

Chapter 10. The relevance of Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, for the study of African-Asian transcontinental continuities

With emphasis on the religious dimension, the argument of this chapter considers selected aspects of South and South East Asian culture and history (the kingship, musical instruments, ceramics and gaming pieces), against the background of the results (here briefly summarised in Section 10.2) of my earlier research into transcontinental continuities between Asia and Africa in regard of divination and ecstatic cults. After posing preliminary methodological questions, what emerges is the interpretive frame of a multidirectional global transcontinental network, such as appears to have gradually developed since the Neolithic. After arguing the *possibility* of Taoist, Hindu and Buddhist influences upon Africa in addition to the generally acknowledged Islamic one (*cf.* ch. 9, above), the next question to be discussed is how such transcontinental continuities might manifest themselves *in concreto* in sub-Saharan Africa? From a long list, three themes, in addition to divination, are highlighted as particularly important: ecstatic cults, kingship, and boat cults. The discussion advances conclusive evidence for the Hindu / Buddhist nature of the state complex centring on Great Zimbabwe as a likely epicentre for the transmission of South-East-Asian-inspired forms of kingship and ecstatic cults. A provisional attempt is made at periodisation of the proposed Hindu / Buddhist element in sub-Saharan Africa. The limitations of transcontinental borrowing in protohistorical and historical times are argued by reference to an extensive prehistoric cultural substratum (partly covered by the Pelasgian Hypothesis) from which both South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa may be claimed to have selectively drawn and which becomes manifest, for instance, in the tree cult. On the basis of future research advocated here, we may expect new insights in transconti-

mental continuities so as to throw new light on the extent to which Africa has always been part of global cultural history, and should not be imprisoned in a paradigm (undeservedly popular among Africans and Africanists alike) that (out of a sympathetic but mistaken loyalty to African identity and originality) seeks to explain things African exclusively by reference to African factors and conditions.

10.1. My Africanist encounter with East, South, and South East Asia

Before turning to a discussion of the South and South East Asian connection in African pre- and protohistory, let me present a few of the findings on Chinese-African connections, such as brought out by my comparative and historical research, since 1990, into the transregional background of Southern African divination systems. This will help us to conceive of an analytical framework in which such transcontinental continuities may appear as conceivable, even plausible, in the first place.

10.1.1. African divination, and Taoist China

10.1.1.1. Africa and China

This chapter was first presented at the International Conference on 'Africa's Transcontinental Continuities in Pre- and Protohistory', Leiden, 2012. In my keynote address for that conference I indicated the great extent to which the contemplation of transcontinental continuities has been counterparadigmatic, even anathema, for most present-day Africanists (and Asianists, for that matter). Yet, fortunately, throughout the 20th century Sinologists and Africanists in East and West have collaborated to develop a coherent picture of the extensive contacts between China and the East African coast,¹ A rapidly increasing production of Chinese scholarship is now correcting the potential Eurocentrist one-sidedness of such Western approaches, having provided ample information on the extensive maritime relations between China and sub-Saharan Africa.²

¹ Chang Hsing-lang 1930; Duyvendak 1938, 1949; Filesi 1972; Sutton 1974; Winters 1979; Snow 1988; Li Anshan. 2000 (with an adequate picture of Ancient Chinese representations of the South African coastline); Lin Bin 2005; Davidson 1959 / 1970; Wheatley 1975a, 1975b; Schwarz 1938; Fripp 1940, 1941; Hirth 1909. Against the background of the Pelasgian Hypothesis, which – according to the 'cross model' – proposes Neolithic and Bronze-Age cultural (and demographic) influence from West Asia upon both East / South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, it is meanwhile interesting to recall the contentious and generally rejected theory of the late 19th-c. CE French-British Sinologist Terrien de Lacouperie (1887, 1888, 1892a, 1892b), according to which the classic Chinese correlative system known as 易經 *Yi Jing* / *I Ching* derived from Neolithic West Asia; for a more extensive discussion, and a partial vindication of Terrien de Lacouperie, cf. van Binsbergen 2012d: ch. 7, pp. 215f.

² One of the interesting suggestions emerging is that the name of Somalia might derive its name from an unattested Chinese *索马里 **Su Ma Li*, although its apparent meaning 'rope-horse-community / halfmile / suffering' does not make sense beyond evoking conditions of navigation. Which makes one

Meanwhile, in more recent years, Chinese scholars³ have brought to light convincing evidence that, to East Asian mariners after the T'ang 唐朝 dynasty, the outline of the South African coast had few secrets.

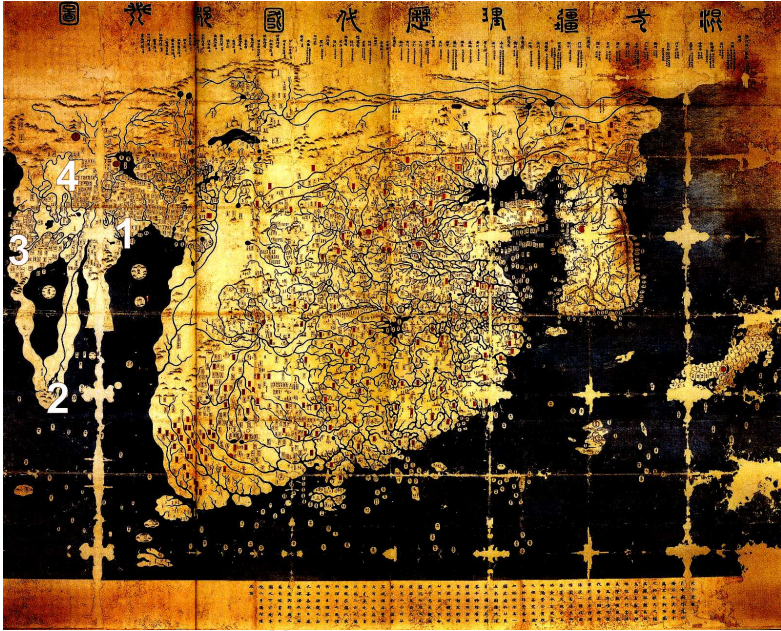


Fig. 10.1. The Korean Kangnido map (1402), with added indication of the major regions for the historical use of divining bowls: (1) Mesopotamia; (2) Vanda (3); Bight of Benin; (4) Ancient Greece.

wonder whether the same Chinese etymology would attach to the phonetically very close name of *Sumer* / *Šumr*, the name which the Semitic-, notably Akkadian-, -speaking successors of the Sumerians gave to their predecessors. Intensified Chinese mercantile penetration into the Red Sea seems to have occurred in the context of Admiral Zheng He's expeditions in the early 15th c. CE. Meanwhile Occam's Razor would simply suggest an equivalence of Somali and Sumer, without necessitating a distant Chinese connection. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.1, pp. 370 f.) I propose an Austric, *i.e.* Sunda-related, etymology (*-tal-, 'star, luminary') for the name of the mythical land of Dilmun, which is usually identified as the island of Baḥrayn in the Persian Gulf. The same background may be adduced for the Ancient Mediterranean personal names Daidalos and Talos. However, the root *-tal- occurs not only in Austric but also in West Chadic and in Amerind, and ultimately goes back to *Borean *TVLKV, which shows that an hypothetical Sunda connection is not the only possible explanation for its occurrence in the Bronze-Age Red Sea context.

³ But also *cf.*, in the West: Fuchs 1953; Mills 1954.

Fig. 10.1 presents a late medieval Korean depiction dating from 1402 CE⁴ of East and South Asia and of the African coast from Aden to the Bight of Benin. Twentieth-century research has brought to light a number of such maps as proofs of extensive Chinese contacts, not only with East but also with South and West Africa. As nautical manuals from that period indicate (Rockhill 1914; Ahmad 1989; Sauvaget 1948), Chinese ships commonly called on the harbours of the Persian Gulf in ^cAbbāsīd times (late 1st mill. CE).

10.1.1.2. African divination, and Taoist China: Introductory remarks

In my comparative work on Old World divination systems, already nearly two decades ago I became aware of the distinct possibility of Asian-African borrowing. Here I concentrated on geomantic divination. Both Chinese geomantic divination (易經 *Yi Jing*, usually designated '*I Ching*' in the West) and African geomancies, as well as Islamic ones from ^cAbbāsīd Mesopotamia (c. 1000 CE) and the Indian Ocean forms derived from the latter, all operate on the basis of an interpretative catalogue of 2ⁿ configurations, n varying from 4 yielding 16 basic positions (Southern Africa) to 8 (256) (West Africa), with Taoist China occupying an intermediate position with 6 (64).⁵ While these are the mathematics underlying the composition of the interpretational catalogues on the basis of which very specific divinatory pronouncements are being made, divination must in the first place ascertain where to look in the locally prevailing divinatory catalogue. This question is decided on the basis of a random generator, that produces one or a series of chance outcomes, which by virtue of locally established, intersubjective rules produce a particular figure (e.g. a hexagram (e.g. ☰☷ ☱☲ ☳☴) as in *Yi Jing*, or a geomantic combination symbol (e.g. ☰, ☷, ☱, ☲) as in ^c*ilm al-raml* and the divination systems derived from the latter in East, Southern and West Africa,⁶ in India, and in Europe since the height of the Middle Ages. The random generators used in geomantic divination vary greatly (cf. Table 10.1), from the casting of coins and/or milfoil stalks in *Yi Jing*, to the reading of a zodiac-based divination compass throughout East and South East Asia (the likely basis also for the medieval *zāirja* divination circle as described by Ibn Ḥaldūn),⁷ the casting of wooden, ivory or leather dice

⁴ The Korean map closely follows – except for the depiction of the Eastern coast of the Indian Ocean – the Great Ming Atlas of 1389 CE; cf. Li Anshan 2012.

⁵ Cf. van Binsbergen 1996b; and my Leiden key note, 2005d / 2013a, lavishly illustrated in the online version. Also cf. above, chapter 9 of the present book.

⁶ On West African geomantic divination, cf. Apostel 1981; Abimbola 1983, 1975, 1991; Akiwowo 1983; Aromolaran 1992; Eze 1993; Makinde 1988; Bewaji, 1994; Uyanne 1994; Maupoil 1943a; Jaulin 1966. On East African and comparative forms of geomantic divination: Trautmann 1939-1940; Hébert 1961; and my various publications on divination cited below.

⁷ Ibn Ḥaldūn, 1980 / 1958; written in Arabic 1377; also: al-Zanati 1922-1923 and 1908-1909.

or tablets (*Hakata*) in Southern Africa, the manipulation of divining chains consisting of four strings each of which can take two values (facing up or down) due to a coin or cowry attached to it, the casting of cowries or nutshells in Southern and Western Africa (on a wooden tray or in a bowl), or the generation of the geomantic figures from repeated chance procedures such as hitting the ground with a stick in a near horizontal movement, and counting whether the resulting series of indentures is of an odd (stroke) or an even number (dot).

10.1.1.3. Divining bowls and their connections in space and time

An interesting case for Chinese-African continuities in divination can be made for wooden divination bowls, such as attested in historical times (mainly from the nineteenth century CE on) both in Southern Africa and on the Bight of Benin (Nigeria).⁸ Soon after their discovery the signs in the rim were interpreted as some kind of zodiac, but scholars were puzzled by their sheer number: well over thirty, rather than the 12 one was accustomed to on the basis of dominant Western, South Asian, and Chinese astrology.

The solution to this puzzle lies in early Chinese astrology's unmistakable indebtedness to Hellenistic astrology as practiced in Alexandria, Egypt, in the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era, when units of 10 degrees (*decans*) had come to play an important role (Boll 1912). Indebted to this background from across Asia, initially the well-known Chinese zodiacal cycle of 12 animals spanning 12 years (not months) took the form of not 12 but 36 animals, both real and fabulous. These animals were represented on the rim of the Chinese Taoist divination board, *i.e.* a planisphere which must be considered a predecessor of the well-known 羅盤 Luo Pan geomantic compass which is still in use among the practitioners of the Chinese spiritual location method called 風水 *feng shui*. A similar (but not identical) list of c. 36 animals is contained in a mystical work on the Five elements *Wu-hsing Ta-I* by 小琪 Hsiao Chi, of the middle of the first millennium CE (隋朝 Sui dynasty, 581-618 CE).⁹

⁸ Cf. van Binsbergen 2005d / 2013a, as illustrated in the online version. Illustrations of such Venda bowls are further available with Bent 1969 / 1896 / 1892: frontispiece (see my Fig. 10.2); Canby 1980: 31; and Nettleton 1984. Some West African counterparts are to be found in: Frobenius 1954 / 1933; Skinner 1980. The classicist Davis (1955) stresses the Graeco-Roman and ultimately Ancient Mesopotamian parallels to the Sub-Saharan African forms, and in line with Frobenius' (1931) conception of a seaborne South Erythraean culture complex stretching from Mesopotamia to South Central Africa, with Dierk Lange's (2004a, 2004b, 2011) work on Mesopotamian / West African continuities, and with the southbound branch of the Pelasgian 'cross model', this seems to make sense. Yet, given the considerable evidence (some of which discussed in the present chapter) of protohistoric Chinese presence in sub-Saharan Africa, sub-Saharan African divination bowls might also have a partly Chinese background. Since the east-bound branch of the Pelasgian 'cross model' leads into East Asia, ultimately we may be looking here at a complex transcontinental model spanning the entire Old World.

⁹ Cf. Walters 1989 / 1987: 80. Hsiao Chi's work is also mentioned in Needham 1980 : 14.



(a) Venda divining bowl from Northern Limpopo Province (formerly Transvaal), South Africa, © <http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/oracle/soafbowlL.html>; (b) A wooden divining bowl found c. 1890 near Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe, Africa; Bent 1892: frontispiece; (c) Yoruba divining bowl. © http://www.toledomuseum.org/Collection_NewAccessions.htm; (d) Ancient Greek *kylix* bowl, possibly (in my non-specialist opinion) used for divination <http://www.christusrex.org/www1/vaticano/ETb-Kylix.jpg>; (e) Mesopotamian divining/magical bowl, c. 600 CE; © <http://www.trocadero.com/PassageToAntiquity/items/392508/en1.html> – such bowls have been attested throughout the 1st millennium CE in Zoroastrian Iran, Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine (cf.: Nettleton n.d.; Davis 1955). In Fig. 10.1, presenting a late medieval East Asian nautical map, I have marked the regions corresponding with these bowl types: A. Mesopotamia; B. Venda; C. Bight of Benin and D. Ancient Greece. Only D seems to lie outside even the far periphery of Chinese maritime contact, yet was of course strongly influenced by Mesopotamia, in divination, astrology, other proto-sciences including mathematics and astronomy, in mythology *etc.*

Fig. 10.2. Divining bowls through time and space.



