

Towards a pre- and proto-historic transcontinental maritime network

Africa's pre-modern connections with East, South East and South Asia and with the rest of the world, in the light of a critical assessment of Gavin Menzies' work

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1. The historical claim of transcontinental continuity constitutes, in principle, a form of anti-hegemonic knowledge production¹

The spectacular growth of digital and other electronic media in recent decades has, among many other effects, democratised the global access to valid and especially to invalid information. It has intensified the production of non-academic historiography and, with the perks of bestsellership and television / movie rights, has endowed this remarkable field of writing with potentially considerable remunerations. In a way, the Internet has become a place where those who, for whatever reason, have missed a formal academic education, can compensate this lack and retaliate by the production of texts that superficially seem to have all the trappings of accomplished scholarship

¹ This study is in the first place inspired by my fieldwork, of greatly varying duration and intensity, in a considerable number of locations in sub-Saharan Africa from the early 1970s on; my first indebtedness is therefore to the people who welcomed me in their midst, and greatly facilitated my historical and ethnographic research, in Zambia, Botswana, Guinea Bissau, and Tunisia – as well as brief and inevitably superficial explorations in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Senegal, Benin, and Cameroon, and, outside Africa, in the People's Republic of China, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Navaho Nation USA, and British Columbia, Canada. I am moreover indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for encouraging, and for largely funding, my ongoing research on Africa's transcontinental continuities since 1990, on which the present study is based. This institution, as well as the Harvard Department of Sanskrit and Asian Studies, Cambridge MA, USA; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' 中国社会科学院 Institute of West Asian and African Studies (IWAAS) 西亚非洲研究所, Beijing, People's Republic of China; Peking University 北京大學, Beijing; the Philosophical Faculty, Erasmus University Rotterdam; the Philosophical Faculty, Université Yaounde I, Yaounde, Cameroon; the Philosophical Faculty, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana; the Philosophical Faculty, Parahyangan (Catholic) University, Bandung, Indonesia; the non-governmental organisation Africa Cultures, Cotonou, Benin; Ministerio de Saúde, Bissau, Guinea Bissau; and the enthusiastic and sustained support from my wife, enabled me to visit worldwide, even as a mere Africanist, many of the locations relevant for the present argument. Likewise I acknowledge my association with the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (especially as member of the Study Group on Religion and Magic in the Ancient Near East, 1994-1995), the International Association for Comparative Mythology (from 2006 on), and Fred Woudhuizen, in which contexts the theoretical, empirical and methodological foundations for the present argument were further explored. This study is essentially one instalment among many around this same theme, hence the frequent cross-references to my other publications and work in progress, for which I apologise but for which I see no alternative save presenting all the evidence of this other work in the present argument, which would have forced the latter to swell to book length.

but that, predictably, deliberately set out to radically rewrite academic history.

Let us consider one well-known example of a recent author seeking to rewrite history, although not so much with the aid of the Internet. Since he had ventured out into a field (Bronze Age Mediterranean history) in which he was initially totally unqualified, his irritated academic critics have applied the above model of amateur pseudo-history to Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* project² – but largely unjustifiably so, for, after all, he had a splendid academic education in Sinology and intellectual history, hailed from a British family and milieu of intellectual giants (including the embryologist turned Sinological historian of science Joseph Needham), and, already Professor of Politics, soon also made it to Associate Professor of Ancient History, at one of the USA's most respected universities. In my opinion, Bernal was viciously reproached for his inevitable small and big errors (many – but not all – of the type that would easily be forgiven among fellow-academics), in the first place because he dared insist on the Eurocentric, hegemonic nature of much of the existing scholarly production on Ancient history and on the emergence of Ancient Greek civilisation as the cornerstone of subsequent European, finally North Atlantic, culture and society.

Having gone out of my way, repeatedly, to defend Bernal (without hiding my own profound criticism of his factual alternative proposals for Ancient Egypt's, and sub-Saharan Africa's, impact on Ancient Greece), I hoped (as it now turns out, largely, but not totally, in vain) I could muster some of the same positive approach for the much-despised work of Gavin Menzies, a British retired naval officer who with a series of books, initiated by *1421: The year China discovered the world* (Menzies 2003), has sought to rewrite more recent world history on a scope not even rivalled by Bernal. In Menzies' view, not the well-known European explorers of around 1500 CE discovered the world (Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Drake etc.), but a huge fleet under the Chinese eunuch admiral Zheng He 鄭和 ('He' pronounced *khè*), sailing from China in 1421 CE, allegedly visiting literally all the continents of the earth, and allegedly leaving substantial and detectable traces there in the form of artefacts, beliefs, customs, names, other fragments of language, and genes. Menzies' argument is summarised, in his own words, in a few lines of what he calls 'theory' (Menzies 2003: 498):

‘THEORY

- Four huge Chinese fleets circumnavigated the world between March 1421 and October 1423. The fleets comprised more than 800 vessels. These fleets charted the world.
- Sailors and concubines from those great fleets settled in Malaysia, India, Africa, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand and on islands across the Pacific.
- The first European explorers had maps showing where they were going before they set sail. They met Chinese settlers when they arrived in the New World.
- China, not Europe, discovered and settled the New World. European 'discoveries' relied on China leading the way.'

Despite his comprehensive and at first sight impressive critical apparatus and bibliography,³ Menzies admits that his formal education and command of the relevant

² Bernal 1987, 1991, 2001, 2006; Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers 1996; Berlinerblau 1999; van Binsbergen 1996a, 1997b, 2000, 2011c.

³ Although both are grossly defective, and presented in an impossible way. Menzies 2003 has no separate bibliography. Incomplete and sometimes inaccurate references (often no more than isolated author's names) are to be gleaned at the reader's initiative from the notes, from an Appendix I 'Chinese

sources are not up to the huge task he has set himself, and that his main claim to an original new perspective is his expertise in navigation as a naval officer who asserts to have sailed (albeit under the water surface, in a submarine) many of the routes he now attributes to Zheng He 600 years ago.

I had already learned that the mere fact of a counter-Eurocentric orientation was in itself insufficient saving grace to vindicate an amateur revision of history (or even a specialist revision, for that matter). The British paediatrician and geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer, in his *Eden of the East* (1998) had claimed – in a remarkably counter-Eurocentrist argument inspired by his work in South East Asia and New Guinea, and by his love for his South East Asian wife⁴ – that the civilisations of the Indus valley and the Ancient Near East were greatly indebted (e.g. in the details of the *Genesis* mythology) to a hypothetical westward seaborne migration of inhabitants of the ‘Sunda’ subcontinent of South East Asia when this was partially flooded by the rise of the sea level with the melting of the polar caps at the onset of the Holocene (10 ka BP = 10,000 years Before Present); I found fault (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) with much of Oppenheimer’s comparative-mythological and archaeological argument, and demonstrated by multivariate analysis of flood myths worldwide that Oppenheimer’s specific *Genesis* claim could not be sustained. But perhaps I was guilty of throwing away the baby with the bathing water: subsequently, also as a result of Oppenheimer’s particularly forceful methods of insisting on being right, his Sunda model continued to haunt my life and my work as an Africanist, and I gradually came to admit (also on the basis of Robert Dick-Read’s (2005) impressive synthesis *The Phantom Voyagers*, another – and in this case most successful – instance of British amateur revision of history) that *as a model, not for early-Holocene but for late-Holocene transcontinental history of Africa, i.e. for the last few millennia*, Oppenheimer’s Sunda model (if amplified so as to include not only Indonesian but also South and East Asian demographic and cultural influxes) had, after all – as we shall see in the course of the present argument – much to recommend it (van Binsbergen 2012c), even though its original author had never extended it to apply to Africa.

Menzies’ argument has found high-profile exposure in the media and on the Internet, and although unmistakably *a work of fiction ineffectively disguised as a work of scholarship*, was extensively and dismissively criticised on academic, not literary, grounds, especially by Western specialists on China.⁵ In the People’s Republic of

circumnavigation of the world 1421-3: Synopsis of evidence’, pp. 493-595, and from an itemised bibliography on an obscure website not mentioned in the book: <http://www.gavinmenzies.net/china/book-1421/bibliography/>. The announcement at the end of Appendix 1 (Menzies 2003: 595), ‘NOTE: for a full bibliography for 1421, please refer to the website www.1421.tv’ turns out to lead to a non-existing website. Many authors and their works to which the text (especially the evidential Appendix I) refers are nowhere to be identified even in this threefold labyrinth, for instance: ‘Lynda Nutter’, ‘Tan Koolin’, ‘Duncan Craig’, ‘Nancy Yaw Davis’, ‘J. Warsing’, ‘J.D. van Horn’, ‘Martin Tai’, ‘Philip Snow’ [= Snow 1988; but only an E.R. Snow is explicitly referenced by Menzies], ‘Terry’ [= Terry 1665, whose identification posed me great difficulties; only a different author Terry 1978 is identified by Menzies], Ranking [= Ranking 1827], Clavigero [= Clavigero & Cullen 1806, cf. Clavigero & Mora 1826; Gordon 1832], ‘Captain Cochran’s journal’, ‘J. Parkinson’ [a Sydney Parkinson accompanied James Cook as draughtsman], ‘Antonia Bowen-Jones’, ‘Dave Bell’, ‘Vega’ [= Garcilaso de Vega 1688] – but let us end this depressing listing here.

⁴ A similar personal sentimental attachment is claimed by Menzies: he spent his infancy in China.

⁵ Finlay 2004; Rivers 2006; Stallard 2011; Dreyer 2004; Robinson 2010; Richardson 2004; Tatsumi 2008; Prescott n.d.; Henige 2008; Wade 2007; Melleuish *et al.* 2009. An entire website has been dedi-

China, whose intellectual production in history and archaeology over the last few decades has had a strong chauvinistic slant⁶ (as elsewhere in the world, for that matter), whose recent world policy has been extremely outgoing, and where the celebration of Zheng He has become a major industry, Menzies' work and person were much better received, and a number of publications were produced by Chinese academics (e.g. Liu Gang 2009) that concur with Menzies' argument and adduce additional evidence – perhaps somewhat too eagerly. The few positive academic reactions to Menzies that I could identify, came from global peripheries such as South Africa and South America,⁷ from writers who obviously could not judge the Sinological and nautical argument and its devastating criticisms, but to whom the counter-Eurocentric argument strongly appealed, and for reasons stemming from their own regional historical experience.

What are the hallmarks of scholarship? An adequate exploration and definition would fill a book, but for the present purpose the following list of characteristics may be sufficient:

1. an explicit method by which specific statements have been arrived at and by which such statements may be falsified;
2. a manifest sense of accountability to a scientific forum of peers, specialists,⁸ which guarantees that current scientific paradigms are critically taken into account;

cated to the debunking of Menzies' claims (at: <http://www.kenspy.com/menzies>). One of the few academic authors to take Menzies seriously is the orthomolecular physician Paterson (2005) – not exactly a specialist in the relevant fields of scholarship. Zheng He's voyages have been the subject of modern specialist research, e.g. Levathes 1996; Salmon & Ptak 2005; and, with a view on China's today's diplomatic use of Zheng He, Holmes 2006.

⁶ This sweeping statement is based on limited, fragmented, and subjective personal experience, and there may be myriad examples to the contrary. I visited the People's Republic of China and participated in its intellectual exchanges in 2002 and 2006, as a guest of the Institute of West Asian and African Studies (IWAAS), and as participant in the 2006 Peking University (Department of Sanskrit and Buddhist studies) / Harvard Department of Sanskrit and Asian Studies International Conference on Comparative Mythology, and have kept in touch ever since; also the Round Tables organised by the above Harvard department, and the Annual Meetings of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, brought me in contact with Chinese scholarship today, and allowed me to gauge, somewhat, its ideological orientation.

⁷ Davenport 2003; Vargas Martinez n.d.

⁸ In the beginning of his evidential Appendix I, Menzies (2003: 494) proudly announces:

‘The evidence has been carefully considered by more than two hundred experts. Of these, approximately 85 per cent accept the author's argument that Chinese fleets discovered the New World before Europeans. Details of the issues over which about 15 per cent disagree will be provided to any researcher who requests them.’

The preceding list of Menzies' Chinese academic contacts, presented with 100 copies of the book, suggests that the great majority of these evaluating experts were Chinese, under common political pressures of chauvinism and nationalism. This is not the way in which a convincing scientific forum works (*cf.* de Groot 1966; Popper 1959 / 1935). An appeal to the resentment engendered by auto-reflexive awareness of defective education is dripping from the demagogic end of Menzies postscript (2003: 491):

‘The great bulk of the new evidence that has enabled me to make such startling claims has come from readers of my book. It is you, not historians or academics, who have rewritten history.’

3. insistence on reading all available relevant scholarly literature especially the most recent publications;
4. the use of a full critical apparatus and full bibliography so that (2) and (3) are open to immediate and public scrutiny;
5. a sense of the intersubjective and ephemeral nature of scholarly truth – the best results are not those that are eternally ‘true’ but those that critically invite specific refutation resulting in an ulterior truth
6. a *Fingerspitzengefühl* – the kind of professional intuition that comes with many years of experience in handling the same kind of data and the same kind of academic problems, in exchange with a specialist scientific forum;
7. an overall knowledge and understanding of the basic theoretical and methodological positions circulating in the field and adjacent fields, based on a scholar’s personal and acknowledged contributions;
8. a basic command of all, or most of, the linguistic and disciplinary fields that are relevant to the subject;
9. within this intersubjective and rather highly structured context, yet a strong element of originality and uniqueness.

These are some of the criteria that enable senior scholars to assess the value and topicality of scholarly texts submitted for publication, and by which, more in general, they judge the performance of each other and of their students. It would be easy to demonstrate that of these characteristics, Menzies’ work – predictably and pardonably, in work of fiction – only displays (8), originality and uniqueness. He does not have a clue as to what constitutes convincing historiography. He uses the results of molecular population genetics without having the faintest idea as to how these results are mathematically constructed and to what extensive error functions they are subjected – the very idea is absurd of seeking to trace through state-of-the-art genetic methods the precise genetic trail, all over the world, of a Chinese maritime expedition that lasted only three years and that took place only six centuries ago. Moreover, Menzies relies heavily on ancient Chinese texts and maps, and feedback from Chinese scholars today, but (somewhat, but not quite, like myself) does not seem to know one word or one character of Chinese. In general, he engages in linguistic comparisons within and across linguistic phyla and macrophyla, and concludes to the identity (and hence the Chinese nature) of words, terms and the etymology of place names and ethnic names all over the globe, as if the extremely complex and tricky field of etymology can be convincingly handled with a methodology of amateur assertion – he is completely unaware of the splendid and elaborate edifice of comparative and historical linguistics and its methods. He engages in cross-cultural comparison without critiquing the usually very old, pre-scientific sources from which he gleans ethnographic data of often very dubious quality. He engages in comparative physical anthropology on the basis of mere stereotypical amateur visual impressions, thus concluding to the ‘Mongolian features’ of a Peruvian anthropomorphic statue, etc. He is incredibly naïve in his handling of documentary evidence, tending to take any ancient declaration of distance, size, number as literal truth, without the slightest sense of historical criticism by which documentary data are placed in the specific socio-political context (including chauvinism and propaganda) in which they were engendered, and are given a relative, critical meaning and significance in that light. Against all evidence of ancient (*cf.* Xiongnu 匈奴) and recent history (*cf.* Tibet འཇམ་ལྗོངས་ / 西藏), he claims

‘the Chinese were always careful to respect local sensibilities’ (Menzies 2003: 133)

– in stead of recognising such respect for what it is, a rare intellectual and ethical achievement of global cosmopolitanism of the last few centuries. His misconception of the nature of scholarly truth claims is sufficiently evidenced from the fact that he admits only ‘a chance of one in a million that I am wrong’. Even in his own professional field as a mariner, that of applied nautical geography and astronomy, he makes serious mistakes.⁹

All this is not new and does not need elaboration. Menzies’ book is affordable, entertaining, thick, and adorned with nice photographs; as long as we realise that it is a cleverly presented work of fiction and that the canons of scholarship should not be applied to it, there is little wrong with it. We may even admire its anti-hegemonic pathos, as long as we realise that the Eurocentric hegemonic intellectual production of yesterday may well be supplanted by an anti-Eurocentric hegemonic production of today, serving the hegemonic aspirations of a different part of the modern world – no longer the North Atlantic region, but East Asia. For such aspirations there are many indications today, including China’s massive venture into African economies, and its constructive, attenuating role in the financial crisis that has put the American and European economies in jeopardy during the last few years. Still, as an Africanist currently engaged in the study of Africa’s transcontinental continuities in pre- and proto-history, I think that more important, and more positive, lessons can be gathered from, or around, Menzies book than merely the demonstration of ‘how not to rewrite world history’ (Finlay 2004).

