n, 484n
 Starostin, Georgiy, 123-124,
 248, 256, 83n, 139n, 258n,
 264n, 396n
 Statius, 386
 Steere, 496n
 Stein, 129
 Stesichorus, 298, 83n, 220n
 Stöhr & Zoetmulder, 540n
 Stoller, Paul, 104n
 Straipys & Klimka, 397
 Strawson, 332n
 Streck, 162
 Strelka, 102n
 Strenski, 86n
 Strich, 102n
 Stricker, 304, 390, 493n
 Stringer & Gamble 1993, 195,
 313n
 Strong 1989, 527n
 Stubbs, 136, 202, 290, 356,
 135n, 218n
 Surgeon, Theodore, 49
 Suidas, 386
 Sullivan, 540n, 563n
 Swann, 294
 Swanson, 61n
 Swanton, 283, 297
 Sylvester II, Pope, 297
 Tabler, 297
 Tacitus, 551
 Tajima *et al.*, 381n
 Takacs, 84n
 Taliesin, 293
 Tamm *et al.*, 424, 452, 307n
 Tamminen, 281, 283, 295,
 388n
 Tatar, 343
 Tauchmann, 40, 70n, 215n,
 308n, 484n
 Tegnaeus, 407n
 Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre,
 48, 50n
 Temple, 387, 450, 387n
 ter Haar, 76n
 Textor, 62n
 Thales, 140
 Thangaraj, 566n
 The Canadian Press, 74
 The Oriental Caravan's
 Postcard from Libya, 122
 Theagenes of Rhegion, 83,
 98, 105
 Theal, 349
 Theophrastus, 59
 Thierry, 281, 300
 Thoden van Velzen & van
 Wetering, 61n
 Thoden van Velzen, 243n,
 576n
 Thomas 1924, 129, 305
 Thomas 1971, 75n
 Thompson, 270n, 431n
 Thuillard *et al.*, 51
 Ting Nai-Tung, 342, 495n
 Toelken, 105n
 Tolkien, 487
 Torrend, Father, 497, 280n
 Touyem, Pascal, 553
 Troumier, 340
 Traoré, 142
 Trapnell & Clothier, 273
 Tremearne, 543

- Tripp, 342n
 Trismegistus, Hermes (*q.v.*)
 – , pseudo-epigraphical author, 446
 Trombetti, 69, 68n, 162n
 Trubetzkoy, 504
 Tsonis, 560n
 Tucker, 526n
 Tufton, 134n
 Turner, 2008, 259
 Turner, Victor, 282, 308, 481, 485, 293n, 488n, 490n, 577n
 Tylor, 85, 85n, 217n
 Tzetzes, 385, 83n
 Ullman, 276n
 Unas, Egyptian king, 294
 Underhill *et al.*, 152
 Underhill, 147, 268, 380, 450, 69n, 12n, 142n, 185n, 264n, 396n
 Urton, 302, 305
 Uther, 270, 271; *cf.* Aame-Thompson-Uther
 Vaill, 95n
 van Beek, W., 223, 337, 396
 van Binsbergen with Isaak, 38, 73, 148, 188, 266, 424, 449, 475, 70n, 187n, 263n, 269n, 287n, 307n, 408n, 421n, 568n, 576n
 van Binsbergen with La-croix, 209, 98n
 van Binsbergen & Geschiere, 149n, 158n, 490n
 van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers, 480, 487, 486n
 van Binsbergen & Venbrux, 33, 34, 314, 578, 580, 264n, 281n, 309n-310n, 316n, 318n-319n, 529n
 van Binsbergen & Wiggerman, 92n
 van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, , 35, 40, 73-75, 79, 124, 148, 162, 246, 257, 282, 288, 291-292, 300-301, 303-304, 372, 374, 400, 412, 415, 432, 448, 481, 541, 548, 569, 69n, 70n, 72n, 74n, 109n, 111n, 115n, 140n, 158n, 244n, 252n, 258n-259n, 269n-270n, 357n, 388n, 399n, 417n, 422n, 432n, 445n, 484n, 495n, 550n, 573n
 van Binsbergen, Hannah
 Michelle Sebuka, 108n
 van Binsbergen, Sarah