- (a) 羅盤 geomantic compass (<http://www.mcallen.lib.tx.us/staff/fengshui.htm>); (b) Bronze mirrors (Chinese and Javanese) salvaged from South Chinese Sea shipwrecks (http://www.forbes.com/2001/04/04/0404hot_u.html); (c) Chinese divinatory magnetic ladle, representing *Ursa Major* and constituting one of the earliest forms of the nautical compass (http://www.csupomona.edu/~plin/lz201/images/chicompass_big.jpgo)

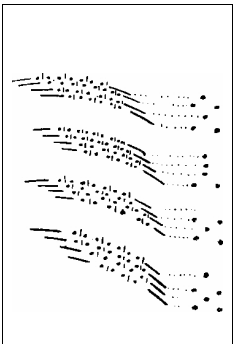
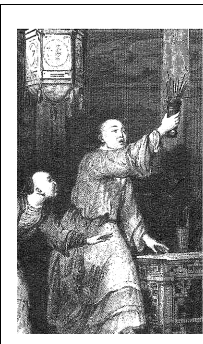


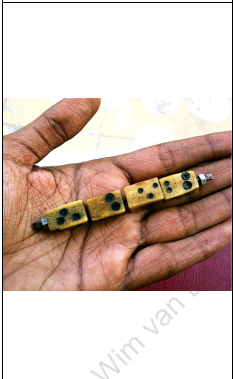

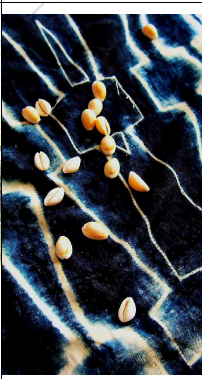

Fig. 10.3. From Chinese nautical instrument to African divination apparatus?

The spoon-shaped magnetic needle on a special grid, as in Fig. 10.3, may be considered a developed form from a prototypes where a magnetic needle on a simple piece of wood or paper would float on a water surface in a bowl – another possible prototype for the Venda and Nigerian divining bowl, and notably one that is intimately connected with the plausibly nautical nature of any medieval Chinese-African connections.

10.1.1.4. Connections in space and time of the random generator in geomantic divination

Moreover the cowries that are cast in the context of dominant forms of West African divination are not indigenous but come from the Indian Ocean, often via trading networks involving Asian and European intermediaries; in China, the character for money 貝 is a schematised representation of the cowry (Modern (Beijing) reading: *bèi*; Preclassic Old Chinese: *pāts*; ‘cowry’; Karlgren code: 0320 a-e (source: Tower of Babel, ‘Chinese characters’.) The back-front asymmetrical tablets thrown in African geomantic divination are similar, in curved form and use, to the lunar-shaped temple blocks that feature in Chinese popular divination. Is it possible to cast light on the origin of the Southern African geomantic dice? In the light of extensive parallels in Madagascar, the Comoro Islands, West Africa, and Medieval and Early Modern European Renaissance, with unmistakable prototypes in Arabic geomancies from the late 1st millennium CE on: *‘ilm al-raml*, we may ask the following question: if the geomantic system in itself can hardly be maintained to be originally Southern African, why should not the attending material apparatus be imported as well? Geomantic dice have been recorded from South Asia, where the divination system to which they belong is called *ramlaśāstra*, in unmistakable recognition of Arabic origin provenance. In many East Asian temples, pilgrims are invited to conduct a personalised divination using a pair of wooden dice that, like the Southern African ones, are convex on one side and that tend to be strung together. *E.g.* 趙汝适 *Chau Ju-Kua’s* work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteen centuries CE, entitled 諸蕃志 *Chu-fan-chi* (1911 / 1914 / 1966), speaking (p. 181) of the island of 海南島 Hainan.

‘In the eastern part of the city is the Po-chu Tu-kang miao or “Temple of the ship-captain Tu-kang”. Whosoever with profound faith prays here for an omen, gets a reply. Passing ships make an offering here before preceding (farther).’

			
<p>rhythmically 'hitting the sand' with a stick (Islamic <i>'ilm al-raml</i> علم الرمل) el Tounisi 1845</p>	<p>throwing of numbered milfoil sticks (East Asia; Michael 1999-2008.)</p>	<p>throwing of coins (East Asia) (Laurel 2001-2009.)</p>	<p>throwing of temple-blocks that can take two values: up or down (East Asia) (author's collection)</p>
			
<p>geomantic dice consisting of four strung cubes, revolving around a central axis in fixed order, while each cube can take four values (India, Africa) – Southern African <i>Hakata</i> may be considered as such dice detached from the central axis (cf. Pirzada 2011.)</p>	<p>clockwork emulation of the geomantic process: an Islamic divinatory machine of the early 2nd millennium CE (Hosken n.d.)</p>	<p>throwing of cowries (West Africa) (author's collection)</p>	<p>throwing of a divining chain (West Africa) (author's collection)</p>

			
<p><i>Hakata</i>: four ivory or wooden tablets (Southern Africa) (author's collection)</p>	<p>throwing of half-shells of <i>mungongo</i> (<i>Schinziophyton rautanenii</i>) or other nuts (West Africa, Southern Africa)¹⁰</p>	<p>divining and gaming pieces of North American Indians in historical times (Culin 1975 / 1907).</p>	<p>A Yoruba Ifa diviner's board from Benin, early 20th c. CE (author's collection)</p>

Table 10.1. Alternative random generators in transcontinental forms of geomancy and related forms of divination.

10.1.1.5. Additional evidence¹¹

While the above could have given the idea of translating the *Yi Jing* 易經 divination approach into wooden tablets, the Chinese material culture of divination offers several other possible prototypes for African divination instruments, e.g. the boards and bowls associated with geomantic divination in Southern and West Africa may derive from Han south-pointing ladles used for divination especially *feng shui* 風水 (prototype also of nautical compasses – the maritime connection!), and also counting systems involving sticks (origin of the notation system of whole and broken lines in *Yi Jing* 易經 divination – cf. the 16 geomantic symbols similarly constructed), bronze mirrors used for divination, etc.

¹⁰ Robbins & Campbell 1990; Rodrigues de Areia 1985; with kola nuts: Nassau 1904: 207 f.; Bosman 1967 [1704] : 152 f.; Dennett 1968 / 1910: 149. The coin is included for size comparison only – although often in divinatory usage random generators are mixed and include coins.

¹¹ Meanwhile, the fact (clear from Table 10.1) that Southern African *Hakata* can hardly be distinguished from gaming and divinatory tablets of Native Americans (cf. van Binsbergen 2012d: 276: Fig. 8.6) may suggest continuities from at least the Upper Palaeolithic. State-of-the-art genetic and comparative mythological research indicates that these connections may indeed go back to a common source in Central Asia 30,000-15,000 years BP – it is from here that at least two major demic flows (with inevitable demic diffusion of cultural traits) originate:

- One leading to population of the New World, in various waves mainly giving rise to Amerind languages, whereas the most recent one may have been that producing the Nadene speaking peoples of North America (who, as long-range comparative linguists have argued since the 1980s, belong to the linguistic macrofamily of Dene-Sino-Causasian, stretching from the Gulf of Biscay i.e. Basques, via the Caucasus and Tibet / China to North America);
- The other leading West, to West Asia, Europe and back into Africa.

An uncanny experience was reported by the British writer on divination D. ffarrington Hook (1975): an illiterate diviner she consulted while living in South Africa turned out to be fully aware of the number system that, according to the Chinese Taoist symbolism, was supposed to be associated with the tortoise carapace! Of course there is the obvious risk here that, steeped in Chinese divination, Mrs Hook's perception of the African diviner was tainted by unconscious projection. However, there are similar experiences. The Ndebele (Zimbabwe) diviner Mr Gumede (1928-1992), one of my two teachers of divination and herbalism in Francistown, Botswana (1998-1992), had worked as steward on a South African cruise ship for more than 25 years when the illness announcing his diviner career struck him, and he received his initiation in South Africa; a quarter of a century later I trained with him in Botswana, at the time when my knowledge of Taoism was virtually limited to Needham's account.¹² Only much later could I see the marked Taoist parallels in Mr Gumede's medical practice and his habitus.

Also the Chinese traditional (Taoist) pharmacopaea, about which we have very detailed descriptions,¹³ turns out to display striking parallels with that of diviner-healers in Southern Africa. Further, it is amazing that the Chinese expression *yuye* (cf. Harper 1985) or 箕坐 *chi zuò* 'sitting箕 winnowing-basket fashion, i.e. with one's legs stretched out' is also reminiscent of the (otherwise locally exceptional) stance clients of divination are to assume in Southern Africa – stretching one or two legs in front of them.¹⁴ There is nothing in the act of winnowing that suggests a particular mode of sitting. If the person winnowing is sitting with his (more typically her) legs stretched out, this would require the place to be fairly windy; winnowing in a standing position is usually a better strategy: because of friction with the soil, the power of the wind decreases the closer one gets to the ground. A widespread feature of early agriculture, the winnowing basket is a standard

¹² Needham with Ling 1956: *Vol. II: History of scientific thought*.

¹³ On both topics the literature is too abundant to discuss here. For the Chinese pharmacopaea, cf. Needham *et al.* 2000, *Science and civilisation in China*, vol. VI part 6, *Medicine*; Li 1977; Jiang 2005; Zheng Guilu & Zhang Chengbo, 1997; Long Zhxian *et al.*, 2005 / 1998; Read with Li Yü-Thien 1931; Hyatt 1978; and references cited there. An interesting overview, with an abundance of sources and bibliography, is meanwhile offered by: Anonymous, 2010: 'Traditional Chinese medicine'. For the Southern African herbalist's pharmacopaea, cf.: Ashton 1943; Barnard 1979; Blake-Thompson 1931: 93; Bourdillon 1989; Chavunduka 1994; de Zoysa *et al.* 1984; Fako 1978; Gelfand 1956, 1964; Gilges 1974; Hammond-Tooke 1989; Hoernlé 1937; Hours 1986; Hutchings 1996; Jackson 1918; Mokgosi 1985; Morris 1986, 1996; Ngubane [Sibisi] 1977; Prins 1996; Staugård 1985; Symon 1959; Thorpe 1993; van Wyc *et al.* 1997 / 2009; Watt & van Warmelo 1930.

¹⁴ In view of our discussion of African-Buddhist parallels in the rest of the present chapter, this is a remarkable case. In Buddhism, particularly in the Thai variant, it is absolutely forbidden to show the soles of one's feet, let alone to point these towards an object of worship, such as a Buddha image. The *yuye* or *chi zuò* stance therefore may be Chinese but not Buddhist – during much of the last two millennia Buddhism was an important expression in China, but it had to contest with Confucianism and Taoism, and the stance is probably Taoist in the first place (cf. Fig. 10.4). Equally remarkably, the Thai Buddhist practice is also that of South Central African court etiquette before the king: squatting or sitting on one's haunches with the legs folded aside in a twisted position.

divining apparatus in China, however, and it is likely that the client sits through the session with legs stretched out – like in Southern Africa.



Courtesy of : http://personaltao.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Taoist_Priest.jpg, with thanks

Fig. 10.4. A Taoist scene showing one person in the standard meditative stance, the other sitting with legs stretched out in front of him.

10.1.2. Discussion

All this suggests the possibility particularly of Taoist Chinese borrowing to West and South Africa in the 1st mill. CE. However, it was in the specific form of *‘ilm al-raml* that geomantic divination travelled, scarcely across the Sahara (van Binsbergen 2012d: 71), but from the Persian Gulf over sea and along the African coastline, via Madagascar and Southern Africa to West Africa – the same route than can also be argued for cowry shells, divination bowls,¹⁵ ecstatic cults, and certain types of musical instruments and of boats.

¹⁵ Another major form of divination is that of the divining basket (e.g. Rodrigues de Areia 1985), filled with all sorts of figurines most of which evoke aspects of the concrete reality of the African village and court. The basket is shaken and the selection of figurines that falls out, and the pattern they form on the ground, is interpreted as clues for the problem at hand. The parallel use of vessels for divinatory purposes suggests some kind of genetic relation between the divining bowls and divining baskets, but how? I am inclined to see the baskets as adulterations and localising transformations of the divining bowl, which after all can be argued to have arrived, already with a divinatory function, from a distant transcontinental provenance.



Fig. 10.5. A Roman coin from the reign of Constantine the Great – similar to the one found in Buea in the 1930s CE.

The trajectories of artefacts may be capricious and difficult to interpret. Thus, a Roman coin from the time of Emperor Constantine the Great (c. 272-337 CE) was found near Buea, Western Cameroon, in the 1930s.¹⁶ Although we have been made to expect differently on the basis of the disputed reports of the Phoenician Hanno sailing down the West African coast and probably sighting Mt Cameroon ('the Chariot of the Gods') in the end,¹⁷ there is no record of Roman Atlantic trade all the way to Mt Cameroon. Therefore Robert Dick-Read¹⁸ surmises that this coin is one of the large number that found their way to the Indian Ocean, where Roman trade was going through a revival under Constantine, and where (given the extent of Roman trade there) such coins were much in demand. In that case the Buea coin suggests a trajectory that brought probably quite a few other items of culture to West Africa via Madagascar and Southern Africa, e.g. (in the following list I have somewhat added to Dick-Read's own items):

- cowries¹⁹ – of monetary value both in China and in Africa –,
- divination bowls and geomantic divination in general (see above),²⁰
- ecstatic cults such as *Bituma*, *Sangoma*, *Voodoo* and *Bori*, for which an Indian Ocean / South East Asian epicentre of diffusion has been proposed²¹

¹⁶ Bovill 1958: 41, n.; I owe this example, though not the illustration, to Robert Dick-Read 2005.

¹⁷ Falconer, Thomas 1797; Lacroix 1993; and Herodotus' claim of a circumnavigation of Africa under Pharaoh Necho II, 600 BCE, *Historiae*, IV, 42.

¹⁸ Dick-Read 2005.

¹⁹ Cf. Jackson 1917; Jeffreys 1938.

²⁰ Yet there is a further puzzle here. Since the work of Dierk Lange (e.g. 2004a, 2004b, 2011) we are aware of Assyrian influence on West Africa which therefore suggests the South-bound arrow of the Pelasgian cross-model as an overland route, rather than the maritime one proposed in the main text here. However, this refers to 600 BCE, when divining bowls or incantation bowls were not yet in use in Mesopotamia – their use stems from more than a millennium later, when there is so far no evidence on Mesopotamian influence on West Africa.