2. Trans-Pacific continuities

It is outside my fields of academic interest to try and judge Menzies’ claim of China’s priority over Europe in making regular and massive maritime contact with the New World (or with Australia, New Zealand and Oceania at large, for that matter), yet a few remarks on this point are in order. Trans-Pacific contacts in pre- and proto-history have been the subject of an extensive scholarly literature, from the time (late 19th century CE) that diffusion was the main stock-in-trade of anthropology, culture history and archaeology.¹⁰ To these studies of contacts in (proto-)historical times, we may add the palaeo-anthropological and genetic studies of the peopling of the Americas,

⁹ As pointed out, for instance, by Rivers 2006-2012. Another nautical technical mistake is in Menzies 2003: 367, where he equates thirty nautical miles of longitude somewhere between Djibouti and the Cape of Good Hope, *i.e.* a stretch straddling the equator, with ‘a mere thirty seconds of time’, instead of: $(30 \text{ [miles]} * 1.852 \text{ km [km equivalent]} / 40,000 \text{ km [earth's equatorial circumference]}) * 24 \text{ hr} = 0.033336 \text{ hr}$, or 2 minutes, being 4 times as much. Only very close to the poles would the longitude circles be sufficiently contracted to match Menzies’ figure.

¹⁰ There is an extensive anthropological and art-historical literature on circum-Pacific Asian-American continuities, very little of which is acknowledged by Menzies. This field of enquiry was initiated with Tylor’s (the founding father of British anthropology) spotting the parallels between Asian and Meso American games and colour symbolism (Tylor 1879, 1880, 1882, 1896); Tylor specifically discussed the South Asian board game of *patolli* (*cf.* Murray’s 1952 authoritative overview), but in Menzies’ (2003: 546) hands this becomes a *Chinese* game transmitted to Peru by the Zheng He expedition. Further, *cf.* Badner 1966; Barnard 1968, 1972; Hentze 1933; Kelley 1995; Lévi-Strauss 1963 (although that author here dismisses diffusion as a possible explanation for the Asian-American parallels, instead relying, structuralistically, on the converging parallelism of the universal human mind); Murray 1952: 231 f.; Schuster 1949; von Heine-Geldern 1937, 1950a, 1950b, 1954, 1960, 1964, 1964-1967, 1966; von Heine-Geldern & Ekholm 1949; Stein 1992.

which scholarly consensus of the last hundred years has predominantly (although no longer exclusively) attributed to eastbound migrations across the Bering Strait from the Late Palaeolithic onward. A state-of-the-art interpretation is offered in Fig. 1.

Against this very well established empirical background, scholarly consensus has tended to view the demographic, cultural and linguistic contribution of Asia to the Americas as resulting from a number of major migration waves, combined with a continuous trickle of smaller events of demic diffusion going on, essentially, to modern times.¹¹ Apparently such a process extending over more than twenty millennia is insufficiently dramatic for Menzies' literary purposes, so he decides to reduce all real or imagined signs of Asian influence to *Chinese* influence, and to compress all these millennia into the *three years* during which Zheng He sailed the seas – even though the relevant and surviving Chinese records need to be over-interpreted to find the slightest hint of the Americas.

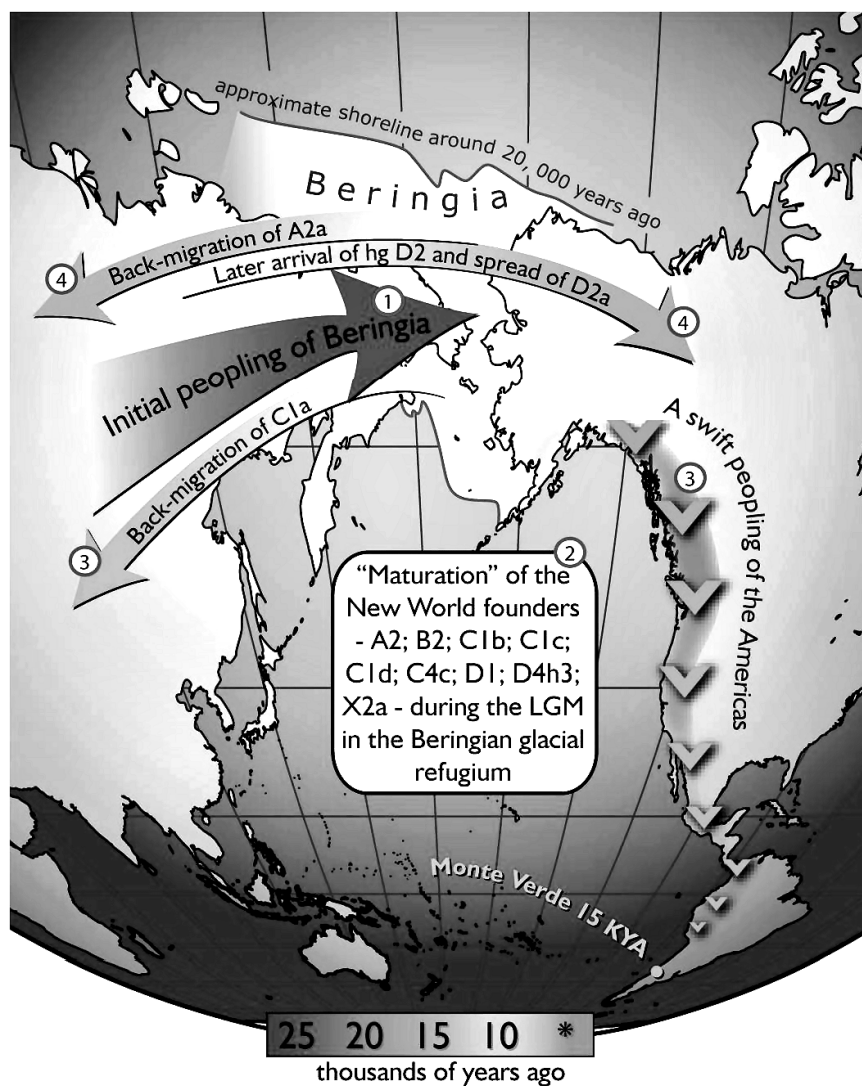


Fig. 1. Back and forth migrations across 'Beringia' (after Tamm et al. 2007). The letter and number codes refer to mitochondrial DNA haplotypes worldwide.

¹¹ Jett 2002; Menzies does acknowledge some other publications by that author, and of the wider N[ew] E[ngland] A[n]tiquities R[esearch] A[ssociation] network to which Jett belongs.

3. Determining longitude, and pre-Columbian surprises concerning the representation of the African coastline

Menzies does not, of course, justify this extraordinary twofold reduction by appealing to a need of literary effect, but by appealing to his navigation craftsmanship which is to constitute his main advantage over specialist academics. Menzies argument here is briefly as follows. In order to sail the world oceans and to map the continents and islands reliably and in detail, a huge fleet of hundreds of ships would have been needed (merely to view every square km of sea surface), as well as the ability to correctly determine not only latitude but also longitude; these two requirements were, allegedly, met by the Chinese in the early 15th century, both by Zheng He's fleet and by an ingenious if largely hypothetical system of longitude measurement on the basis of lunar eclipses,¹² which Menzies reconstructs, in conjunction with the academic astronomer John Oliver (University of Florida) and a Marshall Payn, in Appendix 2 of his book (Menzies 2003: 597-608). In Menzies' view, the system required Chinese observation platforms to be set up all over the world (two dozens of which Menzies claims to have identified); and moreover required that the information thus gathered was subsequently collated and processed into world maps after the fleet's return to China. That longitude was measured adequately is a claim which Menzies bases, not on any surviving and authenticated Chinese map (for those available are either suspected fakes (Wade 2007) or hopelessly inadequate in terms of longitude and latitude as the con-

¹² Menzies admits that the determination of longitude through lunar eclipses was already proposed by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus as reported by the Imperial Roman geographer-astronomer-astrologer Claudius Ptolemaeus ('Ptolemy'), in the latter's *Geography*. Menzies moreover claims that the *Geography* had been unknown in Europe throughout the Middle Ages until it was reintroduced from Constantinople in 1415. This claim is incorrect on several counts. The 13th-century *Codex Seragliensis GI 57*, the oldest surviving copy of Ptolemy's *Geography*, was found in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul and the modern standard critical edition is based on it, but already in 1295 the Byzantine monk Maximus Planudes found a copy of the work, while in 1397 a copy of the work was given to Palla Strozzi in Florence – to be translated into Latin by the Florentine Giacomo da Scarperia in 1406; moreover, since the end of the first millennium CE, indirect access to Ptolemy's knowledge was possible via excerpts in the work of al-Mas'udi *المسعودي* of the late 10th century CE (Masudi 1861; Anonymous, 'Geography (Ptolemy)'). It has been a moot point – culminating in a protracted debate on the history of the concept of moon stations / *nakshatra* – throughout 19th- and 20th-century European scholarship whether, and to what extent, the astronomies and astrologies of South and East Asia (China, India, Mongolia) were indebted to one another and to Ancient Greece, whose science in these domains was in itself greatly indebted to Mesopotamia of the first millennium BCE. The literature on this point is extensive, cf. Bentley 1825; Biot 1840; Boll 1912; Burgess 1866; de Saussure 1930; Gundel 1936 / 1969; Hommel 1891; Kelley 1991, 1992, 1995; Kugler 1900; Oldenburg 1909; Parpola 1983: Appendix B, Lunar constellations, pp. 385-386; Sastri 1930-1931; Schlegel 1875; Steinschneider 1870-71; Stucken 1913; Thibaut 1894; Weber 1865; Whitney 1874; Yabuti 1954; Yampolsky 1950. Overlooking this impressive scholarly literature one could hardly entertain the thought of independent parallel regional inventions, but is compelled to see the astronomies / astrologies from West to South and East Asia (including those of the Ancient Graeco-Roman tradition; Bouché-Leclerc 1899; Tester 1989) as one coherent system, and as one unfolding from West Asia. If the lunar-eclipse method had already been available in Mesopotamian astronomy, it may have been transmitted westward to Hipparchus (let us not forget that a few centuries earlier, Thales' ability to predict a solar eclipse had certainly derived from Mesopotamia), as well as eastward to China. That there was considerable continuity between Mesopotamian and Chinese astronomy was already suggested by Scaliger (1540-1609), and has been argued convincingly by Jastrow (1898: II, 745); Ungnad 1932-; Boll 1912; and especially and in detail: Bezold 1919. The continuity need not exclusively mean that the Chinese borrowed unidirectionally from Ancient Mesopotamia: Kugler (1900: 79 f) sees in the Babylonian determination of the longest day as 14 hour 24 minutes an indication that a Chinese, not Babylonian, latitude is implied. For a recent discussion of linkages between West Asia and China, cf. van Binsbergen 2012d.

temporary sailing chart rendered here as Fig. 2.), but on the basis of *European* maps that were drawn prior to the discoveries of Columbus, Vasco da Gama etc. and that yet showed the outlines of especially the African coast with remarkable precision and amazingly correct longitudes.¹³ Such maps, in Menzies' blinkered vision, can only be: unacknowledged adaptations from Chinese originals – the latter deliberately distributed to the West so that Arabs and perhaps Europeans could find their way to the Chinese imperial court in order to pay tribute and homage there. The clinching element in Menzies' argumentational edifice is his claim of the deliberate official destruction of all documents relating to Zheng He's voyages at China's subsequent turning away from the wider world – in other words, Menzies' cyclical argument is that such the hypothetical Chinese originals to which such pivotal importance is being attributed, can yet will never be found. Menzies does not explain how the iconoclasm thus attributed to Chinese officialdom shortly after Zheng He's voyages could also have extended to the hypothetical Chinese maps postulated to be in Western possession, of which, predictably, not a shred was retrieved either. One of the most amusing and original literary devices of his book is that Menzies proffers Chinese documents including maps to reconstruct the action and knowledge of Westerners, and Western documents including maps to reconstruct the action and knowledge of Chinese, and hopes to get away with such sleight-of-hand.

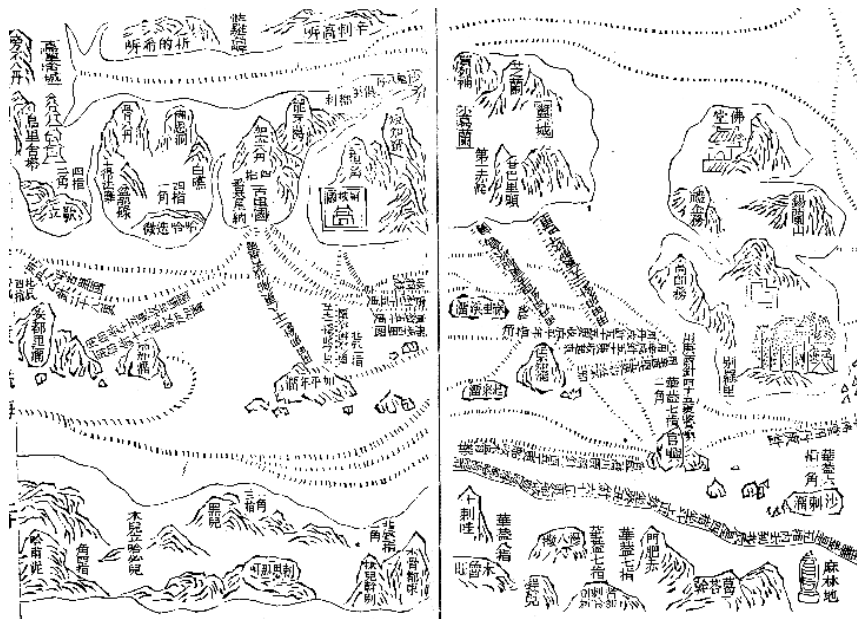


Fig. 2. A section of the Mao Kun map from the *Wu Pei Chi* 武備志, showing the southern part of the Indian Ocean between India and the Arabian peninsula, and reputed to derive from Zheng He's expeditions (source: Ma Huan 1970; Anonymous, 'Wubei Zhi'; Anonymous, 'Zheng He').

¹³ Menzies' insistence on such pre-Columbian surprises in European map-making regarding the coastline of Africa primarily refers to the so-called Fra Mauro Mappamundi of the mid-15th c. CE, and to a lesser extent to the Cantino, Jean Rotz, and Waldseemüller maps. From the very extensive overview, with lavish map samples and critical essays on individual maps, in Davis 1998, it is clear that the shape of the African continent was also rendered more or less adequately in some other pre-Columbian late-medieval European maps. This was also the case on some Chinese maps from at least the Yuan 元朝 dynasty (1271-1388 CE) on. How specialists deal with this puzzle is beyond my present scope, and beyond my competence. All I want to show here is that Menzies' explanation in terms of Chinese superior navigational capabilities and subsequent transmission of the Chinese results to the West, does not convince.

The alleged Chinese superior capability of measuring longitude as claimed by Menzies is very conspicuously not in evidence in Fig. 2.