 Nicolien Shikanda, 295n
 van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., *passim*
 van de Vijver & Leung, 62n
 van der Sluijs, Rens, 155, 161, 281, 286, 288, 341, 396-397, 161n, 177n, 281n
 van der Veer, Peter, 243n
 van Dijk, 104n, 287n
 van Gorp, 102n
 van Hoek, 136n
 van Kessel, L., 547
 van Loon, 448n
 van Nes, 333n
 van Sertima, 217n, 376n
 van Veen & van Der Sijs, 83, 83n, 85n
 van Warmelo, 291
 Vandermeersch, 203n, 313n
 Vandier, 127n
 Vansina, 45, 62, 159, 239, 257, 275, 304, 492, 42n, 92n, 95n, 108n, 124n, 269n, 278n, 494n
 Vaughan, 493n
 Velikowski, 449n
 Venbrux, Eric, 33, 43, 51, 200, 290, 314, 576, 578, 580, 103n, 281n
 Vergeer, 333n
 Vigilant *et al.*, 124n
 Vigilant, 258n
 Villems, 187, 21, 232, 431, 380n
 Virgil, 296-297, 332, 334, 72n, 111n, 333n
 Vitaliano, 287
 Vitebsky, 493n, 540n
 Viveiros de Castro, 561n
 Vloemans, 86n
 Voynot, 130
 von Däniken, 356
 von Heuglin, 129
 von Kadic, 129
 von Sicard, Harald, 46, 115, 142, 144-145, 201-202, 246, 256, 291, 293, 303-304, 397, 503, 505-510, 513-514, 517, 520, 524, 488n, 503n, 506n-508n, 510n-511n, 522n
 Voth, A., 282
 Vroon, 411n
 Vulto, 561n
 Wainwright, 256n
 Walcot 1966, 297
 Waley, 495n
 Walker, 287n
 Wallis, 540n
 Ward, 527n
 Warner, 347
 Warren, 540n
 Warrington Eastlake, 551
 Wastiau, 291
 Waters, Frank, 282
 Watson Andaya, 300
 Watson, 332n, 381n
 Waugh, 281
 Wayan Dibia & Ballinger, 540n
 Weber, Eloi, & Weber, Georg, 566n
 Weber, Max, 66
 Wegener, 236, 237n, 265n
 Weidner, 59
 Weigle, 354, 380n
 Weiss, 566n
 Wendt, 511n
 Werbner, 480
 Werner, 279, 281, 303, 342, 349, 495-498, 269n, 495n-497n
 West, M.L., 398
 Westbeeck, George Copp, 297
 Weverbergh, 39n, 103n
 Wheelwright, 102n
 White, C.M.N., 279, 304, 490n
 Whitehead, 94, 276, 302, 492
 Whitfield, 516n
 Wickramasinghe, C. & K., 176n
 Wilbert, 540n
 Wilby, 75n
 Wilkinson, 281, 298, 275n
 Williams 1937, 289
 Williams 1974, 511n
 Williamson, 412n
 Willis, 144, 161, 223, 286-287, 290, 294, 297, 308, 337, 342, 345, 347-349, 387, 396, 95n, 218n, 333n
 Wilmsen, 163, 523, 532n
 Wilson, 75n, 493n
 Winters, Clyde, 235, 547
 Wiredu, 191
 Wirtz, 289
 Witzel, Michael, *passim*
 Williams 1986, 256n
 Worsley, 504, 504n
 Woudhuizen, Fred, 34, 246, 72n, 111n; *cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen
 Wrigley, 94, 277, 494, 95n, 278n, 494n
 Wuaku, 551
 Wun, 572n
 Wyschogrod, 253n
 Xenophanes, 83, 98, 105
 Xenophon, 129, 135n
 Yamadah, 39
 Yanchevskaya, Natalya, 43, 51
 Yanko-Hombach *et al.*, 431n
 Ye Shuxian, 115n
 Yeats, William B., 102n
 Yetts 1926, 300
 Yoder, 95n
 Yoshida, 575n
 Yu, 396
 Zachernuk, 131, 508n
 Zaehner, 397
 Zeitlyn, D., 376
 Zetterberg, 397
 Zimmerman, 342n
 Zourmatzi, 294
 Zuesse, 396, 71n

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