²¹ Cf. van Binsbergen 1981b, 2003b: ch. 7 and 8; and several discussions of the same point in the present book, see General Index s.v. 'cults of affliction'.

- Indonesian food crops *e.g.* taro, banana, cloves²²
- perhaps even trans-Pacific American food crops such as cassava and maize, transmitted via South East Asia; Dick-Read claims (and he is not alone) that such crops were already available in West Africa before Columbus' crossing of the Atlantic – but rather than the enormous detour via the Pacific, it is more likely that such availability was based on direct pre-Columbian trans-Atlantic communications, such as claimed by Afrocentrists and others²³ but largely rejected by mainstream researchers (*cf.* Ortiz de Montellano 2000).

And all this far away from the usual Arab trade routes connecting West Africa with West Asia and the Mediterranean. East Asian connections may well account for at least some of the material forms of African divination. In all such cases we have at least three explicatory options:

- Coincidence
- Historical diffusion in recent millennia (probably from China to Africa, *pace* Afrocentrists like Clyde Winters, who prefers to stress West-East transmission from Africa)
- Common prehistoric origin in the 'Back-to-Africa' movement
- Pelasgian diffusion (as explained at the end of chapter 7, above).

Meanwhile, despite the suggestive material in the preceding Figures, and despite the intuitive plausibility that the rational, effective maritime technology of one technologically advanced society (China in the 唐朝 T'ang dynasty and later) is converted into occult apparatus in the far periphery of such a society's sphere of influence, we must not jump to conclusions on the basis of parallels between Chinese and African divinatory apparatuses. Similar parallels could be cited between African material and that from other parts of the Old World, for instance divination bowls from Mesopotamia and Phoenicia (1st mill. BCE-CE) might also be invoked: not only was there (as the work of Dierk Lange demonstrates, likewise introduced at the end of chapter 7 above) considerable influence from Assyria onto West Africa, but also there are strong indications that Africa was actually circumnavigated by Phoenicians in these relatively early times (Hanno). Even the Aegean (*i.e.* Ancient Greece) and the Central Mediterranean (Etruria) produced artefacts similar to African divination objects in Antiquity, and indeed an earlier vintage of scholars (Frobenius, S. Davis) was inclined to look for explanations in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Afrocentrists would be inclined to reverse the arrows and see the influences emerging from Africa. And finally, discussions initiated by Oppenheimer's Sunda hypothesis

²² Banana can only be transplanted from one region to another through carefully tended living sprouts; therefore the appearance of bananas (originating in New Guinea) in West African sites c. 1000 BCE indicates concrete transcontinental communications. Cloves (originating in Indonesia) were found in roughly the same period in Anatolia (*cf.* Wright 1982). I owe this reminder to Stephen Oppenheimer, personal communication, 2007.

²³ Van Sertima 1976; Gordon 1971.

(Oppenheimer 1998 / 2001) have introduced another candidate (Indonesians) to be agents of intercontinental diffusion; while my Pelasgian Hypothesis (*cf.* above, p. 289) suggests the possibility of an eastbound cultural flow emanating from West Asia and even the Aegean and the Mediterranean at large.

Probably all these monocentric explanations are myopic. The most important point is that there is unmistakable convergence, indicative of a *finely-meshed intercontinental network of proto-globalisation*, and reminding us that Africa has always been an effective part of the wider world.

It is tempting to pursue these questions of transcontinental continuities considerably further in the present chapter, even if that would initially divert us from the central, *religious* focus of the present volume. However, after considering a selection of relevant data from the field of kingship (which, given the divine nature of African kingship, may certainly be counted as an aspect of religion!), musical instruments / orchestras, gaming pieces and ceramics, the evidence for transcontinental continuity between sub-Saharan Africa and Asia turns out to be overwhelming. In an attempt to indicate its main factors we will end up focussing on Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition to the Taoism which has dominated the first sections of the present chapter, this will offer a context in which to understand not only African kingship, but also cults of affliction and boat cults. Even so, in the end tree cults will remind us of at least two factors at work in addition to one-directional transmission:

1. the *multidirectional, multi-centred global maritime network* for whose gradual emergence since the Bronze Age there is a wealth of fragmented evidence (although this book is not the proper context to go into detail) – this factor particularly would seem to cast more convincing light on cults of affliction, which have hitherto often been considered as African borrowings from Asia, but where the opposite movement and therefore bi-directional exchange also seems to be in evidence especially since the emergence, a few millennia ago, of forced migration (slavery) from Africa to Asia
2. the existence of a transcontinental cultural substrate dating from the Upper Palaeolithic and before; this factor throws light on the tree cult; on the transformative element cosmology which I have argued (2012d) to be widespread and demonstrable ever since the Upper Palaeolithic; but also on presumably very old proto-shamanic forms of religion that manifest themselves, in various ways, the ecstatic cults of historical times.

So let us first make the detour along a few topics that are not strikingly religious, to return in the end to a better appreciation of the transcontinental effect of such world religions as Hinduism and Buddhism, and of Taoism as (until recently) a more regional religious expression.

10.2. The kingship, the royal orchestra, ceramics and gaming pieces as indicative of Asian-African trans-continental continuities

10.2.1. Kingship

If, in our consideration of African kingship, we may narrow down our scope to South Central African societies on which I have some expertise, it is true to say that there the kingship in many ways appears in the nature of a foreign imposition, whose details of symbolism, ceremonials, ritual, and underlying values are strikingly discontinuous with those of the commoner communities surrounding the royal capitals – even though kings are often recruited from such commoner communities. I have made this point in detail for the Zambian Nkoya (van Binsbergen 2003e / 1993c). In brief, among the Nkoya the commoner communities (whose autochthony during c. two millennia is suggested by archaeological pottery finds) are orientated towards equality, social reciprocity, non-violence, production through agriculture and hunting, some measure of regional trade, and identify with a language that has a long local standing in the region; by contrast, the royal capitals (until the imposition of colonial rule in 1900 CE) were geared towards inequality, the denial of reciprocity, violence, the appropriation of the production of the commoner communities, long-distance trade, and ethnic and linguistic belonging to distant places: the Lunda, the empire of king Mwaat Yaamv²⁴ in Southern Congo. My analysis of these contrasts propelled me into an examination of the regional and increasingly transregional, even transcontinental, origins of South Central African kingships, which ultimately led to the present transcontinental comparison, because I found that in

²⁴ *Mwaat Yaav* (Lunda) means: 'Lord Death'. In Hinduism and Buddhism, Lord Death is a central concept: first recorded in the Vedas, as Yama, this deity is also known as Yamarāja (litt. 'King Death', which makes the South Central African parallel all the more striking) in India and Nepal, Shinje in Tibet, Yamano in South Korea, Yanluowang or simply Yan in China, and Enma Dai-Ō in Japan (Anonymous, 2006, 'Yama'). In the Asian tradition, he is twinned with the god of love, Kama; I am not aware of some such arrangement in the South Central African context – cf. Luweji (Turner 1955)? The ruler of the Lunda capital of Musumba in Southern Congo, Mwaat Yaav is considered to be the overlord of every king within a radius of many hundreds of kms, in Congo, Angola, Zambia, even Malawi. As such, present-day incumbents have played a considerable role in the modern anticolonial, postcolonial, and secessionist politics in the region. One of the striking features of the Mwaat Yaav kingship (and perhaps this is where it got its name from) is that, rather like a Mongolian or Turkish ruler, the incumbent is murdered by his councillors when his term of office is completed – in the Lunda case, he is systematically torn apart. (Incidentally, my analysis of Nkoya myths (2010a) found several more Mongolian parallels, perhaps transmitted from Moghul (<< Mongolian) India.) For the Nkoya, the Mwaat Yaav occupies a special place: in their traditions, their kings originally dwelled at the Musumba capital in a state of humiliation (at the pigsties), from which they fled to set up kingdoms of their own, largely dropping the male genital mutilation (*Mukanda*) that was the Mwaat Yaav's prerogative and means of control; the Mwaat Yaav sent his subject Humbu people on a punitive expedition to impose *Mukanda* once more, but Nkoya male royals confronted the Humbu force successfully, and since then have have the privilege of occupying the kingship – which before that time was a female prerogative (van Binsbergen 1992b, 1993b). Elsewhere I have tried to read this account in the light of the Israelites' (mythical) Exodus from Egypt, or the Hindu Gypsy's escape from a tyrannical Muslim ruler imposing male genital mutilation c. 1000 CE (van Binsbergen 2010a) but I fail to see any South East Asian connection here.

royal myths and ceremonial many elements were to be found suggestive of a transcontinental, especially Indonesian / Sunda provenance. However, we must realise that the presence of two such fundamentally contrasting socio-cultural modalities in one historical society need not inescapably be interpreted in terms of a foreign origin of one of the modalities. One of the classics of political anthropology is Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma*,²⁵ claiming a similar contrast of overall modalities to inform the socio-political life of one South East Asian society in historical times.

However, Sunda influence need not come from Indonesia²⁶ (although the one uncontested case of such influence in the African context is the migration of the people of Madagascar from the Indonesian archipelago, from the beginning of the Common Era onwards). While parallels between Indonesian and South Central African (as well as West African) kingship are considerable, much of the same package can also be found in continental South East Asia. The package includes, in arbitrary order:

- underpinning of the kingship with cosmic symbolism, as the principal connection between Heaven and Earth
- sacred kingship, surrounded by all sorts of prohibitions and requiring public signs of reverence (clapping, squatting, prostration) from all subjects and non-subjects
- royal orchestra with xylophones and hour-glass drums
- other regalia including ceremonial weaponry and sunshades
- fenced royal capitals laid out according to strict, cosmologically-anchored rules; as an aristocratic or royal privilege, the fences have pointed poles, and foundation sacrifices (traditionally: human) are associated with the construction of the fence and of the palace
- the king is considered the Owner of the Land, and identified with the land
- positional succession and perpetual kinship²⁷
- elaborate royal funerary culture
- perhaps as an aspect of the divine / celestial nature of royal persons, they cannot touch the earth but must be carried in a sedan
- slavery and tribute payments are central institutions for the maintenance of the royal court²⁸

²⁵ Leach 1954.

²⁶ Cf. the equally important question that what looks like Sunda influence in a comparative approach to Africa, may not be Sunda at all, but the result of parallel transmission, both to South East Asia and to sub-Saharan Africa, of a common Neolithic, 'Pelasgian' heritage from West to Central Asia. This aspect I discuss elsewhere in the present chapter.

²⁷ These two features (cf. Cunnison 1956; Vansina 1966; van Binsbergen 1992b) are striking in the case of South Central African kingship, but further research needs to confirm my initial and superficial impression that they also obtain in South East Asia.

²⁸ The extent to which these institutions are constitutive of kingship both in Thailand and Western Zambia, may be indicated by the fact that that, in Thailand, the abolition of slavery and *corvée* services was only initiated in 1874 shortly after the ascent to the throne of Rama V, and only definitively abolished by that king in 1905. Among the Nkoya and the Lozi / Barotse, slavery and royal *corvée* were still conspicuous institutions at the turn of the 20th century, and were only definitively abolished by a

- a ceremonial culture of festivals, mostly following an annual calendar, and celebrating the kingship and its relation with celestial and chthonic forces.



Thai funerary sedan for the remains of a princess, c. 1900 CE, one of several in the collection of the National Museum, Bangkok; (b) Use of the sedan on the Lower Congo, late 16th century, after van der Aa (1729); note the sunshade, centre right. The Nkoya collection of oral traditions *Likota Iya Bankoya* describes the journey of a nineteenth-century royal bride to her husband's home in a sedan.

Fig. 10.6. Sedans in Africa and Asia.

In Africa, the kingship has a very wide distribution and considerable continuity between non-Bantu Niger-Congo-speaking West Africa to Bantu Niger-Congo-speaking Central, East and Southern Africa. Many of its forms have been considered eminently African. However, their ultimate origin remains to be ascertained. Sacred kingship has been on African soil ever since the rise of dynastic rule in Egypt (3100 BCE), and there have undoubtedly been effects – recognised and discussed, exaggerated and denied, in a considerable Africanist literature²⁹ – of historical continuity between Egyptian and sub-Saharan African kingship. At the same time, some of the African forms (orchestra, layout of the palace) are so closely reminiscent of South East Asia, that one wonders whether Sunda effects may not have combined with Egyptian-transmitted traits, or even may have, in certain regions, engendered an African political culture of kingship in their own right.

decree of the Lozi / Barotse king in 1930. Although slavery will be listed in Table 10.2 as one among many Pelasgian traits, here again I suspect that South East Asian notions of Buddhist kingship did contribute to the development of slavery in South Central Africa, particularly its change from relatively benign, reversible and non-hereditary pawnship, to downright slavery in the form of human chattels available for transcontinental deportation (cf. Douglas 1964; Meillassoux 1991; Tuden 1958, 1970; Lovejoy 1983; White 1957; Kopytof & Miers 1977; Watson 1980; Kopytoff 1982). However, in connection with this transformation the impact of the transcontinental slave trade must have been far greater than that of Buddhist conceptions of kingship.

²⁹ E.g. Seligman 1934; Meyerowitz 1960; Wainwright 1951, 1949.

The latter suggestion is predicated on the hypothesis (inspired especially by genetic research but also by occasional archaeological finds such as the Buea Roman coin) that East Asian and South East Asian influence on the African continent has been considerable, from 15 ka BP on but particularly in more recent millennia, and is not limited to the obvious targets of Madagascar and East Africa, but extends to South Central, Southern and (via the Cape of Good Hope) even West Africa. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to hypothesise that the kingship and the Bantu language family in Africa (and perhaps also iron-working)³⁰ have a common history, in which³¹ West Africa in the late first millennium before the Common Era is a major milestone but which may also involve the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean region.

On a superficial and incidental level one could point to such details as the fact that also Thai royal history records an heroic and martial queen, Somdet Phra Sri Suriyothai, who gave her life in battle (1548 CE) in an attempt to save her royal husband. She was roughly contemporary to the martial Nkoya Queen Shikanda and her Angolan counterpart Queen Nzinga – at least, if we may thus correct the ideas of present-day Nkoya informants (who on the basis of the number of generations claimed to have elapsed since situate Shikanda in the 18th century); however, there is reason to think that Shikanda never was a historical person but a South Asian warrior god (Skanda) transcontinentally localised both in name and in historical situation.³²

10.2.2. *Musical instruments and the royal orchestra*

Another possible Thai-Nkoya correspondence lies in the royal orchestra comprising xylophones and hourglass drums. However, from the material and the informative texts in the instrument room at the Bangkok National Museum, Thailand, it is clear that Thai xylophones should rather be counted as Javanese instruments, which only around 1800 CE or later were added to the Thai royal musical

³⁰ Cf. Alpern 2005; Hromník 1981.