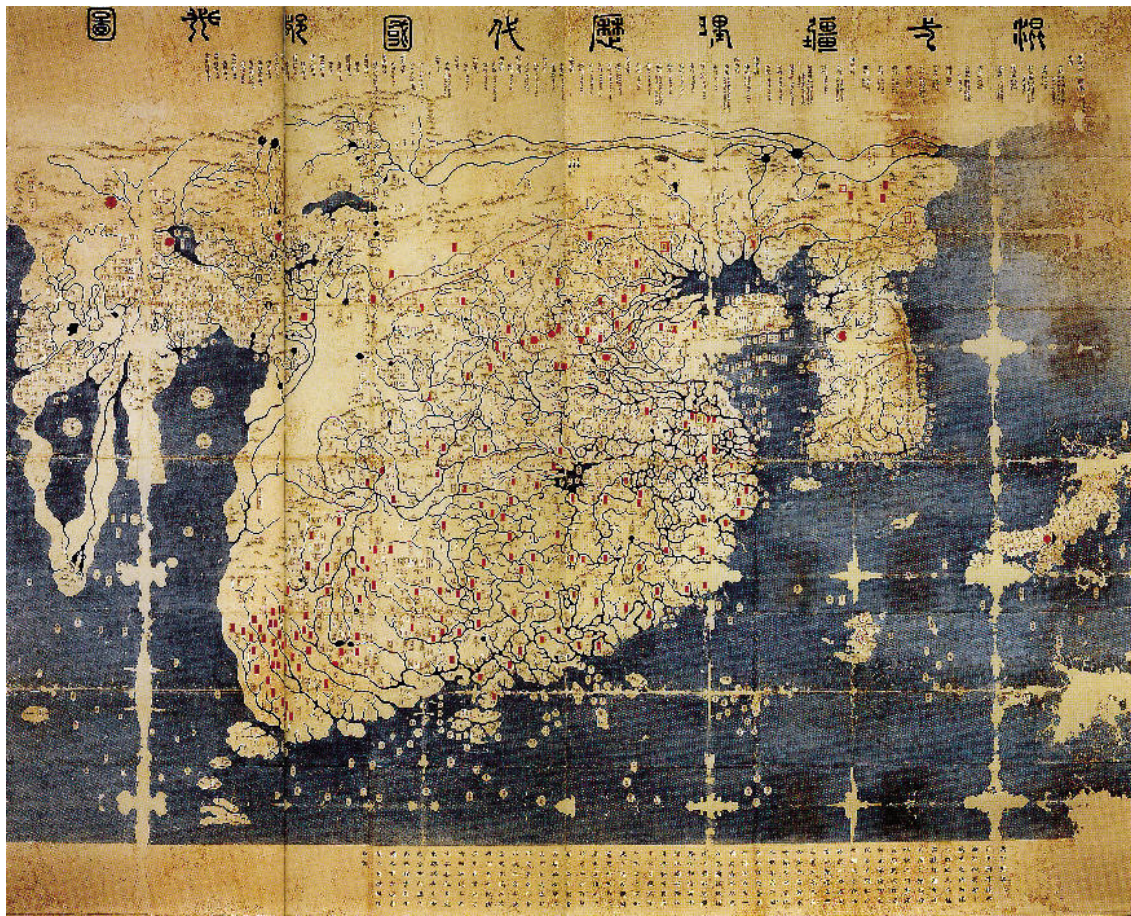


Fig. 3. The Japanese Honkōji copy (16th-19th century) of the Korean 'Kangnido' 강강강 / 疆理圖 (Honil Gangni Yeokdae Gukdo Ji Do) map (1402), which in itself is very similar to the Chinese Da Ming Hun Yi Tu 大明混一圖 Great Ming Amalgamated Map, which some scholars judge slightly older (source: Anonymous, 'Da Ming Hun Yi Tu'; Anonymous, 'Kangnido'.) My use here of the later, derived copy is something of an anachronism and is only justified by the ready availability of its image; however, the differences with the original are slight.

Moreover, there is, among many others, one remarkable flaw in Menzies' analysis precisely on a point where he claims superior knowledge over academics: navigational techniques. Basing himself (Menzies 2003: 127 f.) on the Korean-Chinese-Japanese 'Kangnido' map (1403 CE, revised after 1420 CE; cf. my Fig. 3) he sees the reasonably correct rendering of the Eastern and Western coastlines of Africa as proof that the Chinese fleet under Zheng He not only made the, generally undisputed, voyages to the East African coast as far South as Sofala (in present-day Mozambique) but also had proceeded from there to round the Cape of Good Hope and to sail all along the Atlantic coast of Africa to reach, first, Matadi near the mouth of the Congo River, and from there the Cape Verde Islands. However, as can be clearly seen, the rendering of longitude for the East African coast is far from impeccable, and for the Atlantic

African coast is dramatically distorted, reducing the whole of West Africa from the Bight of Benin to Cap Verde (Dakar, Senegal) – a distance of over 3,000 kms) to almost nothing. Arguing elsewhere in his book that it was the correct assessment of longitude that gave the Chinese a head start in the Age of Discovery, at this point in his argument, however, Menzies can only invoke the Chinese's *inability* to determine longitude as explanation for the West African distortion! Apparently, Menzies' claim that the Chinese could correctly determine longitude is spurious; or, alternatively, perhaps the Chinese had the claimed ability and applied it to the East African coast, but then the Atlantic coast of Africa at the time did not constitute Chinese-charted territory at all – so that the information that went into this part of the Kangnido map may have come from distorted mere hearsay, or from sources outside East Asia subsequently distorted in East Asian hands.¹⁴

It is to Menzies' credit to have spotted the pre-Columbian anomalies in European maps, and to try and work out, in the best tradition of counter-hegemonic anti-Eurocentric studies, an astronomical system by which the Chinese may have solved a central navigational problem centuries before Sully's and Harrison's clocks did the same for the West.¹⁵ I leave it to specialists in Chinese astronomy (*cf.* Needham with Wang Ling, 1959 (vol. III) to determine whether Menzies' claim on this point is not anachronistic in the sense that it may be predicated on a phase in Chinese astronomy that could only be reached after European Jesuits had made their impact on China. I submit, meanwhile, that all other possible explanations of the pre-Columbian surprises in European map-making must be considered before we accept Menzies' proposal of a Chinese connection, for which there is only circumstantial evidence (Menzies 2003: 122 f) of a highly constructed and far-fetched nature, centring on the figure of the Venetian traveller Niccolò da Conti.

4. Towards a model of transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory, resulting from the installation, from the Neolithic onwards, of a multcentred, multidirectional global maritime network

We have seen how Menzies applies two formidable forms of reduction:

1. such transcontinental Asian influence as the world outside Asia may have undergone, must have come from one source (China) and
2. must have taken place during one limited period (early Ming 明朝 dynasty, which ruled from 1388 to 1644 CE).

When we realise that the Americas are generally considered to have been mainly populated by trans-Bering migrations from the Late Palaeolithic to the present (*cf.* my Fig. 1, above), the fallacy of such a model becomes immediately apparent. If many

¹⁴ On the Kangnido map, also see: Ledyard 1991 (referred to by Menzies); and, sternly dismissive of Menzies' use of it, Robinson 2010, which also offers an up-to-date scholarly treatment.

¹⁵ The English clockmaker John Harrison (1693-1776) invented the first reliable longitude clock in the 1730s-40s CE, after his compatriot Henry Sully laid the groundwork for such a clock in the 1710s-20s CE; *cf.* Sobel & Andrewes 1998.

Native Americans today display physical characteristics reminiscent of East Asians (as Menzies does not fail to notice), this should not in the first place be attributed to a hypothetical, numerically very minor gene influx from China in the 15th century CE as a result of the sexual activities and settling of the crew of a few Chinese ships, but to migrations back and forth across the Bering Strait since the Upper Palaeolithic. A similar argument would apply to the convergence between North American Athabaskan-Eyak-Tlingit languages and the North Asian Yeniseian language group; since the latter belongs to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic phylum, long-range linguists have come to speak of the Sino-Caucasian macrophylum comprising Northern and Southern Athabaskan languages (e.g. Tlingit, Navaho), Yenisean, Chinese, Tibetan, the North Caucasian group, Basque, and a few language isolates in Asia – in other words, the proposed Sino-Caucasian macrophylum spans three continents between the Gulf of Biscay and the North American South West. Such long-range connections involve many millennia, and it is ridiculous to exclusively attribute them to Zheng He's voyages however significant these may have been in other respects.¹⁶

So much for Asian traits in the Americas. The mainstream argument for Asian traits in Africa (regardless of Menzies' views) also goes back to the Upper Palaeolithic, in the first place. After the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans inside the African continent from c. 200 ka BP on, the Exodus 'Out-of-Africa' took place c. 80 – c. 60 ka BP (Forster 2004; Oppenheimer 2004a). But while the other continents were being populated with modern humans in this way, already c. 15 ka BP a counter-movement started, the 'Back-into-Africa' migration which painstaking molecular genetics has discovered in the last 15 years¹⁷ and which means that, over the last 15 millennia (and especially in the more recent part of that period) Asian genes, Asian modes of production, Asian cultural items, Asian language elements (probably also contributing to the rise of the Bantu sub-phylum), Asian religious representations and practices (including shamanistic and ecstatic cults), Asian political institutions including the kingship, and Asian mythologies and worldviews, have made a considerable impact on Africa and have helped to produce the socio-cultural and demographic landscape we have come to know as present-day Africa.¹⁸ In such an ancient and utterly hybrid context of continuity and transcontinental feedback, it requires far more sophisticated methods than Menzies' naïve common-sense approach, if one wishes to reliably identify 15th-century CE Chinese influence, and distinguish the latter from among the entire complex of African and Asian borrowings and feedbacks back and forth from 80 ka BP on.

In addition to these models of long-range, transcontinental transmission going back to the Upper Palaeolithic, for an understanding of cultural, mythological and linguistic affinities in the three continents of the Old World it is useful to discuss the Pelagian

¹⁶ Menzies is superficially aware of the trans-Bering model but does not allow it to govern his thinking on Asian (which for him means Chinese) / New World continuities:

'Professor Novick *et al.*[.] report: "The results corroborate the Asian origin of native American populations but do not support the multiple-wave migration hypothesis supposedly responsible for the tripartite Eskaleut, Nadene and Amerind linguistic groups." The multiple-wave hypothesis refers to the waves across the Bering Straits.' (Menzies 2003: 580).

¹⁷ Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Underhill 2004; Coia *et al.* 2005.

¹⁸ Cf. van Binsbergen 2010a, 2011c, 2012a, 2012abis, 2012b, 2012c.

hypothesis,¹⁹ which (*cf.* my Fig. 4) essentially deals with transmissions from the Early Bronze Age onwards. 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 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,²⁰ 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 limited number of them*, also a basis for ethno-political identification with, and contrastive distinction from, other such groups, *e.g.* in the context of the Sea Peoples episode in the Mediterranean at the very end of the Bronze Age. As many as 80 Pelasgian traits have been identified.²¹

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, chariot, and naval 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 and ultimately Oceania, with diversions to South and South East Asia; and south across the Sahara into sub-Saharan Africa – notably the area where Niger-Congo (> Bantu) has been spoken in historical times.

For the transcontinental problematic addressed by Menzies, the Pelasgian hypothesis has the following lesson in stock. As a result of Pelasgian transmission many traits initially peculiar to Primary Pelasgian realm have – usually after considerable transformation – ended up in East, South East and South Asia, and in Oceania; similar Pelasgian traits have been transmitted into Europe and into sub-Saharan Africa – some may even have found their way to the New World, either across the Atlantic or across the Pacific. So if, in Africa, Oceania and the New World, we find a trait that also occurred in China in the middle of the 2nd mill. CE, at all not be attributed to direct

¹⁹ van Binsbergen 2010a, 2010b, 2011c, in press (b); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 28.

²⁰ As a result, the term 'Pelasgian' can only be employed as an analytical label, without any 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 in press (b).

²¹ A full list is presented in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chapter 28. A selection of proposed Pelasgian traits includes (order is arbitrary): 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; 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; women's military prowess and pre-marital sexual license; 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* / *Šot al-Jerīd* (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)Iberia, Libya, and Africa / Ifriq[i]a (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.

Chinese influence in the context of Zheng He's voyages, but is likely to have far more ancient and far more general antecedents.

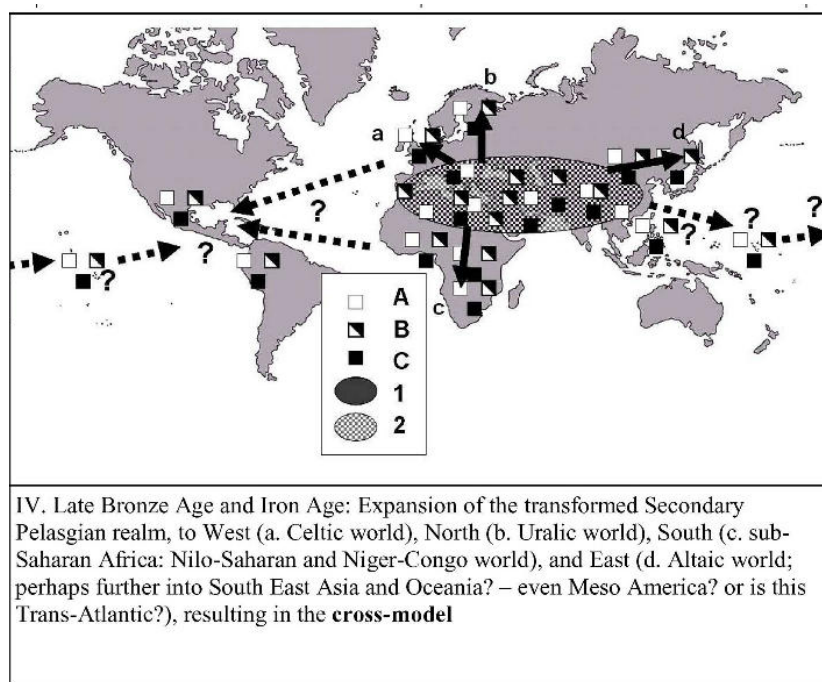
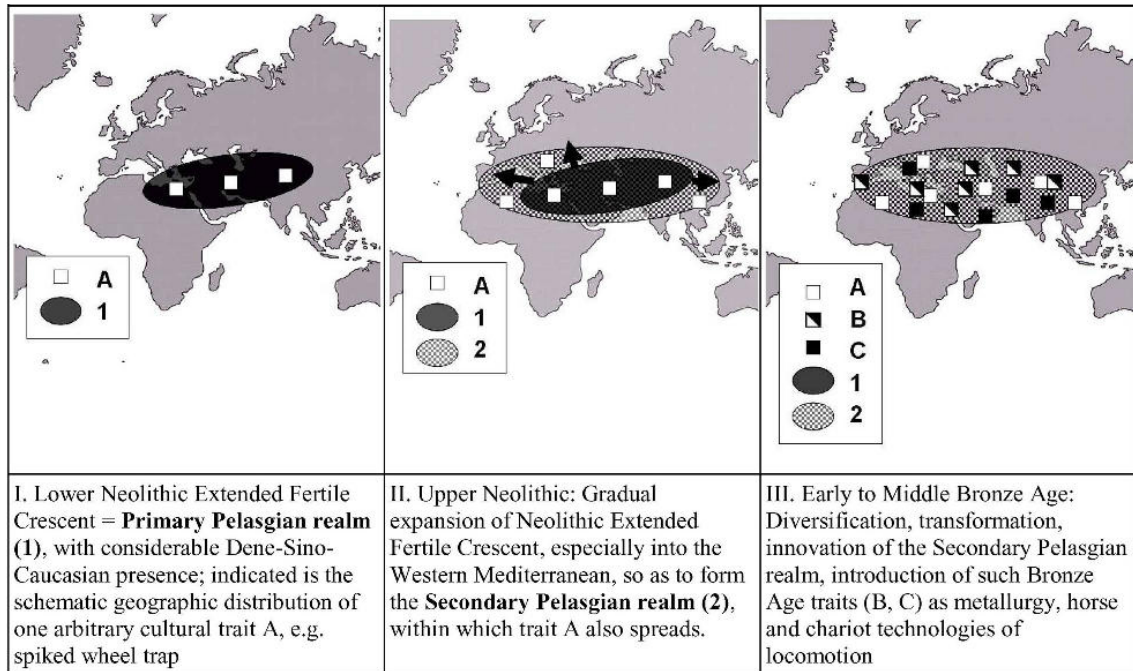
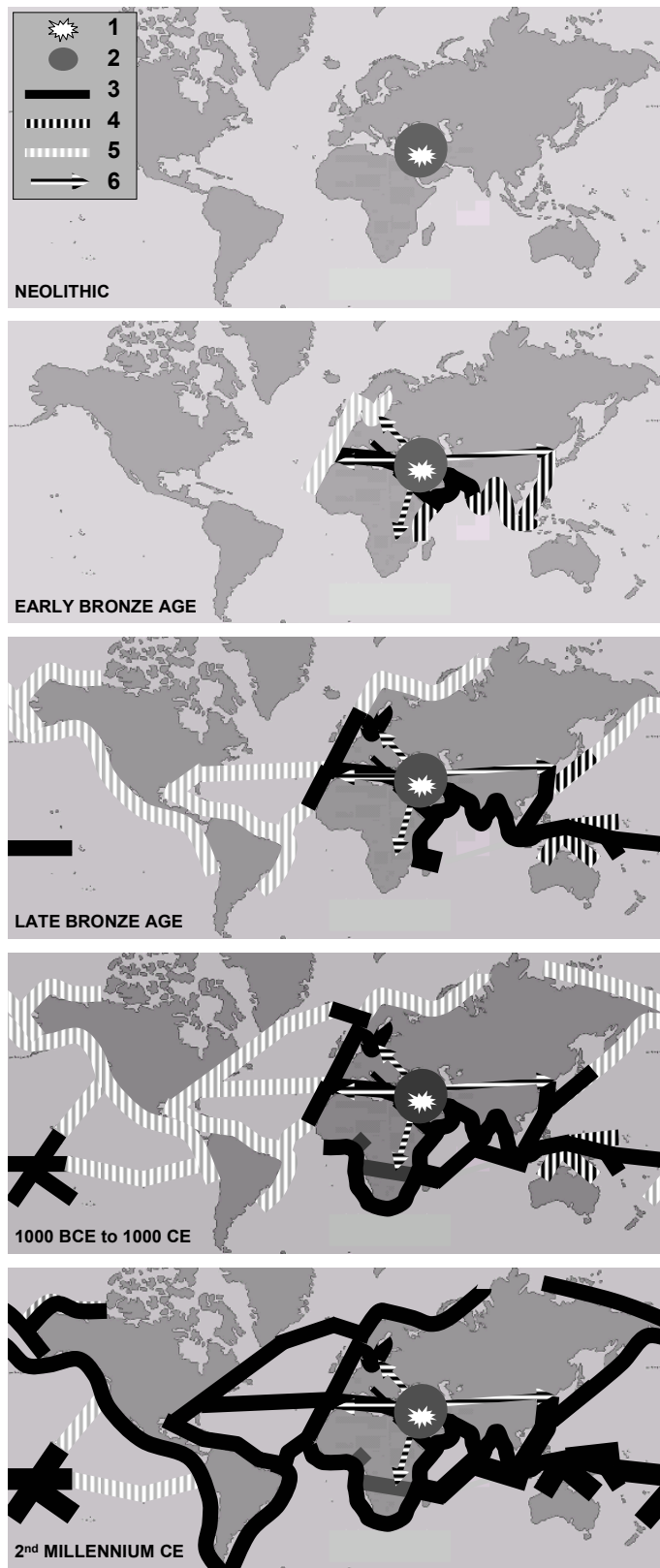