³¹ Bantuist specialists (and I certainly cannot count myself among their number) tend to be in agreement that the Bantu family probably emerged in the Lake Chad region c. 8 ka BP. However, such reconstructions are rather arbitrary in that no documentary or archaeological evidence can support them. Puzzlingly, the first possible documentary attestations of Bantu derive from the Mediterranean Bronze Age (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chapter 4). It has now been recognised that attempts to construct a convincing proto-Bantu corpus are jeopardised by the heterogeneity of the family's origin. The Niger-Congo linguistic macrophyllum, of which Bantu is a well-known branch, appears to be relatively close to the Austric macrophyllum consisting of Austronesian (the languages of insular South East Asia and Oceania with the exception of New Guinea and Australia) and Austroasiatic (the languages of continental South East Asia, e.g. Thai, Khmer), in several ways: with other African languages, and Amerind, Austric languages appear to constitute an early split from the Borean parent body (the latter subsequently developed into Eurasiatic, Afroasiatic and Sino-Caucasian) (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen, in press (c)); moreover, certain Austroasiatic < Austric languages (e.g. Thai) have noun classes somewhat comparable to Bantu.

³² van Binsbergen 2010a.

repertoire. Here, therefore, the link appears to be with insular rather than continental South East Asia, at least as far as the most recent centuries are concerned. Bronze drums have been signs of leadership in South East Asia ever since the Dong Son culture of Northern Vietnam, around the beginning of the Common Era. These drums came in various designs, including a hourglass-type that is strikingly similar to the modern hourglass drum of the Nkoya kings.



(a) The memorial *chedi* (reliquary) to Queen Suriyothai, Phra Chedi Sisuriyothai, was built by King Maha Chakkraphat in her honour. The chedi is located at Wat Suanluang Sopsawan at the banks of the Chao Phraya River, southwest of the Wang Luang (Royal Palace), Bangkok; (b) A large statue of the queen riding a war elephant, in a memorial park to her outside of the town of Ayutthaya.

Fig. 10.7. The Thai Queen Suriyothai, cf. Nkoya Queen Shikanda?



shown are: the hourglass drum (foreground centre left) and the xylophone (background right), photographed in a temporary location where the king was tending his wet riverside (*matapa*) gardens, away from the palace, September 1977.

Fig. 10.8. The royal musical instruments of King Kahare of the Mashasha Nkoya people, Western Zambia.



(a) source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/doremom360/1413925724/sizes/o/in/set-72157602097553987/>; © Doremom360 – with thanks; (b) <http://baotanglichsu.vn/uploads/image/trongtaynguyen.gif>, with thanks; (c) Metropolitan Museum of Art – note the frogs, which (besides being a cosmogonic symbol in much of Eurasia including Ancient Egypt), also appear as a mythical royal ancestor among the Nkoya, cf. van Binsbergen 2010a, 1992b (s.v. Kambotwe). Not the Nkoya hourglass drum (*mukupele*) but other drums in the royal ensemble were recorded to be decorated with the images, not of frogs, but of two reptiles, python (for the male drum) and lizard (for the female drum). Nkoya drums, the functional suspension eyes of the East Asian drums seem to return in the form of merely decorative wooden protrusions, visible on the hourglass drum in Fig. 10.8 (arrow)

Fig. 10.9. Drums from the Dong Son culture, Vietnam.

In South Central Africa, the royal drums unmistakably feature as *palladia*: they are the central symbol of the nation and their kingship, and their capture by enemies is the end of both. The Nkoya compilation of oral traditions *Likota Iya Bankoya* contains several discussions to this effect. In his intriguing but ill-received study of continuities between South Central Africa and Ancient Israel, the Swedish theologian, ethnographer and comparatist Harald von Sicard explicitly considers African royal drums as localising transformations of the Israelite palladium, the Ark of the Covenant. Apparently royal drums served a similar function in Thailand during the nineteenth century – and perhaps much earlier. Meanwhile, in South Central Africa, royal paraphernalia / palladia are not limited to drums and other musical instruments pertaining to the royal orchestra. In addition there is ceremonial ironware, especially weapons including executioner's axes, swords, scythes and bows, and ornamental bow stands. Of course, prowess in war and hunting has been a perennial aspect of kingship, from its earliest attestations in the Ancient Near East and Egypt., and therefore the king's ceremonial weapons need not derive from South East Asia at all. However, since there is a strong case for the royal orchestra to derive from there, I would also suggest, not totally without specific grounds,³³ that some of the royal weaponry may have such a provenance.

³³ Oppenheimer 1998 – 2001, has an argument on extreme Sunda-based similarity of ceremonial axes (as well as neckrings) in Indonesia and Ancient Europe. In general this geneticist's archaeology leaves much to be desired (as does his comparative mythology; cf. van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008d. Yet

10.2.3. Ceramics and nautical communications

In South and South East Asia, especially Thailand has been a prolific source of ceramics. Especially during the Sukhothai period (middle of the second millennium CE) North Central Thailand produced beautiful products for an international market.



Fig. 10.10. Specimens of Sawankhalok / Sangkhalok ceramics from the middle of the second millennium CE.

According to some Thai sources (*E.g.* Fine Arts Department 2002: 76) and sweeping passing remarks in the international scholarly literature,³⁴ some of these ceramics were also exported to Africa, but so far I have not found, in the Africanist literature, specific detailed substantiation of such claims. It would appear as if some types of South East Asian ceramic boxes and plates, as incomparable prestige articles, may

Oppenheimer's argument inspired me to compare the Nkoya king's ceremonial axe (primarily meant for the ritual execution of slaves) with the Indonesian types, and to find similarities in the emphasis on circle-based curves. A display case full of the king's rifles at the National Museum, Bangkok, Thailand, reminded me of King Kabambi Kahare's fondness of his own collection of rifles, considered major regalia and heirlooms. The same king also boasted a royal bow, which I, as his adopted son, inherited upon his death. Although the bow is of very different construction from the composite Thai ceremonial bows that have constituted regalia, the mythical and artistic significance of the bow in the South East Asian context as the main attribute of Rama (many dance dramas in that region are based on the Ramayana epic) open up another potential Sunda vista.

³⁴ *E.g.* Keith 1987; Green & Harper 1987: 131-133. No such mention of Africa however in: Tharapong Srisuchart & Surat Lertlum, n.d..

have been emulated in wood in South Central Africa, e.g. among the Lozi and Nkoya of Western Zambia.³⁵ However, also Ancient Egyptian parallels could be suggested for such South Central African items attested in historical times.

Mainly older than the Sawankhalok ware, Chinese porcelain has been found in various African prehistoric sites, including Mapungubwe, and Great Zimbabwe:³⁶

'Imported porcelain, stoneware and glass shards have been found at many excavated sites along the East African Swahili coast, such as the Islamic towns of Manda, Shanga and Gedi on the Kenyan coast and the ruins of the Islamic mosque Malindi on the trade island of Kilwa off the east coast of Tanzania. At all of these sites Chinese ceramic shards were found, together with Islamic wares imported from Iran, Persia and India. Exotic imports, when found in a secondary archaeological context, have always provided a basic archaeological dating method if securely dated at their point of origin. In East Africa, (...) the only written records of the pre-Portuguese era is the Greek *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (~ 2 AD),³⁷ a few travel documents from famous Arab travellers such as Al-Masudi and Ibn Battuta (10th century) and hearsay knowledge documented in Chinese sources. (...) Numerous scholars have used particular varieties of Chinese pottery to refine chronology on the East African coast. Chinese ceramic shards have also been found at inland ancient Iron Age ruins, all of which are situated in a region spanning Zimbabwe, Zambia and the northern part of South Africa, where ancient pre-European gold, copper and tin mines occurred.(...) The known imported ceramics recovered from Central African Iron Age sites amount to some 100 shards, of which over 90% come from Great Zimbabwe and are nearly exclusively celadon wares, which broadly dates the shards to pre-Portuguese times.(...) The porcelains traded by the Portuguese, who replaced the Islamic trade along the east coast after 1498, are largely Chinese blue-and-white porcelains and stonewares and were mostly excavated at established Portuguese trading posts.'³⁸



³⁵ Cf. the way bronze axes were emulated, complete in every detail, in stone in the centuries of transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age throughout Eurasia.

³⁶ Cf. Fouché & Gardner 1937-1940; Schofield 1937; Caton-Thompson 1931 / 1970. For a useful, if perhaps somewhat exaggerated, review of the more recent literature on Great Zimbabwe and its intercontinental trade relations, cf. Fish *et al.* 2001.

³⁷ *Sic*; above I refer to MacDowall's research (1964) which allowed us to date the *Periplus* at no CE, over a century later.

³⁸ Prinsloo *et al.* 2005: 807. Also cf. Esterhuizen 2001; Meyer & Esterhuizen 1994.



Fig. 10.11. Food bowls in modern Western Zambia (source: Galerie Ezakwantu 2002-2010).



(a) Celadon potshards excavated on Mapungubwe hill, Limpopo Province (formerly Transvaal), South Africa. (b) Spouted vessel classified as Southern Song celadon (source: Prinsloo *et al.* 2005: 808 f.)

Fig. 10.12. Celadon porcelain from Asia in Africa.



after Prinsloo *et al.* 2005: 807; Sukhothai as provenance of Sangkhalok ceramics indicated with *

Fig. 10.13. Map depicting Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in geographical context with the important ports and cities of the Islamic trade in the Indian Ocean region.

As the investigation of sunken vessels from South East Asia has indicated, specifically

Thai ships played an important role in the regional trade in these ceramics,³⁹ often carrying a mixture of Thai and other ceramic wares, but as yet I am unaware of any Thai ship attested to venture across the Indian Ocean, to reach the African coast.



source: AntikWest Oriental Art & Antiques, 2007-2010; cf. the African wooden plates of Fig. 10.12.

Fig. 10.14. Thai related ceramics from shipwrecks dating from the middle of the second millennium CE

10.2.4. Gaming pieces



³⁹ For specific information on a handful of such ceramics from Thai shipwrecks in the middle of the second millennium CE, see: AntikWest Oriental Art retrieved 10-12-2010. However, this commercial site is imprecise not to say unreliable: a Thai vessel is claimed to have shipwrecked on its way from Ayuthaya (*sic*), the Thai capital in Late Medieval and Early Modern times, but at considerable distance from the coast, to Batavia on the Java coast, in 1460; however, Batavia (the [Dutch] United East India Company's regional headquarters in South East Asia) was only founded by J.P. Coen after the conquest of its predecessor, the town of Jayakarta, in 1619, and named Batavia in 1621; the Batavi, a branch of the Chatti, were an ancient Germanic tribe inhabiting the Netherlands according to Tacitus around the beginning of the Common Era.

Remarkably, similar vegetal shells are used in Southern Africa for divination, thus replacing cowries. *Mungongo* nuts make up an important portion of the diet of San hunter-gatherers. Apparently we hit on an ancient African (or general Old World) cleromantic cultural layer here, which may be influenced in recent centuries by South East Asian models, but does not seem to owe its origins to the latter. Source: <http://www.coincoin.com/bAltGambS.jpg>, with thanks; this collection is similar to, but not identical with, the collection of the Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Sukhothai.

Fig. 10.15. Some specimens of *abbia* from Cameroon (left; average size 3 cm, dictated by the *mungongo* nutshells from which they are carved) (top left) compared with (right) gambling pieces from Thailand with strong Chinese influences.

As I have argued elsewhere (van Binsbergen 1997c / 2011e), it is often the highly abstruse, formal items of culture (such as divination systems, notational systems, writing systems) that persist in relatively unaltered, at least recognisable, form across cultural, linguistic and geographical boundaries; and it is often those, therefore, that are our most fruitful 'index fossils' of transcontinental continuities. Gaming pieces in the Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Sukhothai, bear a remarkable similarity with the famous engraved gaming pieces, known as *abbia*, from Cameroon more specifically the Beti / Yaunde people (cf. Siegel 1940). Yet, although the assumption of considerable East, South East and South Asian influence on the West African coast is one of the main points of the present argument, it is a very long shot indeed to see such influence in the Cameroonian *abbia* stones.

10.3. Towards heuristic hypotheses and research strategies

I will now proceed to discuss new or revised hypotheses on African-Asian transcontinental relationships to which the consideration of the South and South East Asian material has been conducive.

10.3.1. Preliminary considerations: Questioning methodological validity and reliability

Modern ethnography is predicated on the insight that only prolonged and intensive encounter with a local community, supported by the accumulative development of very extensive competence in local cultural and linguistic forms, can produce valid transcultural ethnographic knowledge. Against the background of this dominant paradigm, the present research project is doomed to fail: for an Africanist at the end of his career it is impossible to gather sufficient Asian ethnographic knowledge to competently conduct, on the basis of his personal field-work, the kind of very complex comparisons that are required in the present context.

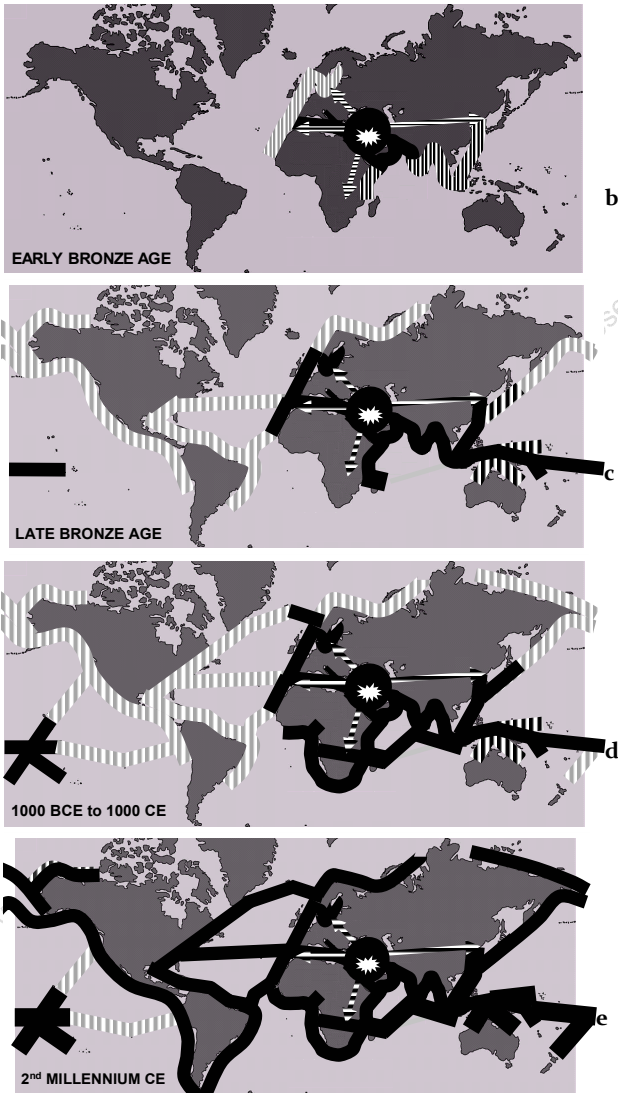
Of course, knowledge based on personal local exposure is augmented (as it always is) by library study and feedback from regional specialists, and thus a more or less acceptable compromise may be found for the methodological puzzle.

zle outlined here. Also we must remember that other relevant disciplines, such as art history, comparative mythology, and archaeology, claim to produce knowledge that is often acceptable within their own paradigmatic disciplinary confines, on the basis on very little personal exposure to the field. ‘Multi-sited’, and dubiously short, field-work has come in fashion with the rise of neo-diffusionist globalisation studies in the last two decades, and my overall approach in the present project could be somewhat defended under that heading. However, it should be clear that the present research setup can only yield *exploratory* results, and that a multidisciplinary, intercontinental team would be the proper format to approach the present research questions appropriately.

10.3.2. An heuristic principle: Positive empirical results attained in connection with a very limited research question provide a context in which wider interpretations can be explored more legitimately and confidently

This principle means that we can use the lessons from years of painstaking research into the global history of geomantic divination (as expounded in Section 10.1, above), and proceed to look at other parts of Asia and Africa, and other items besides divination, and still be confident that what we are pursuing is not evidently a red herring. This is very important, because as yet the study of Asian-African intercontinental continuities is rather counter-paradigmatic. Most Africanists are still adopting the stance, hailing from the early years of African postcolonial independence, that all things African have to be explained by exclusive reference to an African framework – and any deviation from this rule will be frowned upon as a, politically incorrect, North Atlantic hegemonic attempt to deprive Africa and African from their true history and identity. (By the same principle, Old Testament Studies would be anathema because they imply that Christianity as one of the hallmarks of North Atlantic culture, is not originally European, but Asian...)





Legend as shown in map (a) top left: 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)

Fig. 10.16. Proposed emergence of a global maritime network since the Neolithic.

What seems to be at stake is not so much a reconsideration of the gives and takes of Africa's place in cultural prehistory and protohistory, but a deconstruction of the very notion of Africa as a valid and inescapable category in the study of the global cultural past.⁴⁰ Africa is, more than anything else, a relatively recent geopolitical construct dating from Early Modern times and reflecting the perceptions and interests prevailing in the mercantilist North Atlantic – even though Africans and African Americans have in the meantime adopted the notion of Africa as the expression of their innermost identity.

10.3.3. A crucial question: From long-distance trade in artefacts to cultural transmission

In this type of research we run into the difficulty that the connection between transcontinental trade, and the transcontinental flow of ideas including religious representations, is far from obvious. Although over half of Africa is now at least nominally Islamic (but usually far more committed than just 'nominally'), for over a thousand years Islam, and the literacy and secret sciences (divination *etc.*) that accompanied it, were largely confined to royal courts, where also Islamic styles of justice, dress, recreation, gamesmanship *etc.* would obtain. Thus we are used to picture the court of Monomotapa, the great ruler of Zimbabwe, as Arabian in appearance, with Arabian dress codes *etc.* In fact, the court that condemned Father Silveira to death, the first Christian missionary to Zimbabwe, in the mid-16th century (dos Santos 1901 / 1609), ascertained his guilt with the use of the four-tablet oracle that goes back to Islamic texts of the late first and early second millennium of the Common Era – probably the judges were literate Muslims. However, the archaeological impact of such local presence of representatives of a world religion at courts may be so minimal that, unless they leave or stimulate documentary attestations, they risk to be entirely overlooked by history – and the same would apply if these resident priests were not Islamic, but Hindu or Buddhist. Thus, despite the availability of documentary evidence concerning Silveira's fate, the oldest archaeological attestaton of the four-tablet divinatory system that sent him to his death is from 100 years later (Robinson 1959). The suggestion of a Hindu / Buddhist presence at African courts and trading centres, both in East Africa and in West Africa, therefore deserves to be made even though to date it can mainly be supported by circumstantial evidence.

10.3.4. Towards the idea of a multidirectional maritime global transcontinental network since the Bronze Age

In Fig. 10.16 (previous pages) I present provisionally, on the basis of my research in progress, the outlines of a transcontinental maritime network that has been developing between the Indian, Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Oceans since the Neolithic. The complex evidence on which this figure is based cannot itself be presented

⁴⁰ Cf. Mudimbe 1988; Mudimbe 1994; van Binsbergen 1997c / 201b.

here,⁴¹ although part of it is already offered in passing in the present argument.

Now if, for the Indian Ocean and Africa, we stretch the curved actual routes into schematic straight lines, the result would be something like in the following Figure:



Fig. 10.17. For the Indian Ocean region, the proposed transcontinental maritime network largely offers the image of a linear sequence between Africa and South East / East Asia.

Here the discrete nature of the three continents of the Old World – so constitutive of the Eurocentric worldview ever since Early Modern times – largely dissolves into a continuum stretching from the (African) Gold Coast in the West to the Malaccan Peninsula, where it bifurcates into a Southern branch going to Indonesia, the Philippines, even Melanesia; and a Northern branch reaching to South China, ultimately Korea and Japan. Interestingly, the multiple use of the same toponyms for parts of this maritime system suggests its unity. Thus the concept of ‘Gold Land’ is used not only for Sumatra, Zimbabwe (off the East African coast) and Ghana, but the toponym

‘Suvannabhumi (Sanskrit) or Suvannabhumi (Pali) meaning the “Golden Land” or “Land of Gold”, is a term coined by the ancient Indians which refers broadly to Lower Burma, Lower Thailand, Lower Malay Peninsula, (...) Sumatra, but more generally accepted to refer more specifically to Lower Burma’⁴²

The relevance of this schema for our present overall argument becomes apparent once we inscribe in it (Fig. 10.18) the distribution of the three world religions Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. For Islam the situation is straightforward and uncontested: on the strength of the proposed maritime network aided also by overland communications, it spread from the second half of the first millennium both Eastward and Southward to cover a considerable part of our coastal continuum, from East Africa to Indonesia. (Of course, Islam has also massively expanded into Central Asia and even West China, but this was not due to maritime contacts and will be left out of consideration here.) However, Indonesian history has potential lessons for our reading of the African, Western end of our maritime continuum. In Indonesia, Islam was the last world religion to arrive, supplanting Hinduism and Buddhism, which reached Indonesia in the early first millennium, and which were dominant up to the early second millennium. Given the expansion of our continuum in two directions, both East and West, is

⁴¹ van Binsbergen 2012c, 2012e, 2007c. As these studies bring out, there is considerable genetic support for the lines of continuity sketched in Fig. 10.16, including those across the African continent.

⁴² Anonymous, ‘Suvannabhumi’, 2010, with extensive sources. Other toponyms of multiple use throughout this extended maritime system include Libya, Pu(n)t, Havila and Kush, cf. Karst 1931a; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: chs 2 and 3.

it not plausible that also the two earlier world religions, whose powers of expansion in an Eastern direction have been so manifested, also expanded, to some extent, in the Westerly direction, towards Arabia, East Africa, and ultimately West Africa?

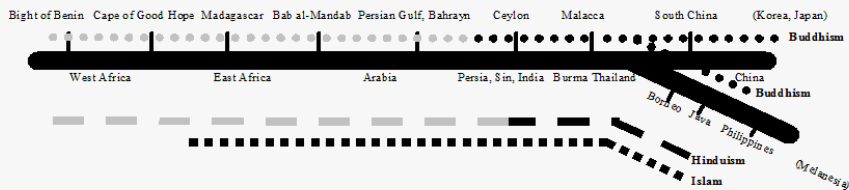


Fig. 10.18. Schematic representation of the distribution of three world religions (Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism) along the linear sequence depicted in Fig. 10.17.

In Fig. 10.18, I have indicated with grey broken en dotted lines what *formally* the implications of such an hypothesis of Westerly expansion of Hinduism and Buddhism would be: expansion West of the Indian subcontinent to Arabia, East Africa and West Africa. Probably, in the reconstruction of this dynamics, so far purely hypothetical, a greater distinction must be made between Hinduism and Buddhism than is necessary in the case of Indonesia.⁴³ But the mechanisms of their spread in South East Asia could plausibly have operated in the western part of our proposed maritime system as well: traders and priests who settle at pre-existing princely and royal courts and come to represent there a distant Great Tradition, that enhances the original legitimacy of local rulers, while subsequently that legitimacy is being redefined in terms of the imported world religion: the imported priestly class designs dynastic genealogies and links them up to their world religion's pantheon, and applies notions of kingship, festivals, royal orchestra, chronicles, epics, court organisation and protocol, to the local scene – after which the imported world religion more or less seeps through to the commoner classes as a selective and adulterated enhancement of their pre-existing popular religion, which by and large survives as a powerful substrate and which is largely continuous with the rest of the Old World.⁴⁴

10.3.5. Identifying specific possibly South Asian / South East Asian components in African culture

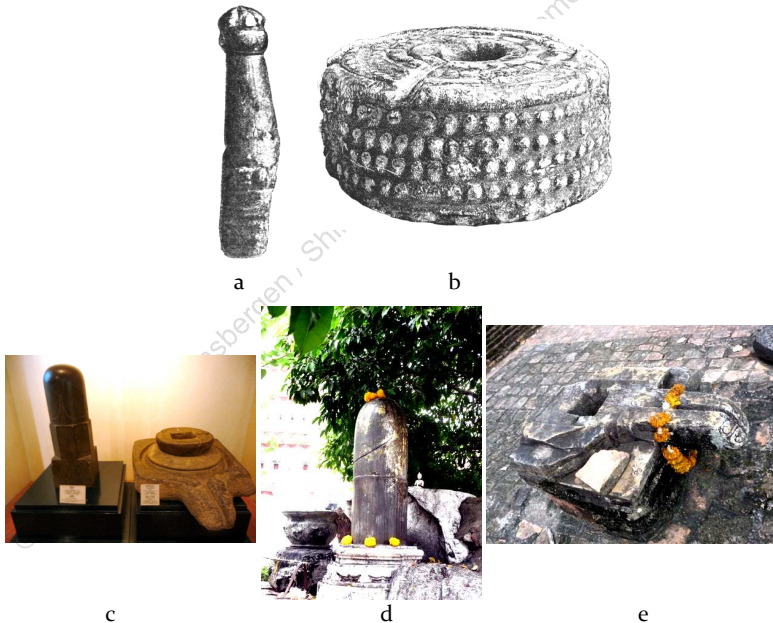
10.3.5.1. Before Islam, Buddhist (and Hindu) influence on sub-Saharan Africa?

From its first century, Islam has come to stay in Africa, and we are accustomed to acknowledge the great impact of that world religion in African history and

⁴³ However, the distinction between Buddhism and Hinduism cannot always be made. All major Hindu deities were incorporated into Buddhism as subservient to the Buddha, and thus they frequently appear in a Buddhist context. Several Thai temples (including Wat Pho in Bangkok and Wat Sri Sawai in Old Sukhothai) show evidence of the cult of Shiva (with representations of the *lingam* as the male principle, and its counterpart the *yoni*). Interestingly, a large number of objects qualifying as *lingams* was excavated by Bent in Great Zimbabwe (Bent 1969 / 1892: 188, with one image). The *yoni* counterpart was also in evidence there, cf. Fig. 10.19.

⁴⁴ Such a model is presented, succinctly but authoritatively, in: Goris & Dronkers n.d. [1950]. It also seems to adequately sum up the Asian dimension of Nkoya religion, cf. van Binsbergen, in press (a).

proto-history. Any influence from Hinduism and Buddhism on sub-Saharan Africa is far less recognised, and if acknowledged at all, it tends to be only in the context of East Africa (cf. Chittick & Rotberg 1975). Yet, considering that major states and cultural complexes in South, South East and East Asia have been dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism for many centuries, and that there has been very considerable and recognised maritime contact between East Africa and these Asian regions, it is almost certain that at some stage Africa underwent the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism – already prior to the last few centuries, when many Indians came to East and Southern Africa, initially in the context of indentured labour hired in the late nineteenth century. That Buddhism reached East Africa is clear from the existence of an Ethiopic account of the Buddha and the Boddhisatva (cf. Budge 1923; Lang 1957). There is also Z.P. Thundy's suggestion that the sect of the *Therapeutae* in Egypt around the beginning of the Common Era was named after the ancient Theravada variety of Buddhism, which has persisted in Sri Lanka and continental South East Asia including Thailand (Thundy 1993: 245).



(a, b) *linga(m)* and *yoni* (Bent 1969 / 1892: 188, 202), Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe; (c) *linga(m)* and *yoni* from Sukhothai medieval city, at Ramkhamhaeng Museum, Old Sukhothai; (d) *linga(m)* at the Wat Pho temple, Bangkok, Thailand; (e) *yoni* at the Wat Sri Sawai, Old Sukhothai. Note that the distinctive feature of the *yoni* is a circular shape with central hole connected with the object's outer rim through a straight groove – an abstraction of humans' female genital anatomy. While here depicted from Buddhist contexts, the *linga(m)*-*yoni* symbolism is also ubiquitously represented especially in Hindu contexts all over South Asia.

Fig. 10.19. Evidence of the Shiva cult from Thailand and from Great Zimbabwe.



Fig. 10.20. The Great Zimbabwe enclosure with the conical tower; the complex dates from the 11th to the 14th century CE.

A similar Buddhist background to Great Zimbabwe was already proposed by Hornell (1934). Of course, I realise that it is politically highly incorrect to doubt the exclusively and primordially African origin of the Great Zimbabwe complex. From c. 1930 (*cf.* Caton-Thompson 1931) much scholarship has been invested to refute the earlier suggestions (by Bent, MacIver *etc.*) as to the non-African (Phoenician, Sabaean, Sardinian *etc.*) origin of the site, whose most striking archaeological features, however, have hardly any counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa. However, throughout my transcontinental research I have taken the position that it is better to acknowledge Africa as an integral part of global cultural history also in the more recent millennia, than to create (alteringly, condescendingly, racially) an artificial niche for that continent, impervious (unlike the rest of the world) for transcontinental influence.