Fig. 4. Diagrammatic representation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis



LEGEND. 1. Proposed origin; 2. Initial expansion of 1; 3. Extent of (semi-)maritime network; 4. idem, putative; 5. idem, highly conjectural; 6. The 'cross-model': expansion of Pelasgian traits (largely overland; cf. van Binsbergen, 2011c, in press (b); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 28).

Fig. 5. Proposed emergence of a global multidirectional, multicentred and diachronic maritime network since the Neolithic.

The point is not to deny the reality and great extent of transcontinental influences, nor to object to the debunking of European initiative in these processes. The emphasis on the Age of Discovery, when the world at large was laid open for European appropriation and exploitation, has been part of European (subsequently North Atlantic) aggressive and racist ideological self-construction as superior – as a part of humanity that was justified to exercise hegemony over all others and to colonise and exploit them without shame.

Of course such an hegemonic ideology deserves to be exposed. But an anti-hegemonic approach that is based on the wrong premises is just as bad as the hegemonic argument it seeks to supplant.

Abstracting from his intricate and adventurous argument, we can say that the three central hypotheses of Menzies' model are:

- *unicentredness* (demographic and cultural flow from, uniquely, China excluding other provenances),
- *unidirectionality* (demographic and cultural flow from China to other parts of the world, but scarcely from these other parts of the world towards China), and
- *ephemerality* (such flow as may have occurred, occurred only at one moment in history, 1421-1423 CE).²²

Having chosen the remunerative postmodern road of amateur revisionist history, strategic media exposure including internet instead of peer-reviewed academic production, there is a serious risk that Menzies' utterly naïve, defective and essentially narrative (*mythical*) model yet becomes established as a popular model and even makes it to school curricula. That would be a blow to European hegemonic notions of the recent past, but also an undeserved boost for Chinese hegemonic notions of today.

Taking for granted the reality of human navigation ever since the Middle Palaeolithic,²³ I have proposed elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2012a, 2012abis, 2012b, 2012c) the gradual unfolding of a *global maritime network* (Fig. 5 above) which started to emerge in the Neolithic, and which soon (in addition to the overland contacts across the Sahara and the Suez isthmus) became the principal condition for Africa's transcontinental continuities – apart from such continuities as stemmed from Anatomically Modern Humans' shared common heritage dating back to before the Out-of-Africa Exodus, c. 80 to 60 ka BP.²⁴

²² Cf:

‘A number of historians, while accepting the author's contention that China reached the New World before Europeans, contend that they did so in sporadic voyages over centuries. The author relies on the scale of the voyages as well as detailed evidence linking settlements to the 1421—3 voyage. The author contends that at least 10,000 people settled in Peru, at least 25,000 in Australasia, and at least 5,000 in Mexico.’ (Menzies 2003: 547)

²³ Bednarik 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999a, 1999b, 2003.

²⁴ Interestingly, at the same conference where I presented, in the keynote (van Binsbergen 2012a), this unfolding of a global maritime network since the Neolithic as a mere hypothesis, the archaeologist Michael Rowlands (2012) immediately obliged by presenting the empirical evidence that goes a considerable way towards substantiating this hypothesis in so far as concerns pre- and proto-historic interactions between Asia and Africa.

The three crucial points about such a global maritime network is that it is conceived to be

- multidirectional
- multcentred, and
- gradually building up, and then active, over very long periods of time right up to the present.

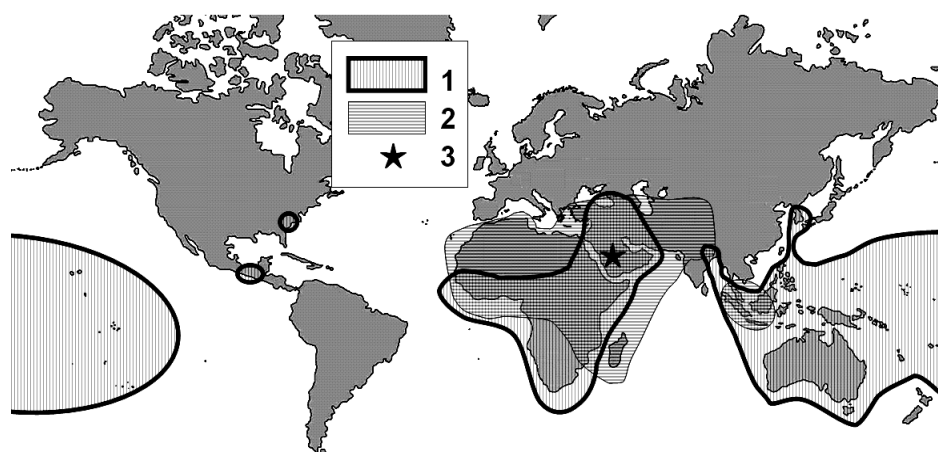
Such conditions imply that already by end of the Neolithic, a process of proto-globalisation had been initiated that led to today's globalisation in the movement of people, ideas and objects.

5. Empirical underpinning of the proposed global maritime network

It is beyond our present scope to argue these important principles in detail here by extensive reference to the relevant literature. However, let me briefly and highly selectively indicate a number of fields whose findings inform, and confirm, my model:

5.1. comparative ethnography

5.1.1. The world distribution of male genital mutilation (in other words, circumcision), as shown in Fig. 6, manifests a number of features that are best explained by the proposed global maritime network – notably the isolated occurrences in South East North America and in Meso America, and the (pre-Islamic) occurrence throughout South East Asia and Oceania but also in Korea. Interestingly, female genital mutilation (essentially limited to Northern and North-eastern Africa, South East Asia and part of Central Asia – with strong Islamic influence upon its transmission) turns out to have a rather different global distribution from the male variety, and does not require recourse to our maritime network hypothesis.



1. Regions where male genital mutilation has been practiced 'traditionally' since pre-modern times
2. Diffusion in context of Islam from 7th century CE from 3
3. Mecca

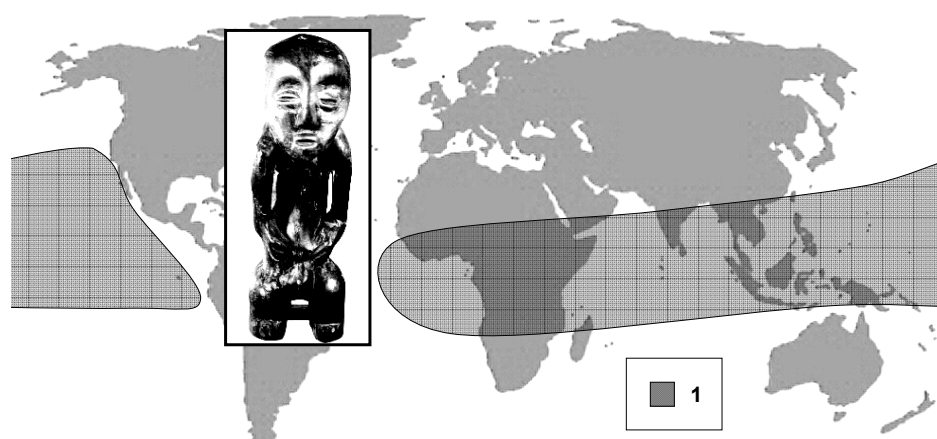
Fig. 6. Global distribution of male genital mutilation (source: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 338, where also extensive references are presented).

5.1.2. the art of Easter Island, where pre-European Peruvian influence is blatant across a distance of over 4,000 kms of open sea (Heyerdahl 1975);²⁵ by the same token, the script-like graphic system of Easter Island has long been recognised to be uncannily similar to the script-like system of the Indus civilisation, across a distance of c. 20,000 km.²⁶

5.1.3. the complex evidence for transcontinental contributions to the Americas (Jett 2002).

5.1.4. musical instruments such as xylophones, hour-glass drums and kettle drums, with a wide distribution all over sub-Saharan Africa, and South and South East Asia; while an originally African background cannot be ruled out, there is the consistent suggestion of westbound transmission from Asia to Africa across the Indian Ocean in the course of the 2nd millennium CE (Jones 1964; Hutton 1946).

5.1.5. The global distribution (Fig. 7) of the iconographic convention of the hunched statuette, suggestive of extensive maritime contacts across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Lommel 1976). Note that the distribution is very similar to that of traditional male genital mutilation.

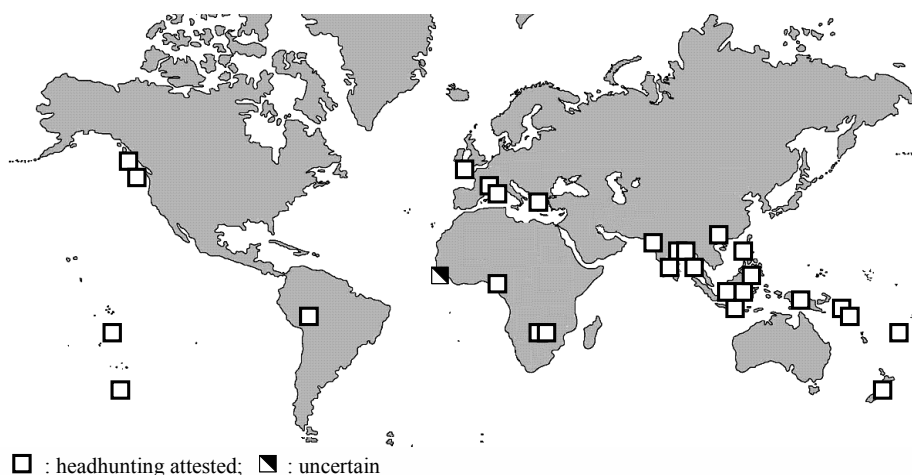


1. Distribution of hunched statuettes (*cf.* inset); source: Lommel 1976
Fig. 7. Distribution of hunched statuettes (cf. inset, after Lommel 1976)

5.1.6. The global distribution of head-hunting (Fig. 8), concentrated in South East Asia and Western Oceania, in such a way that the attestations in Africa, Europe, Eastern Oceania and the Americas might be attributed to global maritime transmission – perhaps in the context of Oppenheimer’s ‘Sunda’ expansion.

²⁵ Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994 signal that there is some genetic evidence for Heyerdahl’s central hypothesis of trans-Pacific migration from South America.

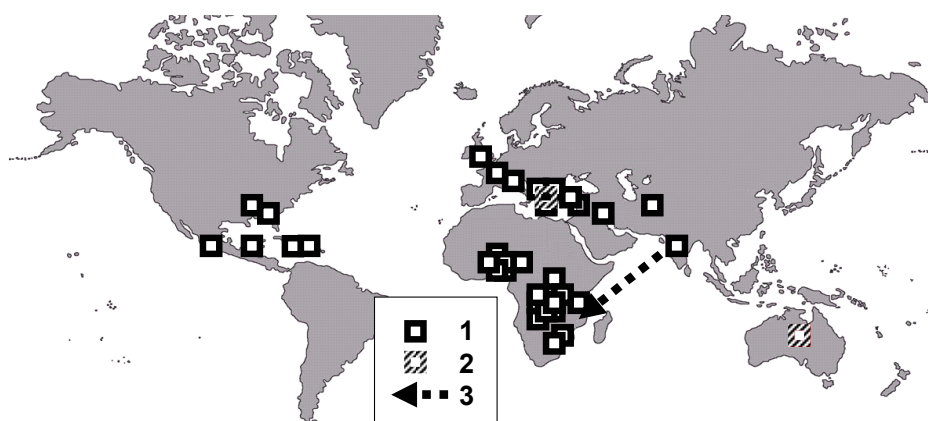
²⁶ Terrien de Lacouperie 1894; Harlez 1895-1896, 1896; de Hevesy 1938. In the light of present-day paradigms and ideologies, the path-breaking and authoritative work by the Anglo-French Sinologist Terrien de Lacouperie is generally considered to be cranky and totally obsolete today; however, for a recent re-appraisal *cf.* van Binsbergen 2012d.



□ : headhunting attested; ■ : uncertain

Fig. 8. Global distribution of head-hunting²⁷

5.1.7. Global distribution of major attestations of the annual communal extinction and rekindling of fire (Fig 9; van Binsbergen 2010a: 183 f). Here the Meso American attestations are suggestive of trans-Atlantic continuities.



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. 9. Global distribution of major attestations of the annual communal extinction and rekindling of fire (van Binsbergen 2010a: 183 f, with references)

5.2. archaeology

5.2.1. The global distribution (Fig. 10) of megalithic practices (building of megalithic structures and associated ritual practices e.g. initiation, burial), which concentrated along ocean shores have been long recognised (and, admittedly, vigorously contested

²⁷ Sources include: Barnes 1993; Collison n.d.; Haddon 1901; Hastings 1908-26; Hutton 1946; Lorrain n.d.; Middelkoop 1963; Nelson 1993; Pickering 1898; Riley 1925; Rosaldo 1980; Urry 1989; Waterson 1996; Watson Andaya 2004; Zegwaard 1959. Headhunting could be regarded as a specific trait to be subsumed under a wider 'skull complex', whose global ramifications I have traced and referenced in van Binsbergen 2010a, including those around the Baltic and the Mediterranean.

in the light of more recent, localising and fragmenting paradigms!)²⁸ to constitute a maritime network going back to the Bronze Age.

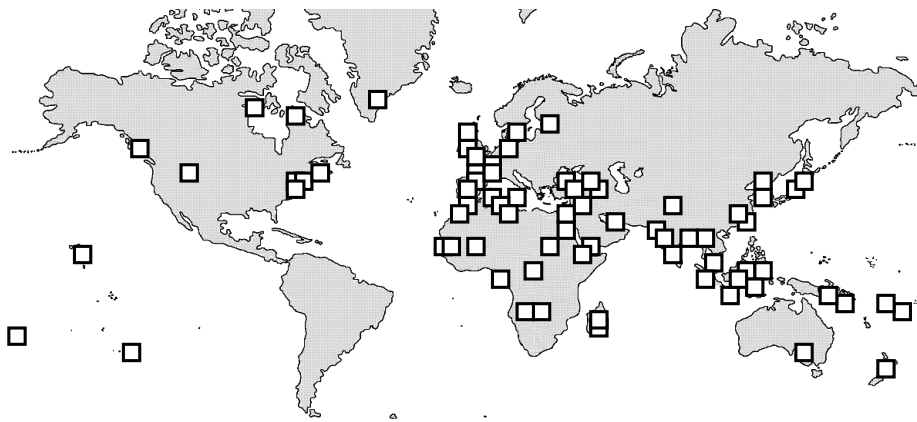


Fig. 10. Global distribution of megalithic structures and practices (source: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 381, with extensive references).