Fig. 10.21. Prang and chedi at the ruin complex of Ayutthaya, Thailand, mid-2nd mill. CE.

10.3.5.2. *Granting the possibility of Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist influences in addition to the well-acknowledged Islamic ones, what kind of attestations of possibly transcontinental continuities might we expect to find in sub-Saharan Africa?*

Before we can answer this pertinent question, let us give our attention to another matter of eminent importance in the global politics of knowledge. I regret that at this point in the analysis, the suggestion emerges that, despite the *multi-directional* nature of the proposed intercontinental maritime system, the direction of cultural borrowing in protohistorical and historical times has been mainly from East to West, i.e. from (East, South East and South) Asia, to sub-Saharan Africa. Frankly, I have relatively little evidence at my disposal to substantiate the reverse process. A particular type of cattle, and certain foodcrops including sesame (Darlington 1969) crossed from Africa to Asia in Neolithic times. In the Common Era, slavery brought so many Africans especially to East Asia, that under the T'ang dynasty (618-908 CE) a Black trickster hero came to constitute a genre of its own in classical Chinese literature (Irwin 1977). The distribution of *mankala*⁴⁵ might be attributed to African influence in Early Modern times, when Africans moved East not only as slaves but also as soldiers. In Indonesia and Sri Lanka this movement gave rise to culturally distinct small minorities, with their own musical and dancing repertoires. Also fire cults and cults of affliction could be discussed in this connection (see below). All this is still relatively modest and main-stream as compared with the claims of the Afrocentrist educationalist and linguist Clyde Winters, who has extensively published on what he sees as African influences on Asia in the same period (Winters 1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1983a, 1983b, 1988). In other words, if we allow ourselves to perceive Asian influence on sub-Saharan Africa, this does not mean that we are blind to African influences travelling the other way around, east-bound.

Now the kind of effects we may expect to result from Asian world religions' postulated impact on Africa would include:

- Hindu / Buddhist *chedis* / *stupas* / reliquaries (*cf.* Great Zimbabwe, above)
- Hindu / Buddhist temples (*cf.* ecstatic cultic lodges and *Vodun* temples in East, Southern and West Africa, especially considering the gaudy colours, bric-à-brac piling up of heterogeneous elements often of an anthropomorphic nature) of Asian reminiscence
- Hindu / Buddhist ritual (*cf.* remnants of ritual in the West African *Vodun* cult, and in South Central and Southern African cults like *Sangoma*, *Bituma* (venerating a lotus!) and other ecstatic / trance / healing

⁴⁵ *Mankala*: a major family of board games often considered as proverbially African (*cf.* Culin 1896), yet also found in South India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (*cf.* Barnes 1975; van Binsbergen 1997c / 2010e, and references cited there).

cults in other words cults of affliction^{46,47}

- Hindu / Buddhist priests (there are indications that priests / cultic leaders in African cults of affliction / ecstatic cults in historic times may well be considered localised transformations of a Hindu / Buddhist priestly model; the same transformation may even be applied to African kings, who in several ways (e.g. food taboos, burial practices) are reminiscent of South Asian Brahmins.
- Hindu / Buddhist doctrine⁴⁸ (cf. general belief in reincarnation, espe-

⁴⁶ The South Asian, Hindu / Buddhist elements in the *Sangoma* cult of Southern Africa I have explored (as a long-standing initiate and officiant of that cult), in a number of papers already referred to.

⁴⁷ *Bituma* was the first ecstatic cult I studied in South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 1972a, 1981b). Its founder, Shimbinga, hailed from Angola and propagated the veneration of the white waterlily, in other words of the lotus; the main other features of his cult were the belief (with Mediterranean / Christian connotations, but with widespread parallels in Africa, cf. van Binsbergen 1981b) that he had risen from the dead, a debarked forked pole hung with strings of white beads, white robes, nocturnal ecstatic healing sessions with drum orchestra and chorus, a song 'We are going to the Moon', and food taboos especially concerning the first fruits of originally alien food crops such as cassava and maize. Although the lotus was also venerated in Ancient Egypt as a cosmogonic symbol, its main associations are Buddhist. In East Asia, the White Lotus cult was an element of conflict and rebellion through much of the last two millennia. The Moon features in virtually every mythology of the world, but rarer are myths that speak of travelling to the Moon as an extensive place of possible inhabitation. In Nkoya mythology the Moon only features as a celestial pendant coveted (like the Moon and the Sun in so many of the world's mythologies; van Binsbergen 2010a) by a princely child (as once by the Ancient Roman emperor Caligula in Camus' 1944 reading...), or as a person whose four wives represent, and attend to, his four phases. The most prominent myth of Moon-travelling that comes to mind is that of the Chinese goddess 嫦娥 Chang E, who as 'the returning maiden' is also implied in Hexagram 54 of *Yi Jing* (䷛); cf. Yang & An 2005. Given the extensive intercontinental communications and the specific evidence of cultural influence from South and East Asia upon sub-Saharan Africa during the last few millennia, as referred to throughout the present book, it is not unthinkable that expelled representatives of the Lotus cult, or of its African offshoots, ended up in Angola. Given the widespread and powerful symbolism of the lotus (it is also venerated in a puberty-initiatory context in Melanesia, e.g. Blackwood 1935), and the syncretic tendencies of West African ecstatic religion ('*Vodun*'), it is quite likely that further research will reveal more connections. These may not be exclusively of a cultural-transmission type. It was found that the tuber of the waterlily has hallucinogen properties (Dobkin de Rios & Mundkur 1977), which may have been part of a very ancient pharmacopaea, or could have been rediscovered time and again by parallel invention. White-robed healer-priests of a necromantic cult, therefore close to *Sangomas* and *Bituma* priests, occur in popular Buddhism in Nepal and surroundings (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Sino-tibetan etymology', s.v. *naksö-sele*, Dumi / Kiranti / Nepali language clusters).

⁴⁸ Even where there is a considerable discrepancy between the spirituality and doctrine of religious specialists, and the folk religion of the masses, the signature of a world religion tends to be reflected in practical matters such as food and drink. In Africa, abstinence from pork and compliance with the practice of male genital mutilation are signs of Muslim identity even when actual practices and beliefs in the field of ritual veneration, compliance with the five pillars of Islam, and alcohol consumption, may deviate from official, formal Islam. In Buddhism, reincarnation beliefs imply respect for non-human life as potentially housing reincarnated human souls, hence abstinence from killing animals and from meat consumption. Similar practices in sub-Saharan Africa which could be indicative of Buddhist / Hindu influence include: reincarnation beliefs, and kings' refusal of commensality, among the Nkoya. In this connection it is reassuring that also in present-day Thailand, vegetarianism is very much a minority option. It combines there with a no-nonsense approach to food – in ordinary life, many meals appear to be prepared and consumed in passing, without the social and

cially in South Central Africa, and in kingship as reinforced by some sort of Great Tradition in the background – which also lends authority to divination practices. Can we really maintain that (much as in rural and peripheral regions, and social classes, of South, South East and East Asia, according to an old debate),⁴⁹ Buddhism, in addition to Hinduism and especially Islam (which so far has attracted most of the attention of scholars in the African transcontinental context), may have formed a legitimating distant reference point, and as such a Great Tradition, even in pre-colonial Africa of the 2nd millennium CE? It is clear that the actual teachings of Theravada Buddhism such as practiced in continental South East Asia (Thailand, Myanmar) and Sri Lanka did not leave conspicuous traces on South Central African culture, strong enough to be detected in cultural and ritual patterns surviving into historical times, but there may be much more than meets the eye.⁵⁰

- Hindu / Buddhist priests legitimating royal claims by genealogies and dynastic constructs, apparently inspired by South, South East and East Asian models of rulership;⁵¹ let me mention one example (more will become manifest throughout the present chapter): one of the amazing facts of Nkoya oral traditions⁵² is that the names of kings appear there grouped by dynasties and each furnished with a serial number: Mwene Manenga I, Mwene Manenga II, Kahare III, *etc.* Much like the amazing systematics of the *Hakata* divination system (see Section 2 above), this suggests dynastic notions managed by a literate elite – and while it would be possible that this literate elite must be sought in twentieth-century recorders of these traditions (Rev. Shimunika and his associates), it is more likely that here we encounter traces of a royal tradition that has been indirectly indebted to Hinduism and Buddhism.⁵³ I also have the impression that Nkoya

ritual elaboration that has become the pattern of North Atlantic middle-class culture, and that seems to puzzle Thai. One must be very careful with generalisations based on a few weeks of fieldwork, but if my generalisation on this point is yet somewhat valid, this condition might reflect not just a historical trend in South East Asian continental culture but a specific application of the Buddhist principle of rejecting the world of the senses. I have found attitudes towards food in rural South Central and Southern Africa similar to the Thai stance, and perhaps this is a reflection of a diffuse Buddhist influence.

⁴⁹ Obeyesekere 1963; Redfield 1955, 1956; Srinivas 1956.

⁵⁰ Thus I have suggested that the Vedic, subsequently Buddhist *homa* fire ritual could be such an influence, but it seems to belong to outside the circle of Theravada; van Binsbergen 2010f.

⁵¹ *E.g.* the Buddhist text *Kamandakiya Nitisa* (Kamandaka & Dutt 1896,) and the Hindu text *Arthashastra* by Kautila (Rangarajan 1992).

⁵² van Binsbergen 1992b; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d. [*Muhumpu wa byambo bya mwaka – Nkoya*]; van Binsbergen 1988d J. *Shimunika's Likota Iya Bankoya*.

⁵³ A perusal of the classic Asian texts on kingship as mentioned two footnotes up might yield further clues as to the extent, and the limitations, to which sub-Saharan African kingships are indebted to literate models and actual state practices from Asia; Rangarajan 1992 / 1987.

oral traditions, including the lengthy *Likota Iya Bankoya*,⁵⁴ have been predicated on South Asian literate models.

- Hindu / Buddhist ritual paraphernalia – beaded scapulars, necklaces and bracelets, although of a near-global distribution going back to very ancient times, may in some of their particular African manifestations (e.g. in the Southern African *Sangoma* cult) be indebted to Asian prototypes.
- Hindu / Buddhist ritual and ceremonial gestures that are out of touch with the local commoner repertoire (cf. staves, black or white robes, specific prayer / respect stances)
- Hindu / Buddhist practices of everyday life, such as divination; the continuities in this field between South, South East and East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, have been the subject of my sustained research since 1990, and have been reported in the above sections.
- Hindu / Buddhist notions of caste hierarchy (a Hindu rather than Buddhist feature); however, in my accounts of the Southern African *Sangoma* cult a rudimentary caste distinction, and selective emphasis and ritual elaboration of the *kshatriya* warrior caste, is unmistakable, for which even a textual basis can be found in South Asian writings; cf. van Binsbergen 2003b: 310 f.; Jolly 1988a: 115.



A leading monk at the monastery adjacent to the Wat Pho temple, Bangkok, Thailand, dispensing blessing and a bracelet of strung beads (already on the lady's right wrist), in exchange for a standard payment of Thai bhat 1000 (ca. € 25). Bracelets of strung beads have been a general feature of Old

⁵⁴ Presented and analysed in: van Binsbergen 1992b.

World life since the Upper Palaeolithic, and their prevalence in present-day Africa therefore cannot simply be claimed as an Asian trait. However, the context (initiation into a cult administered by a localised organisation, a lodge, reminiscent of its *ashram* or monastic counterpart in South, South East and East Asia), suggests that here again we have a case similar to the several cases listed in Table 10.2, below: 'pre-existing African forms due to a common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism'.

Fig. 10.22. A bracelet as sacrificial trophy (follow arrow).

- the Mbedzi / Mbutsi figure throughout Southern West Africa: In Southern Africa the name Mbedzi appears as the widespread honorific title of cult leaders; as the name of a clan with connotations of sacredness and the colour white, whose boast name stresses their custom of *second(ary) burial*,⁵⁵ and whom Frobenius (1931) associates with 'an ancient East Asian kingdom in Southern Africa'. The name also occurs in the Douala region, Cameroon, as the name of an apical ancestor associated with the cult of the sea and its annual festival.⁵⁶ Although in various South Bantu languages the name may mean 'Moon', which opens up all sorts of mythical connotations devoid of historical significance, I proposed (2003) that the reference is in the first place to the Buddha, who in some East and South Asian contexts is referred to as *Butsi*, which in Bantu-speaking mouth would easily become Mbutsi. So far Frobenius' suggestion as to an East Asian kingdom in Southern Africa has not been taken seriously in the international literature,⁵⁷ but against the evidence brought together in the present argument, both Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe appear serious candidates, and their association with the name Mbutsi seems to support my suggestions that, at one stage prior to the ascendance of the Arabs in Southeastern Africa, this kingdom would have had a Buddhist signature. I also suspect that the Lunda region (Fig. 10.23) where also many South and South East Asian traits can be spotted (the Nkoya constitute the Lunda's Southern fringe) qualifies as another Hindu / Buddhist influence area,

⁵⁵ Exhumation of a dead person's remains after one or two years and subsequent re-interment is a custom also found in Africa *e.g.* among the Nigerian Igbo and the Cameroonian Bamileke whose Sunda connotations I have argued elsewhere (notably van Binsbergen 2006c, and in press (b)). The practice has a patchy yet global distribution, sometimes seems primarily associated with South East Asia / Oceania, yet (considering its attestations in *e.g.* Ancient Palestine, Taiwan, Indonesia and Oceania) may also qualify as a Pelasgian trait transmitted along the eastbound branch of the 'cross model'. More research on this point is currently being undertaken.

⁵⁶ It is also at Douala that elaborate, ornate ship's bows are found that I am inclined to read (much like the sculptural traditions in the ornamentation of Western Grassfields royal courts) as evidence of South East Asian influence. There is some genetic support for this idea, the details of which I have set out elsewhere: van Binsbergen 2010e, 2012c, and in press (b); also *cf.* Oppenheimer 1998.

⁵⁷ In recent decades there has been a general discrediting of the figure of Frobenius, for complex and partially valid reasons (Oedipal tendencies on the part of later generations of Africanists in Germany; Frobenius' infringement of *present-day* codes of professional conduct in transcultural field-work; his impact on Afrocentrism) into whose merits I cannot go now. Let it suffice to say that both Richard Fardon, as a prominent present-day ethnographer of Cameroon, and I myself as a specialist on Southern Africa, have found Frobenius' ethnography amazingly reliable; Fardon 1990a.

perhaps even as originally a Hindu / Buddhist state. Elsewhere (2015: 159; http://www.quest-journal.net/shikanda/topicalities/vicarious/vicar_block_1.pdf) I ask the question ‘why should Nkoya [court] musicians be dominant in Western Zambia?’, and identify them as the guardians of an ancient, and sacred, heritage from South Asia. Buddhist influences in sub-Saharan Africa seem particularly concentrated in the institutional domain of the kingship,⁵⁸ – even though of course for such a major and complex institution no one-factor explanation is possible, and especially the trans-Saharan influence from the Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt must be recognised as another factor in its own right. Major Buddhist / Hindu states in Southern Africa during the 11th-15th century CE would be credible epicentres for the transmission, throughout Southern and South Central Africa but with effective extensions into West Africa, of a South-East-Asian-inspired culture of kingship, royal ceremonial culture including orchestra, regalia and boat pageants, – and beyond even the geographic extent of precolonial statal rule, an epicentre for diffuse localising transformations of Buddhism / Hinduism, notably in the form of ecstatic cults. Much of what has remained inexplicable in African kingship and religion on the basis of recognised sub-Saharan African traditions, even if enriched with the undeniable cultural transmission from Egypt during several millennia, suddenly appears in a new light when we take seriously the proposed existence of Southern African Buddhist-Hindu states in the first half of the second millennium CE.

- Below I will briefly indicate the cult of the sea and its many transformations and ramifications in the direction of lesser water deities, naiads, river deities, *etc.* Here again, ancient African traditions may have come to be transformed by Asian influences – yielding, for instance, the Mami Wata complex of West Africa, or the ‘sacred pool’ complex (intimately associated with the Mbedzi name) in Southern Africa. In a study of a Nkoya statuette associated with the *Bituma* ecstatic cult (van Binsbergen 201a), the prominence and transcontinental connections of aquatic and serpentine spirits are further highlighted. Perhaps this is the place to introduce another promising theme for Asian-African continuities: that of the Princess of Heaven, wielding her bow, and playing a major role in the conceptualisation of sacrifices of black cattle to the Sky deity (black because of the coveted rain clouds) in South Central and Southern Africa. The Princess of Heaven features prominently in regions that, in terms of kingship and ecstatic cults, by the present argument would seem to qualify as having undergone considerable Asian / Buddhist-Hindu influence. Although the Princess of Heaven may be considered a Pelasgian concept, yet I suspect that tracing of this theme in the Asian world would yield fruitful insights for Africa.

These are enough themes to fill one individual’s lifetime of future research, or better still a departmental or even an institutional research programme, but I am at the end

⁵⁸ Cf. Ralushai & Gray 1977; Frobenius 1931; van Binsbergen 2003b: 300 *f.*; Dolisane-Ebossé Nyambé 2005.

of my career and my intention is not to embark on a new life's project, but to wind up those projects that have had me occupied for decades, already.

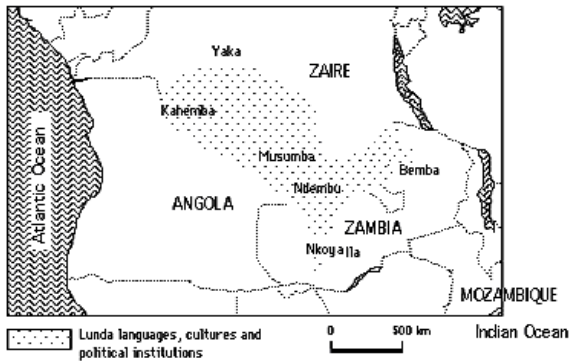
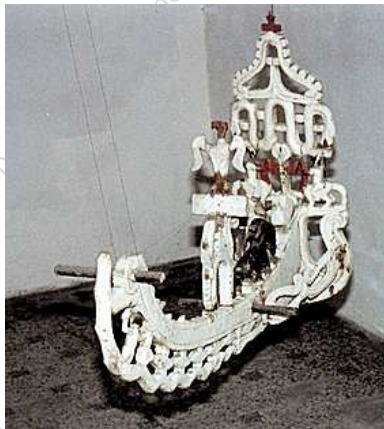


Fig. 10.23. The Lunda region, South Central Africa, as a likely target of transcontinental, South Asian and South East Asian cultural influences during the Common Era.

Let me now briefly elaborate on some of the potentially Buddhist-related African topics outlined above.

- African ecstatic cults (also known as cults of affliction)
- aspects of the culture of kingship, especially in West Africa
- African boat cults



This figure © http://www.galerie-hermann.de/arts/art2/around_and_around/205About_Bug.htm, with thanks. For Oceanian parallels, cf. Meyer 1995: I, 60 fig 40; II, 429 fig. 487; and 449 fig. 514; also cf. the Mimika *mbitoro* spirit pole, Meyer 1995: I, 78 fig. 57; and Asmat spirit pole, I, 81 fig. 60.

Fig. 10.24. Bow of a boat, Douala, Cameroon, 19th c. CE, suggestive of Indonesian / Oceanian influences.

10.3.5.3. Ecstatic cults as further indications of Buddhist influence on sub-Saharan Africa

Given the exposure to South Asia, across the adjacent Indian Ocean, and even to China (*cf.* the well-documented expedition to the East African coast by the Chinese Admiral 鄭和 Zheng He in the early 15th century CE),⁵⁹ the idea of Buddhist influence in East and Southern Africa may have some credibility in the eyes of Africanists. However, what is likely to meet with dogged incredulity is my proposal of an extension of Asian influence to the West African Coast (Namibia, Angola, Lower Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana). Now the general agreement is that trade has been a major factor in the spread of Islam in Africa. To this Becker (1913) has added the brilliant insight that Islam was perceived by the African population as offering a new and more powerful magic; while Horton has argued that Islam's attraction lay in the fact that the immense scope of the divine being proffered by Islam was commensurate to the opening up of the local African world to transregional contacts (Horton 1971; van Binsbergen 1981b). The point now is that all along the African West Coast we see cults of affliction emerge in the course of the second millennium CE, most of which have implicitly to do with the creation and maintaining of regional and transregional trade contacts, the creation of trust between adepts hailing from distant places, the control of monopolies, the sealing of contracts *etc.* A case in point are the cults studied by Janzen in the Lower Congo.⁶⁰ If in general such cults of affliction, in the form they took in historical times, reached East Africa across the Indian Ocean, the extension of trading and religious contacts across Cape of Good Hope into West Africa (of which cowries, divination bowls and geomantic divination in general are testimonies, in my opinion), then it stands to reason that Buddhism (and Hinduism) formed indirectly and obliquely a likely context for such Westbound expansion: Arabs did not follow this maritime route but reached West Africa overland by the caravan routes. The Asian element in West African cults has been recognised before; it will be all the more readily be recognised in the light of the present argument, and will probably appear considerable, on closer scrutiny.

Ecstatic cults abound around the Bight of Benin including parts of Cameroon. Often the veneration of maritime elements is an important aspect of them. The images (Fig. 12.25 a, b courtesy Chesi)⁶¹ show characteristic episodes of *Vodun* cults in Togo. They have also been a prominent expression in coastal East Africa and in S.C. Africa especially in recent centuries, where (at the eve of the penetration of Islam and Christianity) they have partly supplanted pre-existing local ancestral cults (van Binsbergen 1981b). In the latter regions people often consider them spiritual *winds* that come from the east, on the wings of long-distance trade. Often appearing in conjunction with divination systems, there is

⁵⁹ *Cf.* Duyvendak 1938, 1949; also the recent propagandistic album by Song Mingwang *et al.* 2005. Zheng He's exploits came to be known to the general Africanist community by Basil Davidson's popular book *Old Africa Rediscovered* (1959).

⁶⁰ Janzen 1978; also *cf.* Janzen 1992; *cf.* van Dijk *et al.* 2000.

⁶¹ Chesi 1980-1981 / 1979; a relevant collection is also: Mueller & Ritz-Mueller 1999.

much reason to see them as local applications of cultic systems of Madagascar, and ultimately of Sri Lanka and other Asian regions around the Indian Ocean, where ecstatic cults (often concentrating on healing and witchcraft) form an undercurrent of Buddhism and Hinduism.⁶² Note the transcontinental bricolage in picture (c) (circled), featuring among other items the Hindu deities Ganesha and Parvati, his mother. Specialists have for decades recognised the South Asian aspects of *Vodun*.



(a) Mami Wata ritual on the shore of the Bight of Benin; (b) open-air *Vodun* session; (c) and (d) Vodun priest(esse)s in their shrine (e) An altar (© 2010 Museum of the African Diaspora) for the thunder and lightning god Shango in North Carolina, USA – continuous with many such cult places in West Africa; (g) by comparison, the popular temple of Wat Thummikarat, Ayutthaya, Thailand; also cf. the tree shrines of Fig. 10.29.

Fig. 10.25. Ecstatic cults in West Africa reminiscent of Asian influences.

10.3.5.4. Identifying possibly South Asian / South East Asian elements in African kingship

We have already mentioned one striking Asian-African parallel that seems to be

⁶² Of the extensive literature on possession and mediumship in South and South East Asia, I only mention: Kakar 1983 / 1982; Patamajorn 2007; Kapferer 1997. For the African connection, cf. Alpers 1984; Bourignon 1968, 1976.

suggestive of East-West borrowing in the context of African kingship: the royal orchestra. But there is more. Today, as a result of Afrocentrism and the *Black Athena* debate, popular reconstructions of early African history tend to reach back to Ancient Egypt for prototypes; also non-Afrocentrist writers of an earlier vintage have stressed continuity between Ancient Egypt and West Africa: such as Seligman, Meyerowitz, and Wainwright (already mentioned – with an Egyptocentric orientation) and Petrie (who, anticipating on a more recent, Afrocentrist trend, stressed rather Egypt's indebtedness to sub-Saharan Africa).⁶³



(a) Akan festival showing gold-leafed wooden stool, royal sunshades, and court officials seated in state, Akuropon, Ghana, photographed by Herbert Cole in 1972 (after Lavallev n.d., with thanks); (b-d): royal processions in modern Ghana and Nigeria

Fig. 10.26. The public presentation of kingship in West Africa.

⁶³ Petrie 1914. In this connection the Egyptologist Fairman has formulated what I have called Fairman's Dilemma: should Egyptian-African continuities be interpreted as evidence of influence of Egypt upon sub-Saharan Africa, or as evidence that Egypt is a product of sub-Saharan Africa? Fairman 1965. In van Binsbergen 1997b and 2010e, in the context of the *Black Athena* debate, I discussed the merits of the 'Egypt as child of sub-Saharan Africa' thesis and concluded that, while it has a point, it grossly underestimates the extent of Egypt's influence on sub-Saharan Africa, and the *indebtedness to Ancient Egypt, and of sub-Saharan Africa, to Neolithic and Bronze-Age West Asia* – because

- (a) the pre- and protohistoric effects of South-bound transmission (probably from the Late Bronze Age onward, and partly as a result of the Sea Peoples' episode in Egypt and the Levant) according to the Pelasgian Hypothesis' 'cross model'; and
- (b) because of such direct transmission in historic times (Lange).

Dierk Lange (2004a, 2004b, 2011) has convincingly stressed Ancient Mesopotamian / Israelite and West African continuities going back to the mid-1st mill BCE. One would therefore expect that also the royal sunshades of present-day West Africa have an Ancient Egyptian origin. This however is not supported by the evidence. *Portable sunshades / umbrellas are very rare in Egyptian iconography – the standard form there is the fan, whose shade-producing surface is vertical rather than horizontal, and linear instead of convex. Prototypes of sunshades are however available in Assyrian reliefs from the 1st millennium BCE. Considering Dierk Lange’s claim of extensive Mesopotamian and Israelite influence on West Africa, it is possible that the West African royal sunshades hail from the Ancient Near East. However, in view of their overwhelming prevalence in South and South East Asian royal and especially religious contexts, an equally plausible hypothesis is that they have reached West Africa as a cultural influence from Asia, via the Cape of Good Hope.*



(a) An artist’s impression of the use of royal fan in Ancient Egypt – based however on the best Egyptological expertise of a century ago (Maspero *et al.* 1903); (b) Tut-^cAnḥ-Amon’s sunshade, revealing a totally different conception from the portable umbrella (this king’s funerary treasure also comprised a semi-circular metal fan on a pole); (c) Ramesses III with fans, coloured Medinet Habu relief (detail); (d) Assyrian king Sennacherib, with prototypical sunshade mounted onto his chariot; (e) Assyrian king Shalmanesser under sunshade;

(f) Ethiopian representation of royal sunshade.

Fig. 10.27. Sunshades transcontinentally.

10.3.5.5. Identifying possibly South Asian / South East Asian elements in African boat cults

On this point I must limit myself to just the presentation of pictorial material:



(a) The Nalikwanda, royal barge of the Barotse / Lozi king, during the annual migration ceremony called the Kuomboka; (b) Thai royal barge end of 19th c. CE; (c) Thai royal barge today. Maritime processions and pageants are known from all over continental South East Asia; (d) boat image on a Dong Son drum (cf. Christie 1961; also Li 1986).

Fig. 10.28. The royal boat cult in South Central Africa and in South East Asia.

10.3.6. What periodisation can we propose for Asian-African cultural continuity?

If there thus seems to be a possible case for Asian-African borrowing regardless even of the advent of Islam to Africa, it becomes important to suggest rough

dates for the proposed Buddhist and Hindu influence.