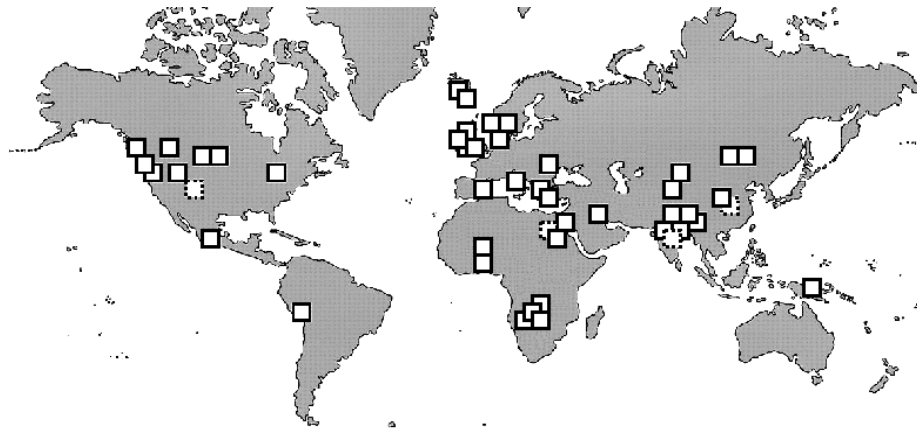
5.2.2. My formulation of the multicentred, multidirectional maritime network was inspired by the recent work on the Sea Peoples' episode in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, by Woudhuizen and myself on *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (2011), which may be fruitfully consulted in this connection.

5.3. comparative mythology

Over the past decade, the field of comparative mythology has gone through a rapid transformation in which it is increasingly asserting itself as a window, in its own right, on humankind's remoter past (Witzel 2001, 2010; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010). It is especially this field that has inspired me to formulate the global maritime network model.

5.3.1. The global distribution (Fig. 11) of the mytheme of the White God of cosmogony and Second Cosmogony – here it is particularly the parallel between North America and the Old World which is suggestive of transcontinental maritime transfers (although the distribution may also be explained by an appeal to *overland* cross-Bering and cross-Suez transmission of Central Asian communalities between African, Amerind and Austric linguistic and cultural in the Upper Palaeolithic (cf. van Binsbergen 2010a, 2011c, and in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 4).

²⁸ Cf. Miksic 1991.



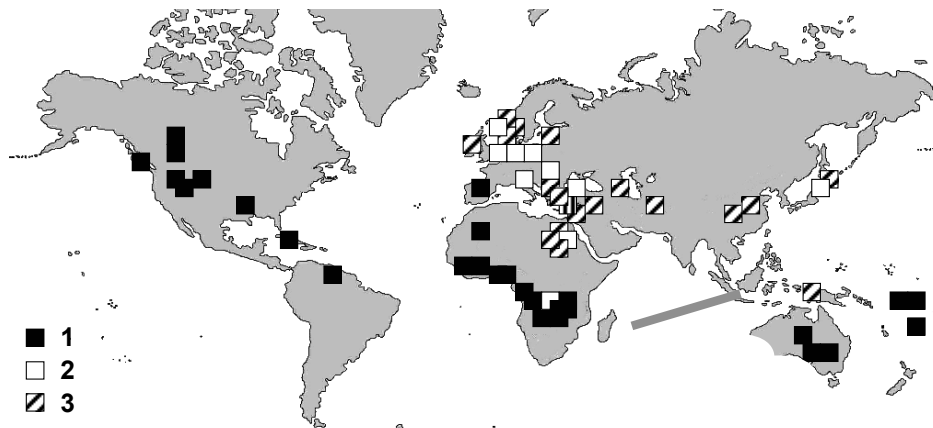
□ : 1 ; ◻ : 2

1. Attestation of the idea of the lowly pigmented, giant god of creation or second creation);
2. uncertain attestation.

Fig. 11. Global distribution of attestations of the White God of Cosmogony or Second Cosmogony (source: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 138, where also extensive references are presented in Table 6.3).

5.3.2. Spider-like connotations of the God of Cosmogony (Fig. 12; van Binsbergen 2010a: 185 f). Again it is the parallelism between American and African attestations, on both sides of the Atlantic, that suggests transmission along the postulated worldwide maritime network. However, if there is a global maritime connection at all, trans-Pacific transmission cannot be ruled out either, given the mytheme's prominence in the Western Pacific. Meanwhile, global distributions of this nature may also be interpreted differently, without recourse to a global maritime network. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010a) I have attempted to reconstruct what basic mythemes ('Narrative Complexes') already circulated among Anatomically Modern Humans prior to the Out-of-Africa Exodus. As it turned out, the mytheme of the spider could be argued to be among these primal mythemes, and that means that the signalled parallelism between American and African manifestations could also be attributed to long-range overland transmission from the Middle Palaeolithic onward – all the more plausible since long-range linguistic analysis has highlighted the affinity, going back to the Upper Palaeolithic, between African, Amerind and Austric linguistic macrophyla.²⁹

²⁹ Cf. van Binsbergen 2010a, 2011c, and in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: ch. 4.

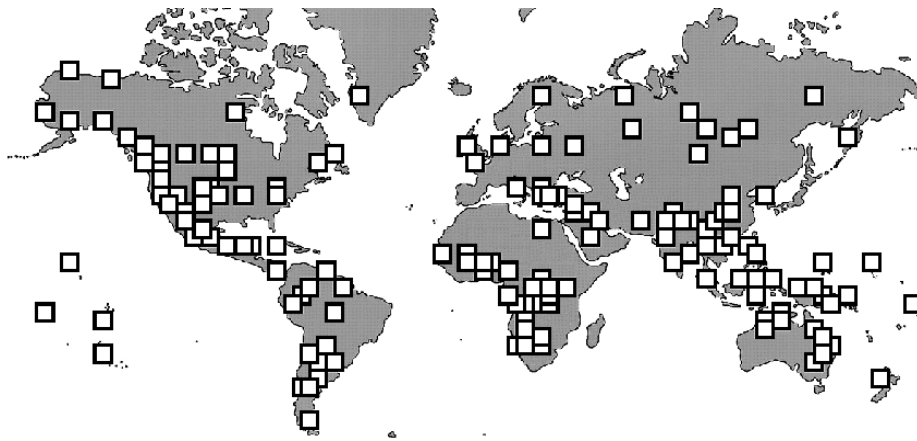


1. Spider Supreme god; 2. oblique references to spider in folklore *etc.*, not mythical; 3. spinning and weaving goddesses, with spider connotations; van Binsbergen 2010a: 185 f.

Fig. 12. Attestations of spider-related mythemes³⁰

5.3.3. The global distribution of flood myths (Fig. 13), with some concentration along ocean shores. In my approaches to comparative mythology, I have tended to the view that flood myths only appeared in the Upper Palaeolithic and therefore did not belong to the original, pre-Out-of-Africa cultural package of Anatomically Modern Humans. The leading comparative mythologist Michael Witzel (2010) however situates them in that package, and in that case the distribution of flood myths should be read, not as indicative of our postulated global maritime network, but of continuities going back to, primarily, overland transmission since the Middle Palaeolithic.

³⁰ Sources on the comparative mythology of spiders include: Banks Island, Melanesia: death was introduced by the Spider creator spirit, Marawa (Cotterell 1989: 143, 151). Enki (the Sumerian 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). There is in Australian Aboriginal art a pattern of concentric circles with radial lines which is generally conceived as a solar motif but which is probably rather a spider motif (Stubbs 1978: 21; also Cotterell 1989: 58). Gilbert Island (Micronesia): Nareau = spider creator deity (Cotterell 1989: 133), made Na Atibun, from his spin grew the sacred tree where all mankind came from; the people scattered falling from this tree (here we encounter two widespread themes: (a) the Narrative Complex 'From the Tree', which I have also reconstructed as part of the oldest, pre-Out-of-Africa mythology of modern humans; and (b) the mytheme of 'the confusion of peoples and of languages', also in flood myths and the associated tower myths, from Ancient Mesopotamia and the Bible to South Central Africa; van Binsbergen 2010a); the luminaries, the sky etc. were made from Na Atibu's body parts (Cotterell 1989: 224:); there was Nareau the older (the spider spirit) and also Nareau the younger (Cotterell 1989: 242:). West of Gilbert Island a similar myth is recorded: Nauru (west of Gilbert Islands): the primal spider Areop-enap, creates heaven and earth from shell with the assistance of insects (Willis 1994: 294). Leza (Zambia) departs to heaven on a spider's web (Cotterell 1989: 89); the same theme for Barotseland (Jacottet 1899-1901; van Binsbergen 2010a). 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, Spanish Levant Art (Bandi & Maringer 1952: 139). Spider woman among the Navaho; the spider is here not the solar god but makes access to the sun god possible for two hero sons (Cotterell 1989: 134); Spider woman Naste Estsan (a palindrome!) was the benevolent god of the Navaho (Cotterell 1989: 240). the Spider Inktomi appears as culture hero and trickster in parts of the N. American prairie (Willis 1994: 227). From the Neolithic on, anthropomorphised spider-like goddesses appear as patrons of warfare, weaving, virginity, in a extensive belt from West Africa (Nzambi) to the Mediterranean (Neith, Anat, Athena, Anahita, etc.), Iran and China but an ideology and practice of male supremacy and state formation has relegated these goddesses to powerless women's quarters (*cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142). Thus spider mythology offers another instance of the surprising mythological parallels between Oceania and Western Eurasia to be discussed shortly in the main text.



□ : 1

1 = Flood myth attested; sources: this figure van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; sources: Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; Isaak 2006.

Fig. 13. Global distribution of Flood myths (elaborate and simpler types together)

5.3.4. East-West mythological parallels between the Western Old World and Oceania.

Oppenheimer, with all his interest (1998) in comparative mythology (unfortunately guided only by James Frazer, *floruit* c. 1900 CE) does not exploit to the full the truly puzzling fact that the distribution of a considerable number of mythemes centres on the Western and the Eastern end of Eurasia without the Pelasgian, trans-Steppe model offering a satisfactory explanation (for the distribution of these mythemes has mainly blanks in the Eurasian Steppe belt itself). These are specially sea-related mythemes, such as

- gods / culture heroes fishing up the land from the sea (in Ancient Nordic and Oceanian mythology);³¹
- similar protagonists inventing the sail (in Greek and Oceanian mythology);³²
- the mytheme of incessant divine intercourse preventing the world (the junior gods) from being born, is found both in the Aegean, on the Bight of Benin, and in Oceania.³³

³¹ In North European mythology: Thor and Hymir fishing for sea serpent Jormungadr (Sturluson 1954); Oceania (the Hawaiian and Polynesian culture hero Maui): Dixon 1916: 43; Westervelt 1910: 24 f, 88; both regions combined:

‘Thor and Hymir fishing for sea serpent Jormungadr, has close parallels with 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’ [from both monsters, the rest of the world came into being, cf. the slaying of Tīāmat in Babylonian myth] (Cotterell 1989: 244 f).

³² Daedalus in Ancient Greek mythology (Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 9.XI.5; the Hawaiian wind god Pakaā credited with the invention of the sail (Beckwith 1940: 81 f; Cotterell 1989: 230).

³³ The Maori myth of the primal gods Papa and Rangi locked in intercourse (Grey 1855: 1 f; Cotterell 1989: 244); the Nigerian primal gods Obatala and Odudua (Heaven and Earth), similarly engaged (Ellis 1894: ch. II. 3; Scheub 2000); the Ancient Greek myth of Uranus and Gaia, whose unending embrace was violently disturbed by their son Cronus emasculating his father and opening the way for cosmogony (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 133 f).

A similarly global distribution has the mytheme of ‘Creation of humankind from earth or mud’ (*Genesis*, Egypt (Hnūm), South East Asia, South China, Oceania (Willis 1994: 22, 91). As we have seen above, also spider gods range from West Africa (Nzamb / Nyambi), via the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East (e.g. Athena, Neith, Anahita) to Oceania. We might see these distributions as resulting, after all (*pace* van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) from Sunda influence upon Western Eurasia – just as Oppenheimer claimed (and in that case spuriously) for the *Genesis* mythology. As we will see below under point 6.1, there are indications of Austric / Sunda influence on Ancient Egypt, the Eastern Mediterranean and West Asia. More convincingly, however, we may take recourse to our hypothesis of a multi-centred, multidirectional, transcontinental maritime network. That hypothesis, while admitting the possibility and the fact of contact between South East Asia and the West, does not in the least stipulate borrowing in exclusively one direction. However, given the Graeco-Roman Ancient World’s extensive familiarity with the Indian Ocean environment (as attested by a text like *Periplus* – *cf.* Casson 1989 – from the beginning of the Common Era, by the massive circulation of Ancient Roman coins in the Indian Ocean region, the fact that diaphanous silk dresses were the great ladies’ fashion in Imperial Rome, etc.), and the relatively late peopling of Oceania in the most recent millennia, there is some probability that these parallels derive from a one-directional eastbound diffusion from a Mediterranean / West Asian source – counter-directional to the Sunda thesis.

5.3.5. The global distribution of the mytheme of the cosmic egg (Fig. 14), indicative of transcontinental maritime transfers, either West-East, or (in terms of Oppenheimer’s Sunda model) East-West (van Binsbergen 2011b with full references and interpretative models).

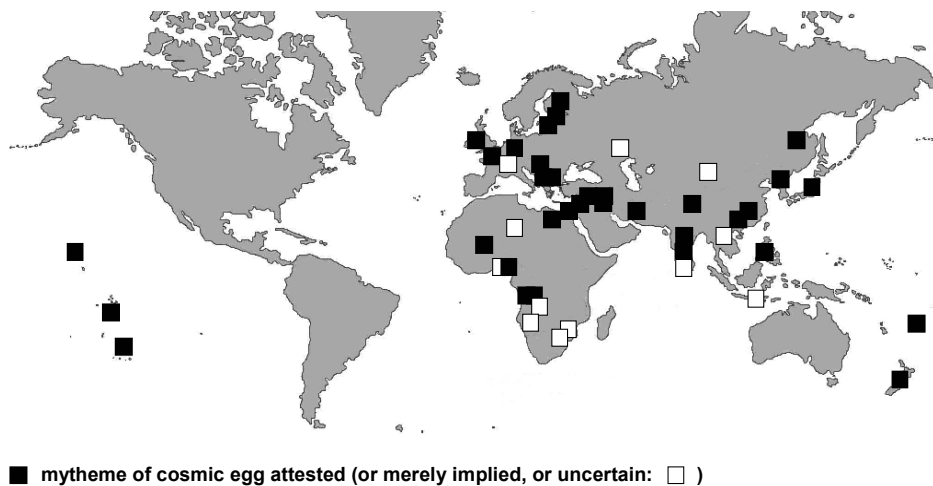


Fig. 14. Global distribution of the mytheme of the cosmic egg (van Binsbergen 2011b, with extensive references)

5.3.6. The global distribution of the mytheme of the leg child (Fig. 15). Strictly speaking, the leg child is a mythical figure who, like Dionysus in Ancient Greek mythol-

ogy, is born from his (female *or* male!) parent's leg or thigh.³⁴ But by extension the term could be applied to any unusual birth where the child springs from the (female *or* male!) parent's body at any other place than the ordinary (maternal) birth channel (*cf.* Willis 1994; Ions 1980; Cotterell 1989):

- Athena (bursting from her father's head, in full armour);³⁵
- Attis (from Myrrhe, a shrub);³⁶
- Hephaestus (from Hera's thigh);³⁷
- Erichthonius / Erechtheus, Athens' first king and born from Hephaestus' ejaculation against Athena's thigh, could also qualify as a leg child;³⁸
- Indra (burst from his mother's side in full armour);³⁹
- Bursting from mother's side also among Huron and Iroquois, as well as Seneca, among Native American peoples;⁴⁰
- but it is also a widely recognised Aarne-Thompson motif (T584.1; Uther 2004);
- also attested, e.g., among the Koryaks of Iran (Omidasalar 1984);
- and in the legendary biography of King Jumong / Chumong or Dongmyeong-seongwang 東明聖王 (late first century BCE) of Northern Korea (La Shure 2000);
- in Ancient Egyptian mythology, Seth – Osiris' brother and adversary – was reputedly born from his mother's side.⁴¹

The leg child occurs moreover in the following contexts:

- Marshall Islands (Edao, child of the Creator god) (Cotterell 1989: 121, 196)
- Papua (Dudugera, the sun god, 'leg child' is the literal meaning of this name; Cressy 1999)
- A few African locations, among which we can count the Ancient Egyptian one, but also: the leg child Lianja among the Nkundo of Congo (Cavendish c.s. 1991: 210).

³⁴ *Homeric Hymn 1 to Dionysus*; Euripides, *Bacchae*, 90 *f.*, 285 *f.*, 520 *f.*; [pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3. 26-29; *cf.* Atsma 2000-2008.

³⁵ [Pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1, 20.

³⁶ [Pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3, 183 *f.*; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10, 298-514.

³⁷ Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 924 *f.*, 929a *f.*; [Pseudo-]Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1, 19 – the 'birth from Hera's thigh' motif however is attested by implication only, in parallel to Zeus' parthenogenetic births.

³⁸ Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 1, 2, 6.

³⁹ *R.gveda*, 15.

⁴⁰ Graulich 1988; Cotterell 1989: 219 (the Algonquin evil trickster Malsum), and *passim*.

⁴¹ *Pyramid texts*, see Seawright n.d.; Mercer 1952: utterance 222 §205a-b; Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 12.



Fig. 15. The global distribution of the mytheme of the leg child

By and large, the above, yields a familiar ‘Pelagian’ distribution, of which the Oceanian and even the North American attestations may be considered extensions. The theme of the leg child is related to that of Flood myths: a common theme of flood myths is the problem of repopulating the earth after the Flood, and there, all over the world, many myths favour not ordinary heterosexual procreation between the surviving humans (often a sibling pair, even twins) but asexual reproduction from plants, fruits or shoots – rather like the leg child. Perhaps there is an ancient echo here of one of the oldest mythemes – one which I have proposed to have belonged (*cf.* above) to the pre-Out-of-Africa common heritage of Anatomically Modern Humans, the Narrative Complex ‘From the Tree’ (as the origin of humankind).⁴² With so few attestations, it is very dangerous to propose a historical reconstruction. However, given the

⁴² The leg child motif may also be interpreted in a very different way. In *Borean (a language construct supposed to be spoken in Central Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic; *cf.* Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), nearly all words are supposed to have the structure $X_n Y X_n Y$, where X_n is a specific consonant and Y an unspecified vowel. There are two pairs of consonantal homonyms (the vowel structure is much more difficult to reconstruct, and consonantal homonyms may have the same or a different vowel structure) that refer to both ‘morning’ and to ‘leg’ or ‘thigh’: $(CVKV)_{1,2}$ and $(PVKTV)_{1,2}$. There are slight indications that in the Central Asian Upper Palaeolithic, newborn children were dedicated to the early morning sun: the custom is attested in Ancient Egypt and in present-day Bantu-speaking S.C. Africa (van Binsbergen 1992), but also neophytes in the Nadenē-speaking Amerindian female puberty initiation (which ritually re-enacts a birth) are thus dedicated – *Borean is arguably the context where these various linguistico-genetic strands were still together. In *Borean times, we are still (for reasons outside our present scope) before the emergence of the ‘upward gaze’ of naked-eye astronomy and shamanism, and instead of dedication to the sun, we may read ‘dedication to the Primal Waters in their ‘above’ aspect’, *i.e.* ‘to the sky’. The myth of the leg child could then have arisen because of deliberate punning, or accidental confusion, of the two meanings involved in both $(CVKV)_{1,2}$ and $(PVKTV)_{1,2}$: ‘morning’ and ‘leg’. *Cf.* reconstructed *Borean (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008):

*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)	

(here, C, K, P, T have their usual phonetic value; V is an unspecified vowel; the subscripts merely serve to distinguish between the various apparent homonyms). Anthropology has traditionally associated ignorance or denial of the role of genital sexuality in human procreation with pre-food-production modes of production preceding the Neolithic. The strangely twisted, apparently extremely archaic imagery underlying the concept of the leg child makes it even conceivable that this mytheme is ultimately of Neanderthal origin.

specificity of the mytheme, one is tempted to see the attestations as forming one far-flung complex, globally disseminated along the proposed maritime network – where the New World attestations may derive from trans-Atlantic transmission (accessible via the St Laurens River) from an epicentre that could have been either in West Asia or (as in Oppenheimer’s Sunda scenario) in South East Asia.

5.4. zoogeography and phytogeography

5.4.1. The reconstructed origin and diffusion (Fig. 16) of Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) (Lee 1999).

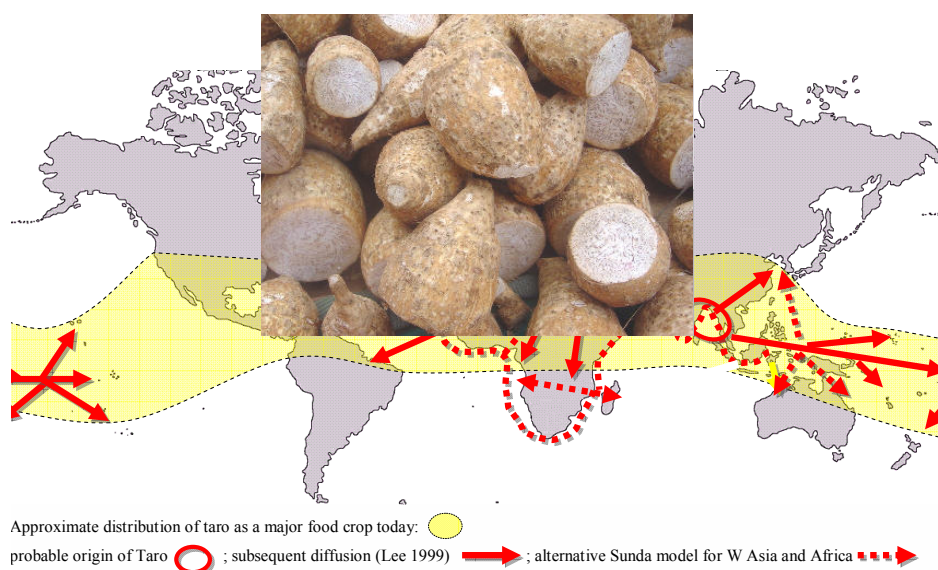


Fig. 16. The global distribution and origin of Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) (Lee 1999), and possible diffusion

5.4.2. The appearance of New-Guinea-originated bananas in West Africa, 1000 BCE (Blench 2009; Dick-Read 2005, and references cited there);

5.4.3. the appearance of Moluccan-originated cloves in Anatolia, 1500 BCE) (Wright 1982);⁴³

5.4.4. America-originating crops appearing in sub-Saharan African contexts (as well as in South and South East Asia) in pre-Columbian times.⁴⁴

⁴³ I am indebted to Stephen Oppenheimer for pointing out these two examples of bananas and cloves to me, but without the references. His 1998 book contains numerous further suggestions as to extensive borrowings along a postulated ‘Sunda’ unidirectional and uncentred maritime network stretching from Indonesia via the Indus and the Persian Gulf to Scandinavia, but most of these claims do not stand up to critical archaeological scrutiny: clay figurines, semi-circular axe blades, neck torques, shell money, mankala games.

⁴⁴ E.g. Jeffreys 1953, 1963, 1967, 1971b (a claim of trans-Atlantic transmission of American food crops by Arab navigation in the early 2nd mill. CE), 1975; and my footnote 51.

5.5. *population genetics*

5.5.1. Global distribution thalassaemias (Oppenheimer 1998; Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994)

5.5.2. some other classic genetic markers (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994);

5.5.3. the peopling of Oceania from 5 ka BP from Taiwan and / or Indonesia (Oppenheimer 1998, 2004b; Oppenheimer & Richards 2001).

5.5.4. For specifically Africa's transcontinental genetic continuities and the probable maritime dimension there, see the extensive argument in van Binsbergen 2012c.

5.6. *linguistics*

5.6.1. Strikingly convincing possible Austric etymologies for key names in religion and mythology of the Eastern Mediterranean and West Asia⁴⁵ suggest that the Sunda maritime expansion postulated by Oppenheimer may yet have been something of a tangible reality.⁴⁶

5.6.2. More comprehensively, we must consider the affinity between the Niger-Congo and Austric (including Austronesian – the language cluster dominating in insular South East Asia and in Oceania) linguistic macrophyla in the light of transcontinental continuities. Cluster analysis of reconstructed proto-lexical material revealed an unmistakable affinity between the Niger-Congo, Austric and Amerind linguistic macrophyla.⁴⁷ In that context, I offered a mathematical / distributional argument to explain this affinity of globally 'peripheral' macrophyla (by contradistinction from the more centrally Old-World macrophyla Eurasiatic (including Indo-European, Dravidian, Altaic etc.), Afroasiatic and Sino-Caucasian, all resulting from the disintegration of *Borean in the Late Upper Palaeolithic (possibly reflecting an early fission in the 'Out-of-Africa' migration, perhaps already in the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle

⁴⁵ Including: Neith, Ra^c, Osiris, Minus, Talus, Dilmun; *cf.* van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 370 *f.* Also *cf.* Pedersen, n.d.

⁴⁶ Is it possible that a gradual westward expansion of seaborne refugees from flooding 'Sundaland' from the early Holocene on (as postulated by Oppenheimer 1998) contributed to the spectacular rise of seafaring skills in and around the Mediterranean from Neolithic times on, when the oldest harbours (Corinth, Joppe / Jaffa) were established in the latter region? Karst (1931) attributes Early Bronze Age seafaring skills in the Levant to a postulated return migration of proto-Basque (< Sino-Caucasian) speakers to West Asia, from South-western Europe (Iberia / Liguria), but that seems to be begging the question. Given the extremely favourable conditions for navigation in the Mediterranean (minimum tidal effects, chains of islands, deep inland bays, relative paucity of strong winds, storms and currents) as compared to most oceanic waters worldwide, it seems safe to consider the rise of navigation in the Mediterranean from Neolithic times onward as, primarily, an endogenous process (Newby 1975). But this does not preclude some early 'Sunda' impact – for which also some indications in the mythological field might be adduced (notably the mythological parallels between Western Eurasia and Oceania, discussed above); even though these may also be explained from Ancient Graeco-Roman impact on the Indian Ocean environment, and more diffusely, through 'Pelagian' transmission, via the Eurasian Steppe.

⁴⁷ Van Binsbergen, 2011c and in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77 *f.*

Palaeolithic, between mitochondrial DNA haplogroups M and N). Arguably, *Borean reflexes make up over a quarter of the reconstructed proto-lexicon of Niger-Congo (> proto-Bantu), which reveals Eurasia as *one of the* provenances of the latter macrophyllum, even though its historical attestations have largely been confined to sub-Saharan Africa. Our oldest attestations, however, of proto-Bantu are found, not in Africa (where the widespread absence of writing, but in the Mediterranean region, especially in the Levant, where the hydronym Jabbok (Canaan; *cf.* proto-Bantu *jabbok*, ‘fordable place in a river’) is the most significant case in point.⁴⁸ Modern reconstructions, based on mere conjectural extrapolation, tend to situate the origin of Bantu in the Lake Chad basin c. 8000 BCE; they postulate the formative period of that language cluster to end in the middle of the 1st millennium BCE, in West Africa, after which Bantu begins its eminently successful expansion (linked to the spread of specifically ‘Bantu’ socio-cultural traits: the kingship, specific modes of production including agriculture, and specific beliefs, symbols and rituals including arboreal shrines, puberty rites, ancestral veneration and sorcery) to the East and the South, finally filling most of the Southern half of sub-Saharan Africa. Specialists⁴⁹ acknowledge the probable contribution, to Bantu, from other macrophyla then circulating in West Africa, especially proto-Nilo-Saharan and proto-KhoiSan. However, the affinity between Austric and Niger-Congo signalled above and attributed to the disintegration of *Borean in the Upper Palaeolithic, could also in part be explained from a much more recent specific ‘Sunda’ influence upon proto-Bantu:

- either during one of the latter’s preparatory phases inside (South Western) Eurasia (which brings to mind the contested but intriguing, Afrocentrist claims of the existence of highly pigmented populations in West Asia including the Caucasus in the Bronze Age – *cf.* footnote -62 below, and the previous point 5.6.1 concerning possible Austric influence on Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean in general), or
- in West Africa itself, as a result of actual penetration, perhaps in the 1st millennium BCE, of Austric-speakers to West Africa, having completed a maritime journey across Cape of Good Hope and along the African Atlantic coast, in the manner suggested by Dick-Read 2005.

Both these explanations tally with the by now well established Back-into-Africa hypothesis, of which the Sunda hypothesis is just one specific application.

5.7. Discussion

In the light of the model of a global, multcentred and multidirectional maritime network since the Neolithic, the very notion of human representatives of one continent uniquely ‘discovering’ another continent becomes ridiculously myopic and an expression of ethnocentric perspectival distortion. Such a notion ideologically twists the constant flow back and forth of people, goods and ideas since the Middle Palaeolithic, into a hegemonic game of the attainment of ‘firsts’. According to the proposed model of a multcentred, multidirectional global maritime network in existence since the

⁴⁸ Van Binsbergen, 2011c and in press (a); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 81f.

⁴⁹ *Cf.* Vansina 1995, 2006, 2008; Ehret 1998, 2001; Oliver *et al.* 2001.

Neolithic, the Chinese did not ‘discover’ America any more than Columbus did, but it is quite possible that (after so many other peoples and individual navigators and cross-Bering walkers) Chinese navigators reached some parts of the Americas earlier than Columbus or his European contemporaries did.

Menzies brings together an enormous amount of factual claims based on old and very recent literature and ephemera, some of them properly referenced, most of them without proper critical assessment, some of them downright wrong, yet some of them convincing as indicating late-medieval Chinese traces in Africa, Oceania, and the New World. Against the multidirectional, multcentred, diachronic model presented in Fig. 5, these late-medieval Chinese traces should not surprise us, but should persuade us, as a next step, to liberate Menzies’ argument from its hopeless uncentredness, unidirectionality, and ephemerality. A total revision of Menzies’ data set, properly referenced so that the fantasy and fraudulent elements can be weeded out, subjected to professional historical and textual criticism with full command of all the relevant languages especially Chinese, and re-interpreted in terms of the model of Fig. 5, would greatly risk to undermine Menzies’ construct as a pillar of Chinese chauvinism today, but would at least do justice to his many years of research, even if methodologically and theoretically flawed.

6. An Africanist perspective: In search of transcontinental connections of Africa’s Atlantic coast

As an Africanist studying the African continent’s transcontinental continuities in pre- and protohistory for over two decades now, I was particularly interested in what new light Menzies would try to shed on the so-called dark continent. Thanks to scholarship from the early twentieth century CE on,⁵⁰ and the anthologising of much of that work by Basil Davidson (1959), the Chinese connection with East Africa has been well known to specialists in African Studies, with Chinese porcelain abounding in medieval royal establishments along the east coast and as far inland as the famous sites of Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe, with Zheng He’s fleet visiting East Africa, and African ambassadors and wild animals being taken to the Chinese Imperial Court. As far as Africa is concerned, the endless and repetitive listing of ‘evidence’ in Menzies’ Appendix I scarcely adds anything new to this overall picture.⁵¹ That the South Afri-

⁵⁰ Cf. Rockhill 1913-1915; Duyvendak 1933, 1938, 1939, 1949, 1953; Needham with Wang Ling 1959; Dart 1951, Filesi 1961, Chittick & Rotberg 1975.

⁵¹ Admittedly, Menzies offers some illustrative detail derived from more or less recent research, such as the East African coastal Pate community apparently descending from shipwrecked Chinese sailors (already described by the Early Modern Jesuit Monclaro; cf. Monclaro 1898-1903 / 1572), boasting a bronze lion with what looks like Chinese iconography. On the other hand, Menzies’ obsession to reduce, worldwide, everything remotely reminiscent of Asia to specifically Chinese and specifically in Zheng He’s wake, makes him miss the complex, multidirectional connotations of the ethnonym and place name *bajun*, which other authors link up with boat people from South East Asia (Dick-Read 2005 and references there). Like Jeffreys (1953, 1963, 1971a, 1975, all duly cited by Menzies; however, he missed out on Jeffreys 1971b – the latter’s claim of an Arab trans-Atlantic connection in the early 2nd mill. CE would have upset his applecart) and Dick-Read (2005), Menzies acknowledges the presence of originally New World food crops in Africa in pre-Columbian times – but instead of insisting on the Zheng He / Chinese scenario, one could appeal to direct pre-Columbian trans-Atlantic transmission (for which I give a few indications in the main text), or mediation in a westbound direction from Peru across the Pacific and the Indian Ocean – the Heyerdahl (1952) proposal. Menzies sees the interconti-

can coastline, both East and West of Cape of Good Hope, was known to Chinese navigators from the Yuan 元朝 dynasty onwards had already been argued by reputable Chinese specialists such as Li Anshan 李安山 (2000, *cf.* 2012; also *cf.* Snow 1988), years before Commander Menzies swaggered into the field.

For the Africanist, the interesting bit in Menzies' argument relates to Africa's Atlantic coast. Few Africanists (but I am one of them) have ventured to make the counter-paradigmatic claim (*cf.* Mauny 1960) of any transcontinental connections for this part of Africa, either trans-Atlantic or from the Indian Ocean. True to his preposterous methods, Menzies uses European evidence as indications of Asian presence along the African Atlantic coast, and attributes such presence inevitably to Zheng He's fleet. In China and at Galle, Sri Lanka, Zheng He left steles commemorating his expeditions.⁵² *Despite the absence of any Chinese inscriptions* in this context, Menzies (who instead claims traces of South West Indian inscriptions here) manages to interpret two Portuguese *padraões* at 'Matadi Falls' (more probably Yellala Falls) near the mouth of the Congo River (perhaps, as Menzies proposes, the 'Garbin' of Fra Mauro's map), and at the village of Janela in one of the Cap Verde Islands, as proof (in the form of observation platforms for lunar eclipses) that Zheng He's fleet passed through there.⁵³ In

mental connections bringing cotton from India to North Africa and the Cape Verde Islands – and also 26-chromosome American cotton to Africa and the Cape Verde Islands; bottle gourds, coffee and root crops from Africa to the Central Pacific, Puerto Rica and Brazil, respectively; cochineal (red dye from insects) from Mexico to India and South East Africa; and tobacco from America to Africa – but might have included in this connection evidence (Nuttall 1909) for purple dye from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Pacific Coast of Mexico, which however he cites elsewhere. From the same network, South Africa is alleged to have received Chinese ship's dogs; Madagascar the fulvous tree duck from Bengal; whereas not only ostriches were recorded in the context of Chinese exploration – they need not have been African, varieties also roamed the deserts of West and Central Asia – but also African giraffes and zebras, as mentioned above, and allegedly also hippopotami, were brought to China, African elephants (amazingly, for there is no historical record of them having ever been domesticated – even Hannibal's elephants would appear to have been Asian ones; Richter 1979) to Meso and South America. Menzies' claims as to the transcontinental transmission of these large mammals is based, in addition to iconographic material, mainly on barely referenced Early Modern travelogues (e.g. Ranking 1827, Clavigero & Mora 1826, *cf.* Gordon 1832) and (also because of the huge practical, e.g. nutritional problems involved) need to be checked with the greatest suspicion – contemporary, pre-Linnaeus zoological nomenclature was extremely variable and imprecise, and for instance, Menzies' references to Clavigero [& Cullen, 1807]: I, 84 as an attestation of elephants is disqualifyingly misleading: the passage says explicitly that no remains of hippopotami 'or even a single tooth of an elephant' have ever been found to the author[s]' knowledge – elephants are also discussed in four places in Clavigero & Cullen, 1807: vol. II but only at a general zoological level without any suggestion of them occurring in the New World. Of course, this one example is already enough to dismiss Menzies as a contributor to valid knowledge. Interestingly, meanwhile, Menzies (2003: 574) has spotted the South African expression 'Chinese Hottentots' for the Namaqua ethnic group (the expression is attributed to an unidentified 'J. Parkinson'; and also *cf.* Theal 1910, 1898-1903; Green 1946: 145).

⁵² I am specifically indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for financing my trip to Sri Lanka, 2011, in the course of which Galle on the South-West coast of the island was extensively visited.

⁵³ The Galle stele is depicted in Menzies book in a Plates section after p. 288, but in such a way that the inscriptions are not manifest; however, see: Anonymous, 'Galle trilingual inscription'. Menzies does not provide illustrations of either of the African *padraões*, however crucial to his African argument. Not thanks to any clue offered by Menzies, I may have identified the Matadi memorial (my Fig. 17) but found no evidence of any Asian elements – that evidence may be there but it does not show in the photograph, and it may be the wrong object after all. Incidentally, the atmosphere of mystery and revelation with which Menzies surrounds his account of selected *padraões* is hardly justified: these steles were taken aboard ready-made when the ships sailed from Portugal, dozens have been placed in the course of the Portuguese discoveries, of many the locations are known, some have only been retrieved in the

other words, the professional Africanist who hopes to find here decisive proof of transcontinental continuities around Africa's Atlantic coast, is seriously disappointed.

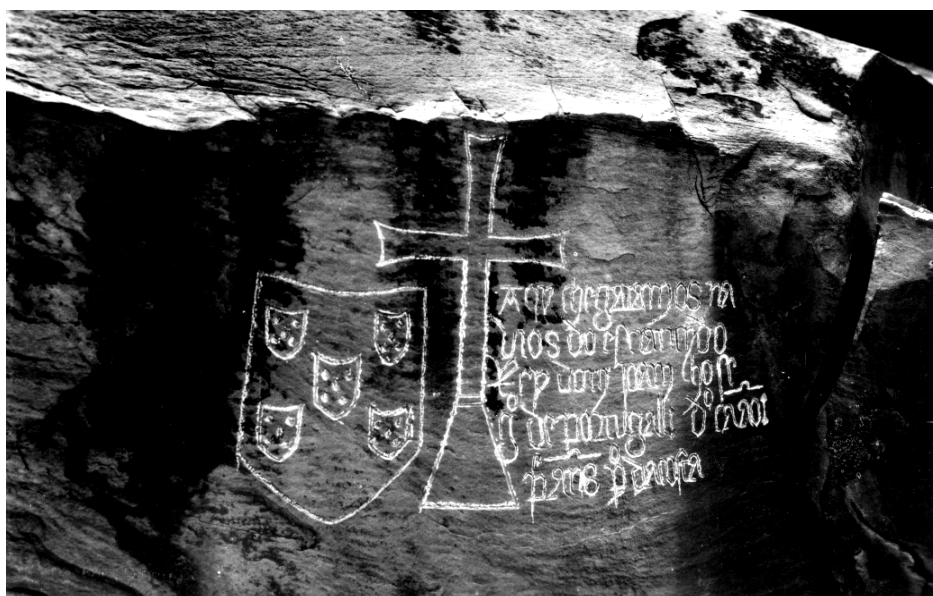


Fig. 17. A Portuguese memorial at Matadi, mouth of the Congo River. No evidence of Malayalam (Kerala, South India) let alone Chinese script is in evidence here (source: Anonymous, 'Yellala Falls').⁵⁴

Disappointed, especially since there is an increasing body of evidence suggesting Asian intrusions on the African Atlantic coast in relatively recent, protohistorical times. Elsewhere⁵⁵ I have brought together indications for direct or indirect Asian influence on the African Atlantic coast, and these are not to be underestimated. They include:

- divination⁵⁶ bowls whose forms and functions converge between the Southern

course of the 20th century CE, and these *padraõs* feature prominently in the international literature on discovery (e.g. Newby 1975: 62 f). The description of how Menzies arrived at the idea that the writing he believed seeing on the *Janela padraõ* would be Mayalayam script, from Kerala, South West India (e.g. അള ഉറങ്ങ ഐവഖ), makes one of the most amusing parts of his book and best illustrations of his methods – he sees signs with little circles, this reminds him of script specimens he has seen on Indian banknotes, so a fax message to that authoritative scholarly institution named the Bank of India is to clinch the matter... This is not the kind of author to whom one would entrust the rewriting of world history.

⁵⁴ However, a different memorial may be meant: Menzies does not give an illustration of the claimed 'observation platform' at 'Matadi Falls' (rather: Yellala Falls?); the present image is the only one I could find.

⁵⁵ van Binsbergen 2012a, 2012abis, 2012b, 2012c, and references cited there; also cf. Dick-Read 2005, which has been a great inspiration and source on this point.

⁵⁶ Divination, but not in the form of geomantic divination, plays a certain role in Menzies' argument. He claims that Zheng He's fleet carried chickens, particularly, he claims, because their blood was used in a form of Chinese divination that, allegedly, was transmitted, as a result of Zheng He's voyages, to Meso America, Peru, and Brazil. In actual fact, chicken-blood divination is a regional minority trait in China, where divination by chicken bones (Loewe 1995), and especially divination by geomantic methods associated with *I Ching* 易經, has been far more common, and far more frequently described

Africa and the Bight of Benin; for their form there are Chinese prototypes in divination vessels and perhaps also in nautical instruments – for their function there is the elaborate complex of geomantic divination, to which also the Chinese *I Ching* 易經 system belongs but which has been extensively and repeatedly demonstrated to have reached Africa via the Indian Ocean in a form derived from the Islamic divination system of *‘ilm al-raml* علم الرمل, ‘Sand Science’, emerged in Southern Mesopotamia at the end of the first millennium CE (van Binsbergen 1995, 1996b, 1996c, 1997a, 2012abis)

- musical instruments especially xylophones, hour-glass drums and kettle drums, but also calabash bows and cithers, all over Southern and West Africa, but probably with relatively recent South Asian and Indonesian prototypes (Jones 1964)
- sculpturing and decorative styles for which the same may be argued, e.g. in relation of the elaborately carved and gaudily coloured boat ornaments of the Duala region and palace decorations in the Western Grassfields, both in Cameroon
- the distribution of the name or honorific title Mbetsi in Southern Africa and along the African Atlantic coast⁵⁷
- the belief in reincarnation, especially as implied in the institutions of name-inheritance that are vital to the kinship system of Bantu-speaking peoples
- concentration of significant genetic markers with South East Asian connota-

in the extensive literature. (Note that the chicken was only domesticated a handful of millennia ago, so that the Upper Palaeolithic overland route cannot be appealed to explain this connection.) Bone divination is also practiced in Southern Africa (van Binsbergen 1995, 1996, and extensive literature cited there), often with the aid of a geomantic interpretational catalogue, and although it usually involves bones of quadrupeds rather than chickens, it is not unthinkable that there is a Chinese connection on this point given the other Africa-Chinese continuities in the field of divination (van Binsbergen 2012a, 2012abis). Geomantic divination in a great variety of forms dominates in much of sub-Saharan Africa. However, interestingly, among the Manjacos of Guinea-Bissau, in a West Africa region heavily affected by trans-Atlantic trade (Rodney 1970) and having irrigated rice cultivation (reminiscent of, and possibly deriving from, East, South East and South Asia) as their main source of livelihood, I encountered a form of chicken divination, revolving not on blood but on the specialist inspection, by a member of the local guild of diviners, of a chick’s entrails: any black spots found there would be interpreted as a negative oracular outcome, absence of such spots as a positive outcome. Inspection of the entrails of domestic mammals is a well-documented Ancient Mesopotamian and Aegean trait, with some distribution in North East Africa (Abbink 1993). I have tended to interpret the Manjaco chick divination in this comparative context (van Binsbergen 1984, 1988), but can see the attractiveness of a Chinese connection on this point. West African rice cultivation (*cf.* Hutton 1946), incidentally, surprisingly remains outside Menzies’ Sinophile scope.

⁵⁷ During the past few years I have had extensive opportunities to acquaint myself on the spot with South and South East Asian expressions of kingship, in a Buddhist (Sri Lanka, Thailand), formerly Buddhist (Java) or Hindu (Bali, South India) context. These field experiences have not only intensified my suspicion, over the decades, that the Nkoya kingship mirrors many ceremonial, conceptual and institutional aspects of Buddhist kingship in South Asia (van Binsbergen 2012b), but have also brought me to take seriously Frobenius’ (1931) assertions of the protohistoric existence of a great, continental, Asian (and by implication Buddhist) kingdom in Southern Africa associated with the enigmatic name *Mwetsi*: in some local Bantu languages identical or close to the word for ‘Moon’, but also similar to East Asian designations of the Buddha (*‘butsi’*, which in Bantu-speaking mouth would readily become *‘mbutsi’* or *‘mbetsi’*). In the harbour town of Douala, famous for its elaborately carved, Indonesian-looking boats and its marriage with the sea (*cf.* Mediterranean Venice, but also South Java where the Sultan of Yogyakarta has a mystical marriage with the Queen of the South, a sea goddess) *Mwetsi* is the name of a mythical ancestor (Dolisane-Ebossé Nyambé 2005). Despite paradigmatic, knowledge-political (he is recognised as a prime inspiration of Afrocentrism) and moral reservations surrounding his figure today, Frobenius deserves to be taken seriously as one of the greatest Africanists of his time.

tions in the Mozambique-Angola corridor and the Cameroonian Grassfields (van Binsbergen 2012c)

- institutions of kingship complete with court ceremonial and organisation, orchestras, royal rights in hunting and fishing
- the distribution of royal boat cults and pageants in South Central Africa
- the distribution of royal ceremonial sunshades – although this could also be a trait directly borrowed from Ancient Mesopotamia (*cf.* Lange 2009, 2011)
- the find of a Roman coin from the time of Constantine at Buea, Cameroon – neither Roman nor Arabic mercantile navigation ever reached south of Mauritania (although, centuries earlier, there is the Phoenician Hanno's report on sighting what has been interpreted as Mt Cameroon; Lacroix 1993), and the most likely provenance of this coin is the Indian Ocean, where Roman trade was bristling in Constantine's time and where such coins were abundant (Bovill 1958: 41n; Dick-Read 2005).
- for the wide distribution of cowries as money and ritual objects in Southern Africa, and along the African Atlantic coast, the same argument can be made.⁵⁸
- the distribution of cults of affliction and ecstatic cults such as Vodun / Voodoo on the Bight of Benin, intricately associated with geomantic divination and strongly reminiscent, in cult paraphernalia, organisation, attire, shrines, of the Indian Ocean region – possibly a double movement is at play here, where Asian cults of affliction may owe a considerable historical debt to African ones, but where it is in their 2nd-millennium Asian form (from Sri Lanka, South India, perhaps South East Asia) that they have been fed back to East and West Africa (van Binsbergen 2012a, 2012b and references cited there)
- perhaps irrigated rice cultivation in West Africa (*cf.* Hutton 1946)
- fragmentary evidence which may be no more than sheer coincidence: the Serer ethnic name along the Upper Guinea / Senegalese coast (the Chinese were known in Roman Antiquity as *Seri*, which may also be the etymology of the word 'silk'); the hornbill bird, which is sacred and iconographically dominant both in South East Asia and on the Upper Guinea coast; apparent South East Asian (especially Philippines) parallels on the Upper Guinea coast and on the Bight of Benin in regard of maritime raiding and head-hunting; etc.
- American food crops that – as indicated above, with references – seem to have reached sub-Saharan Africa in pre-Columbian times, possibly via the Pacific and the Indian Ocean – although direct trans-Atlantic transmission has also been argued
- in addition to these various thematic empirical clusters, we may mention the data discussed and referenced above in section 5, in evidence of the proposed global maritime network, in so far as these data extend to the African Atlantic coast: male genital mutilation; musical instruments; hunched statuettes; head-hunting; annual communal extinction and rekindling of fire; megalithic practices; White God of cosmogony; spider god of cosmogony; flood myths; the mytheme of incessant mating preventing cosmogony; the mytheme of the cosmic egg; the distribution of taro and bananas; thalassaemias and other genetic markers mentioned under 5.5.1-2. The above identification of mytho-

⁵⁸ *Cf.* Bascom 1980; Gregory 1996; Hiskett 1966; Jeffrey 1938, 1953; Johnson 1970; Terrien de Lacouperie 1888; von Sicard 1953.

logical continuities between Oceania and Western Eurasia may be explained as a result of diffusion from Western Eurasia in the context of Indian Ocean navigations by Greeks and Romans in Antiquity, but also as a result of the kind of Sunda expansion postulated by Oppenheimer – and in the latter case attestation of the relevant traits on the African Atlantic coast may be likewise a result of Sunda expansion during the 1st and 2nd millennium CE.

All this might be seen, by the greatest stretch of imagination and evidence, as contributions to Africa's West coast made by Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism but filtered via Chinese influence – all three of them world religions represented in Zheng He's context (he was a Muslim, served a Buddhist-Confucianist-Taoist empire, and had South Indian ships and crews associated with his undertaking); yet it appears that the impact from India, Ceylon, continental South East Asia and insular South East Asia (Indonesia, Philippines) upon West Africa's coast was far more marked than that from China proper, and probably was effected without requiring the Zheng He expeditions.

These explorations along Africa's Atlantic coast bring to mind Frobenius' distribution analysis of cults of affliction and figurative arts in sub-Saharan Africa

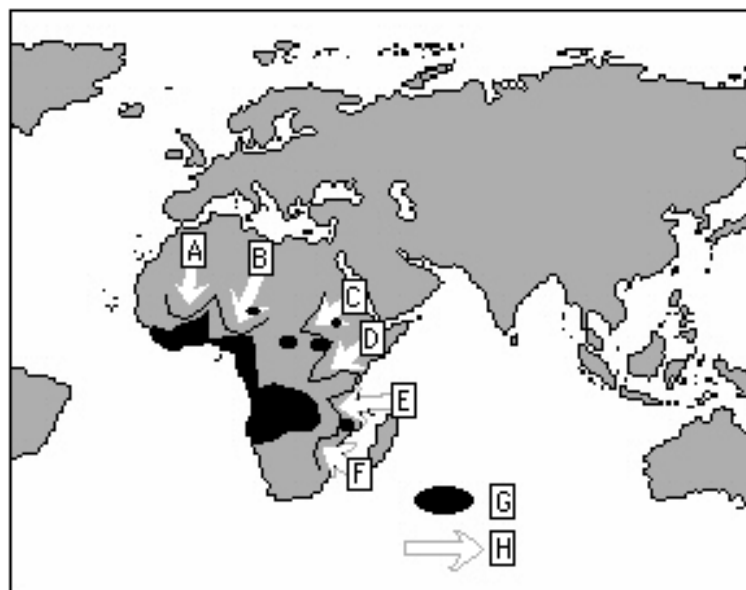


Fig. 18. The distribution of shamanic cults / cults of affliction and figurative arts in sub-Saharan Africa (based on Frobenius 1954 (1933): map 40 p. 296 and map 27 p. 208).

Legend:

inroads (from direction = H) of shamanic cults / cults of affliction

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|---------|
| A Djegu (Western Sahara) | C Zar | E Pepo |
| B Bori | D Mandva (Uganda) | F Shawe |
| G Main areas of figurative and mask plastic arts in sub-Saharan Africa. | | |

Over the past decade, I have repeatedly referred to this distribution and pondered over its meaning. Initially (van Binsbergen 2004, 2006a) I interpreted the distribution marked as 'G' as as a core area of 'pristine' proto-African artistic culture surviving on the Atlantic seaboard despite shamanistic cults' inroads, apparently all from Eurasia and at least in part overland. In my analysis of worldwide leopard-skin symbolism

I saw these shamanic inroads as intimately associated with the mythico-religious model of the ‘exalted stranger’ (herald-bard (in West Africa) / pacifist marabout (around the Sahara) / pacifist ‘leopard-skin’ land priest (as among the Nuer people of Southern Sudan) / king (in West, South Central, East and Southern Africa) / ecstatic spirit medium (the Southern African *sangoma* cult), all of whose incumbents wear the spotted leopard skin as their principal sign of office (and of outsidership). That most these institutions have considerable overland continuity with Eurasia is clear in the cases of:

- (a) the bards (whose institutional forms are continuous with those of the Celtic world, which in itself has strong cultural, linguistic and mythological affinities if not roots in West Asia (cf. Colarusso 2007/2008) but which (as a result of Pelasgian transmission – either overland or seaborne via South and South East Asia) also resonates in South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2010a);
- (b) the marabouts, whose recent cultural form is that of popular Islamic West African religious institution – although probably the (Pelasgian?) institution of shrine-associated pacifist mediators is much older than Islam;
- (c) the Nilotic-speaking land priests (the Nilotic languages belong to the Nilo-Saharan linguistic macrophylum, which, along with the Niger-Congo macrophylum, has been proposed⁵⁹ to link up with Eurasiatic / Nostratic as the dominant linguistic macrophylum throughout Eurasia);
- (d) kings: the African kingships have obvious and much-argued⁶⁰ continuity with Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia

On the other hand, for some of these traits, also a substantial overseas contribution from other continents can be argued. This is least manifest for the marabouts and the pacifist land priests. The case for the bards is hardly stronger, although the continuity of megalithic phenomena on the Atlantic coasts of both Europe and Africa, and the mythological and genetic indications of a Northern Africa / AfroAsiatic substrate in Ireland⁶¹ suggests some overseas continuity even here. For the kingship of sub-Saharan Africa, overseas South Asian and South East Asian connections are very conspicuous, not only in the organisation of royal administrations, royal boat cults and pageants, and such paraphernalia as royal sun-shades (although there is an Ancient Mesopotamian parallel on this point), but also in iconography, cosmology, the layout and symbolism of royal capitals, royal rights to the land, fisheries and selected animal species, and in royal chronicles (van Binsbergen 2012b). On several occasions I have discussed the strong South Asian and South East Asian elements in various cults of affliction / ecstatic cults in sub-Saharan Africa, especially the *sangoma* cult of Southern Africa. Also the cults singled out by Frobenius are depicted (my Fig. 18) to have

⁵⁹ Cf. Kaiser & Shevoroshkin 1988; Karst 1931; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008; van Binsbergen in press (a).

⁶⁰ On continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and Ancient Mesopotamia, cf. Frobenius 1931; Baumann *et al.* 1940; Lange 2009, 2011. An much more extensive literature deals with real or imagined continuities between Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa – for a summary of that literature, and initial bibliography, cf. van Binsbergen 2011d.

⁶¹ Cf. the ‘Black Irish’ of popular expression, and the Fo[r]morian of myth (cf. Hastings 1908-1921: III, 281 f, V, 102 f, XI, 11; Wood-Martin 1902) – with Neit as their god of war, cf. Ancient Egyptian Neith as a goddess of warfare and weaving. Also in Early Christianity striking links between Ireland and Egypt may be noted.

transcontinental, Asian connections, especially the clearly seaborne cults E and F – for whose provenance from the Indian Ocean coast and beyond there is also oral-historical evidence in South Central Africa; van Binsbergen 1981.

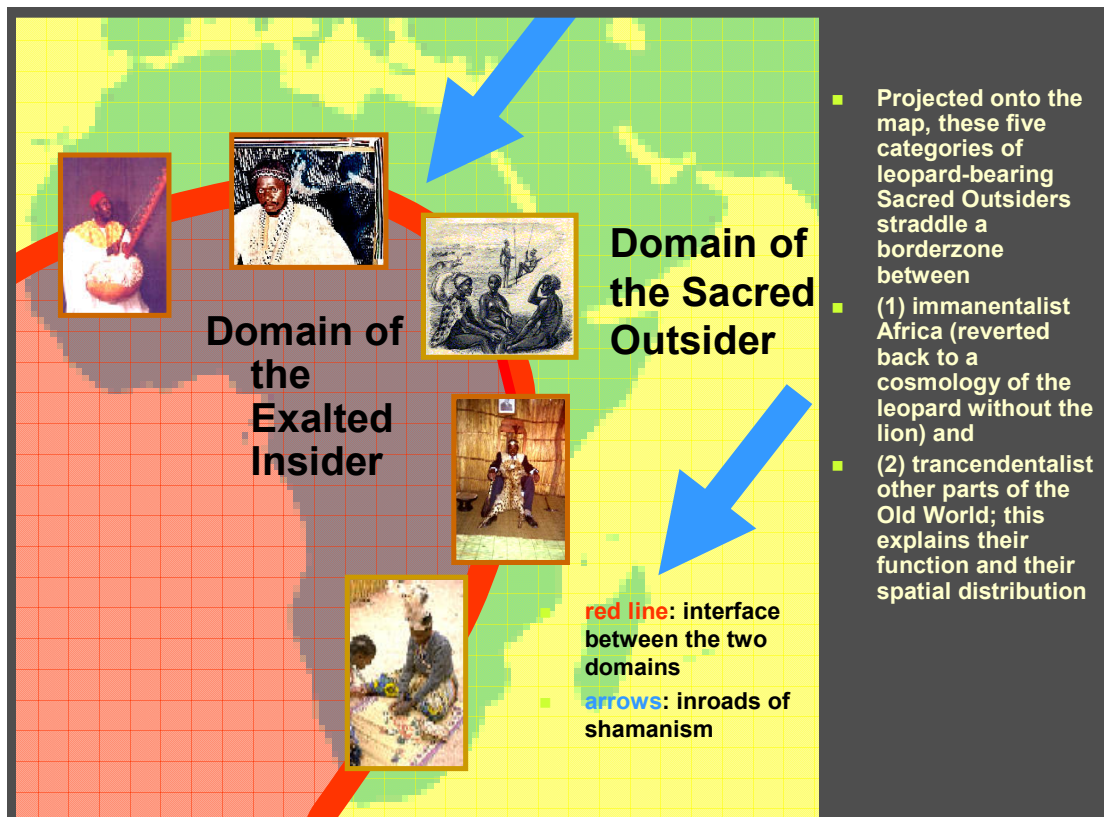


Fig. 19. Five types of leopard-skin bearers as Sacred Outsiders or as Exalted Insiders, at the transcontinental interface between Africa and Eurasia (van Binsbergen 2004).

Overlooking these various distributional arguments, the conclusion seems justified that the areas marked as ‘G’ and as black in Fig. 18, and largely concentrated on the Atlantic coast, are to be interpreted, not in terms of a ‘pristine Africa’ more than most other parts of sub-Saharan Africa left untouched by transcontinental influences, but, on the contrary, as a region where South and South East Asian maritime influences have been particularly strong, especially in the course of the last one or two millennia.

The various traits listed above bear witness, not of a once-for-all transmission of specific cultural items from one distant source to some African destination in a one-way process, but of the multicentred, multidirectional transcontinental maritime network I proposed above, in operation during several millennia and allowing not only for influx into Africa but also for transmission from Africa to elsewhere – of the types stressed by such Afrocentrist writers as Winters, Van Sertima and Jairazbhoy, but usually ignored or dismissed by mainstream specialists.

To these Asian-African exchanges the possibility of trans-Atlantic continuities must

be added.⁶² The field of comparative mythology shows transcontinental continuities relating to more recent, Neolithic conditions of food production: both in Meso and North America (whence many of present-day Africa's food crops derive), and in sub-Saharan Africa,⁶³ the Ancient Mediterranean,⁶⁴ as well as in Japan (Ukemochi-nakami 保食神; Anesaki 1964) and South East Asia (Dewi Sri), we find the myth of the dying junior god or goddess whose body turns into food crops. This global distribution pattern is, again, suggestive of our proposed global maritime network. Given the fact that the origin of the African food crops in question is in the Americas, one is tempted to hypothesise that not only the food crops but also their attending myths crossed over from the New World into Africa, and not necessarily via the Pacific / Indian Ocean detour, but directly across the Atlantic.

So far we have hardly discussed the possibility of European-West Africa continuity. Yet early North Atlantic students of West African culture and religion (notably Frobenius) were impressed by what they considered West African parallels with the Ancient Graeco-Roman / Etruscan world, in such fields as architecture (*impluvia*, i.e. houses with a rain inlet in the roof), mythology (notably parallels between the Yoruba and Greco-Roman pantheon), sculpturing styles, and bronze figures. Overland transmission via the Sahara has been amply considered, especially in connection with the ancient people of the Garamantes, and in fact the trans-Saharan caravan routes are replete with depictions of ancient chariots. Bards and megalithic constructions indicate transcontinental continuities along the Atlantic seaboard, and here maritime rather than overland transmission is likely – although the direction of the transmission remains a moot point.

7. Conclusion

This argument is an instalment in the author's ongoing research into Africa's trans-

⁶² An authoritative mainstream statement of the massive evidence: Sorenson & Johannessen, 2004. West African influence on pre-Columbian cultures is also a long-standing Afrocentric claim, heavily but not totally convincingly contested by academic specialists; cf. Van Sertima 1992; Ortiz de Montelán 2000. Transcontinental continuities have been a central idea in Afrocentrism, e.g. Jairazbhoy 1976 on Asians in the Americas. On Africans in Asia and the New World: Wyatt 2010; Jairazbhoy 1985; Winters (1977, 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1983). Whereas these Afrocentric writers seem to suggest transmission in stages of African genes and cultural traits from sub-Saharan Africa to Asia along something like the proposed global maritime network, I favour an alternative, Pelasgian model (see above), according to which 'Pelasgian', proto-African somatic, cultural and linguistic traits (including, besides the traits already mentioned above, high pigmentation, metallurgy, proto-geomancy, and elements towards the Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan linguistic macrophyla) were available in West Asia in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages, and from there were transmitted, on the wings of the Pelasgian 'cross-model', both east into East Asia, and southwest, into sub-Saharan Africa, where they helped transform Palaeo-African elements essentially still continuous with the pre-Out-of-Africa package, into the familiar African traits of historic times. Whatever the case, Irwin 1977 relates that under the T'ang 唐朝 dynasty African slaves were so common in China that their presence produced an entire literary genre centred on a Black trickster hero.

⁶³ The *Chihamba* and *Bituma* cults in Zambia, the *Mbona* cult in Malawi; Turner 1962; van Binsbergen 1981; Schoffeleers 1992, cf. van Binsbergen 2011a. Also cf. the phytogeographical studies by Jeffreys cited above, especially 1971b which claims direct trans-Atlantic transmission of maize from the New World to West Africa.

⁶⁴ Thammuz / Dumuzi, Attis, Dionysus; Frazer 1914; Jacobsen 1970.

continental connections in pre- and protohistory. While sidestepping to Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis and Oppenheimer's *Sunda* thesis, the immediate focus is on Gavin Menzies' book *1421: The year China discovered the world*. Identifying this book, by explicit criteria, as fiction under the disguise of counter-hegemonic scholarship, and pointing out some of its weaknesses (e.g. in relation to the alleged Chinese ability to measure longitude correctly), the argument yet seeks to go beyond Menzies. Looking for an alternative to his extreme myopia (virtually reducing all transcontinental exchanges in global history to specifically Chinese navigation in specifically admiral Zheng He's time, early 15th c. CE), the present argument *considers explicit and empirically-underpinned models for transcontinental maritime and overland exchanges (worldwide and especially with a view on Africa) since the Upper Palaeolithic*. To the shared cultural, linguistic and genetic background suggested by the widely accepted Out-of-Africa hypothesis and the *Borean hypothesis, the more recent Old-World communalities of the author's Pelasgian hypothesis are added. As a result, the image arises of a global background of communalities and feedbacks, among which the specific effects of Zheng He's exploits could hardly be identified, and certainly not with Menzies' untutored methods. Instead of his claim to the effect that global maritime continuities have resulted from uncentred, unidirectional and ephemeral impact of Chinese navigation in the early 15th c. CE, the present argument proposes the radical alternative of *a multcentred, multidirectional global maritime network established and sustained from the Neolithic onward*. Subsequently, dozens of ethnographic, art-historical, archaeological, mythological, zoo-/ phytogeographical, genetic, and linguistic traits are discussed, complete with distribution maps and extensive references, in order to empirically and bibliographically underpin the proposed maritime network. The second achievement of this argument is the following. While transcontinental continuities have been widely accepted for Africa's east coast, the crucial problem has been to find corroborating evidence for such *transcontinental continuities of Africa's Atlantic West coast* as have been suggested by the author's own research over the years and as are argued and referenced in the present argument. In line with recent work by Oppenheimer (1998) and Dick-Read (2005) on South East Asian impact on Africa in pre- and protohistory, and extending these approaches to include South and East Asia, these empirical indications for a South, South East and East Asian impact on the African Atlantic coast in the course of the last two millennia are discussed in detail. Thus Menzies' work scarcely throws any new light on crucial transcontinental continuities, yet inspires fruitful further research.

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