Indian Ocean trade linking the Persian Gulf and the Indus Valley dates from no later than the second millennium BCE, and possibly considerably earlier. In the same period, Egypt had extensive trade with Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula, possibly also extending further South along the East African coast. Around the beginning of the Common Era, trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was thriving, and Roman ladies were dressed in diaphanous silk from what the Romans called *Seria*, *i.e.* China. If in these millennia there was specific Asian-African cultural borrowing, I would not know how to identify it, although the global maritime network I proposed above had presumably already been well established for millennia, at the time. During the T'ang dynasty, Chinese trade on the Persian Gulf was thriving and brought, besides merchandise, many items of Chinese intellectual culture there (*e.g.* medical practices such as taking the pulse, and divinatory practices) which had a great influence on Islamic Mesopotamian culture, and from there spread both to Europe and to Africa through vehicles that hitherto have been exclusively perceived as Islamic. Great Zimbabwe was build from the 11th c. CE onward, and if it can be argued to display Buddhist influences, those should at least go back to the end of the first millennia CE. In the same time as the rise of Great Zimbabwe, Chinese merchants were sufficiently acquainted with Southern Africa to sketch an adequate map of its coastline. The prototype of a 36-zodiac such as seems to be reflected in Venda and West African divination bowls, dates from the first millennium CE, and I propose to provisionally put the time of its borrowing into African divination repertoires around 1000 CE, first in Southern Africa, subsequently in West Africa. I am under the impression (which however needs to be confirmed in detail) that accounts of cults of affliction and possession cults in West Africa can be found in European travelogues from Early Modern times, which suggests that in the first half of the second millennium Asian influence spilled via Cape of Good Hope to the West African coast as far as the Bight of Benin, possibly further West even. This Asian influence hailed from a Hindu / Buddhist provenance, and not from an Islamic one: Islam only reached West Africa through caravan routes overland, and not overseas. A period of 500 to 1,000 years seems long enough for the South, South East and East Asian influence on sub-Saharan Africa (East, Southern and West) to be incorporated into local and regional cultures in a process of effective transformative localisation (so effective, in fact, as to wipe out all conspicuous traces of a transcontinental origin),⁶⁴ yet short enough to allow these borrowed cultural items to retain a measure of recognisability. A condition that adds further credibility to the idea that some package of cultural elements was transmitted overseas from continental South East Asia (including Thailand) to sub-Saharan Africa, is the fact that in the middle of the

⁶⁴ We are reminded of the apt title of Robert Dick-Read's 2005 book: these Asian seafarers seem to have been *Phanton Voyagers*, leaving fewer obvious traces on the ground than one would expect – unless (and many opponents would claim so) their very existence is a phantom of the scholarly imagination.

second millennium CE, when such transmission is most likely to have occurred, there were intensive political, religious and economic relations between the kingdom of Siam (now Thailand) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) – whereas the latter island, situated south of the Indian subcontinent, has always been recognised as an obvious stepping stone in the transmission of Sunda elements (genes, people, artefacts and ideas) from insular South East Asia (especially Indonesia) to Africa, including Madagascar.

While thus provisionally stating the case for a periodisation of Hindu and Buddhist influence on Africa, Taoism remains a less transparent case. A 2nd-mill.-CE influence seems indicated by my argument on Nkoya clan names (van Binsbergen 2012d); yet there are also scattered suggestions of a considerable Chinese presence on African soil c. 3 ka BP or older (cf. p. 286 f., above).

10.3.7. Limitations of the idea of transcontinental borrowing in proto-historical and historical time: The tree cult in Hindu and Buddhist South and South East Asia suggests that there is also a common substratum between Africa and South East Asia; exploring the Pelasgian heritage since the Neolithic

Meanwhile, the cult of trees throughout South and South East Asia reminds us of the fact that there are also Old-World communalities (probably going back to the Neolithic or even Upper Palaeolithic, in which both Africa and South East Asia share without being the result of diffusion of one continent to the other in recent millennia). Sacred trees and tree myths feature all over the Old World, and make it plausible that the mytheme of cosmogony and anthropogony from a tree belongs to humankind's oldest mythical repertoire, probably dating back to before the Out-of-Africa Exodus c. 60 ka BP (Witzel 2001b, 2012; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b). Throughout the Old World we can find offerings to sacred trees in the form of textile: shreds / rags torn from the believer's own clothes (as in North Africa as well as West and Central Asia), considerable metres of new cloth deposited at the foot of the tree as in pre-colonial South Central Africa (where white cloth was always a long-distance trade item rather than a product of local home industry), or stripes of cloth wound around the trunk as in South East Asia.





(a) Log wrapped in cloth venerated at a riverside temple in Bangkok, Thailand; (b) an alleged clone of the Buddha's original *bodhi* tree, now at Wat Pho temple, Bangkok; (c) as an example of the *rag tree* theme: close-up of cloth would around the tree at (b); (d) inscribed forked planks and branches placed against the tree at (b) – note that the forked branch (while a time-honoured type of village shrine throughout Niger-Congo speaking Africa) was the main cultic emblem of the ecological cult of the Ila prophet Mupumani (active in Central Zambia 1914-15) and of various ecstatic cults that, coming from the Indian Ocean region, swept South Central Africa since the 19th century CE (van Binsbergen 1981b); (e) forked branches lying at the foot of

the tree at (b); (f, g) at Ayutthaya, a tree that has clutched a statue's severed Buddha head in its roots, is on the other side covered under statuettes and other objects of veneration; (h) by comparison: the central village *waringin* tree of the village of Nyu Kuning, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, with a broad chequered cloth around its trunk; (j) at the Wat Si Chum temple, Sukhothai, Thailand, a sacred tree lavishly adorned with cloth overlooks an outside Buddha statue (centre left) as well as the tall chapel (centre) in which a famous, giant standing Buddha statue is kept. Throughout the Old World (I first encountered this arrangement during field-work in the highlands of North-western Tunisia, 1968) sacred trees occur in the near vicinity of man-made shrines, as if the former lend their sacredness to the latter. The pictorial material presented here could be augmented *at libidum* with examples from Hindu and Buddhist contexts in South Asia.

Fig. 10.29. Aspects of the tree cult in South East Asia.



Fig. 10.30. A nature genius surrounded (in accordance with a sacrificial culture encompassing much of South, South East and East Asia) by fresh vegetal offerings, in a garden setting, Wat Pho temple, Bangkok, Thailand.

Along with trees, other forces of undomesticated nature are being venerated in Hinduism / Buddhism, for instance those represented in gardens as malicious looking spirits / *genii* (cf. the *jinn* / pl. *jenun* of the Islamic world).

However, this example of the tree cult very far from exhausts such communalities between South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa as can be attributed to a common cultural substratum going back to the Neolithic.

In the chapters of this book I have repeatedly (esp. p. 289 *f.*) referred to the Pelasgian Hypothesis and the cross-model as possible explanations of long-range cultural continuity in space and time. The following Table 10.2 presents a few remarks on those ‘Pelasgian’ items (numbered as in my original presentation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 374-377, Table 28.4) that occur both in South East Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa and that have a bearing on religion. The point of course is that, *if these Pelasgian traits have spread to both sub-Saharan Africa and to South East Asia from the Bronze Age onward, we scarcely need specific East-West transmission along the proposed intercontinental maritime network to explain their presence in sub-Saharan Africa in historical times.*

no.	description	proposed interpretation in terms of East-West transmission in historical times
4	cult of the sea	This cult has probably an Upper Palaeolithic background, and manifests itself in a great variety of cults of major and minor deities associated not only with the sea but also with rivers, lakes, streams <i>etc.</i> While there is thus a shared substrate between Asia and Africa, I am inclined to believe (for reason of formal similarities in cultic paraphernalia, dress, organisation <i>etc.</i>) that the specific forms of Mami Wata ecstatic cults in West and Central Africa, owe a considerable debt – probably on the basis of a pre-existing African substrate – to the cults of the goddess of the waters, the princes of the sea <i>etc.</i> in both continental and insular South East Asia
6	boat cult; boats dominate iconography (ultimately combining with Flood myths, cult of the sea, and Sun cult)	A boat cult is already a recognisable Pelasgian trait in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt; therefore for this trait we may assume pre-existing African forms due to the common Pelasgian substrate, yet recognisably transformed by ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
14	matrifocality / premarital female sexual license / women conspicuous in political, military and religious roles, even leadership / tendency towards gender equality; female kings and male royal escorts	The Amazon type of female prowess is part of the Pelasgian heritage and may surface all over the Pelasgian distribution area, which covers much of the Old World. I think that African cases of female royal prowess need not derive from the few isolated Thai cases. Meanwhile, a Sunda element is suggested by the fact that, in South Central Africa, male royal escorts usurping female royal power have played a role in precolonial state systems comparable to that recorded for Madagascar in the 19th century.
26	the cult of the earth: landscape (or rather river scape) parcelled into shrine regions each served by a – typically aniconic; <i>e.g.</i> herm-like – cult often also dispensing divination; palladium	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate; I have provisionally explored aspects of its Old World continuity in connection with the Nagara Padang devotional site among the Sunda people of Western Java ⁶⁵
27	complementary to the cult of the earth: socio-political units with (aniconic?) palladium, sacred to <i>e.g.</i> virgin warrior goddess (= creatrix)	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate; however, it is possible that royal drums as palladium in Africa owe something to Asian examples – as the rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
33	elaborate death industry around royals, for royals themselves funerals are taboo	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate

⁶⁵ van Binsbergen 2011h, included in the present book as ch. 12.

38	tree cult, cult of the initiatory sacred forest	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate
39	royal band with distinctive instruments: xylophones, drums, iron bell / gong	unmistakable Sunda influence
40	nautical skills	there is evidence of a continuity in boat types, transmitted from East to West: the outrigger, often considered an Oceanian invention (<i>cf.</i> Dick-Read 2005; against Hornell 1928); and a large eye as a boat ornament; ⁶⁶
41	exalted royal courts (<i>cf.</i> royal band)	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
54	chariot	In the South and South East Asian tradition, the chariot is the privileged vehicle of gods and kings. Chariots reached sub-Saharan Africa in the Late Bronze Age, the rain forest and tsetse fly largely precluded the expansion of horse and chariot south of the equator. I am unaware of the symbolic significance, if any, of the chariot in royal contexts in West Africa. In South Central Africa, among the Nkoya, a major mythical king Kapeshe, whose name has no local etymology, seems to be named after the Sanskrit word for 'chariot beam'. It is this kind of detail that seems to confirm a considerable South and/or South East Asian influence on African kingship
56	shamanism and cults of affliction	pre-existing African forms due to common substrate, probably rearrangement of a pre-existing royal trait in the hands of ritual specialists influenced by Hinduism / Buddhism
58	raiding and trading	
59	slavery	
60	great magical powers attributed to royals	
61	cults of affliction considered to be of alien origin	
68	reincarnation belief	

Table 10.2. Proposed interpretation in terms of to East-West transmission in historical times, of the occurrence of certain Pelasgian traits both in South and South East Asia, and in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the light of Table 10.2, a considerable South and South East Asian cultural impact on sub-Saharan Africa, under the signature of the world religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, appears to be a distinct possibility, even though as yet the empirical evidence is somewhat scarce. Usually, the necessary empirical data begin to become manifest under the heuristic effect of such a hypothesis, once formulated.

10.4. Conclusion

On the basis of a consideration of selected aspects of South and South East culture and history, against the background of the results of my earlier results into transcontinental continuities between Asia and Africa in the field of divi-

⁶⁶ Hornell 1923, 1938. Also see the arch-diffusionist study by G. Elliot Smith, 1916, 'Ships as evidence of the migrations of early cultures'. One of my imminent publications is: van Binsbergen, in press (g), *Sun cults in Africa and beyond: Aspects of the hypothetical Pelasgian heritage? Grafton Elliot Smith's 'Heliolithic Culture' revisited after a hundred years.*

nation and ecstatic cults, I hope to have demonstrated that the study of such continuities now (with the new attention for neo-diffusionist studies in the context of globalisation research) begins to open up as a promising field of enquiry. New insights in transcontinental continuities are to be expected, that may throw new light on the extent to which Africa has always been part of global cultural history, and should not be imprisoned in a paradigm that (out of a sympathetic but mistaken loyalty to African identity and originality) seeks to explain things African exclusively by reference to Africa. Is Africa to lose or to gain from these new transcontinental insights? It will be further dismantled as a nostalgic geopolitical construct subject to 'othering', but gain vitality and credibility as part and parcel of the world as a whole.

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Chapter 11. Giving birth to Fire

The Japanese cosmogonic myth of Izanami and Kagutsuchi in transcontinental perspective

This chapter reflects on the Japanese cosmogonic myth of the primal goddess Izanami giving birth to the Fire God Kagutsuchi. In the process she is said to sustain such burns that she died and became a, or the, death goddess – a remarkable development, for at this point she has already given birth to islands, mountains, trees, *etc.* without noticeable difficulty. I will outline six different registers whose interplay governs the myth, and of these I will only explore one in some detail: that of a transformation cycle of elements. Here, like in Izanami's plight, destruction and production are the two basic relations. This cosmological model is widespread in space and time, and surfaces, for instance, in a late, streamlined form in late 1st mill. BCE China: as the 易經 *Yi Jing* cosmological system of changes based on the 64 combinations of the eight trigrams two taken at a time; and in the five-element cosmology of Taoism in general; while having convincing parallels – significantly differing in detail – in sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, India, Ancient Greece (Empedocles and other Presocratics) and North America. Fire, of course, is among one of the basic elements or positions, and so are water, earth, air, often also metal and wood. These details I have meanwhile worked out in my book *Before the Presocratics* (2012). Without wishing to reduce the complexity and literary grandeur of the myth of Izanami giving birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire to just one of the varieties of the transformative cycle of elements, my argument seeks to assess what insights this perspective yet may offer. The final part of the chapter discusses to what extent the myth under study may be illuminated from the perspective of the comparative study of flood myths worldwide.

11.1. Introduction

11.1.1. Synopsis of the myth of Giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire

Japanese mythology is a rich and well-studied field (cf. Matsumura 1996; Yoshida 1977; Piggott 1969; Florenz 1901; Anesaki 1964 / 1916; Saunder 1961; Witzel 2005). Point of departure of my argument is the myth of the Japanese goddess Izanami (イザナミ, also given as 伊弉冉尊 or 伊邪那美命, meaning 'she who invites') giving birth to the Fire God Kagutsuchi (カグツチ), also called Kagutsuchi no kami (迦具土の神), Hinokagutsuchi (火之迦具土), or Ho musuhi (火産霊). Izanami is the sister and spouse of Izanagi (イザナギ, recorded in Japanese classic histories (early 8th c. CE) as 伊弉諾 – in the *Kojiki* 古事記 – or as 伊邪那岐 – in the *Nihon Shoki* or *Nihongi* –, also written as 伊弉諾尊, meaning 'he who invites'). These two creation deities of the eighth generation have, geomorphically, produced the islands, sea, rivers, mountains, trees, herbs, of the Japanese archipelago. Although many instances of procreation in the early phase of the Japanese 'Age of the Gods' are indirect and non-genital – with numerous clusters of gods springing from implements, acts, conditions *etc.*), the earliest geomorphical phase of this process is implied to have taken place in the normal manner of human birth, from Izanami's womb and via the natural birth channel (which marks her as a great Mother Goddess). Yet, amazingly enough, considering the diverse nature of this offspring, no obstetric problems presented themselves (apart from some highly significant miscreants to which we shall return) until Izanami gives birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire. Then (at least, according to the *Kojiki*, and one alternative version cited in the *Nihongi*) her genitals are lethally burnt, and she retreats to 黄泉 Yomi / 'Yellow Springs', the Land of Death, where her dealings with Izanagi constitute a dramatic and moving parallel to the Orpheus and Eurydice theme from Ancient Graeco-Roman mythology.¹ Fleeing from Yomi and pursued by Izanami and the eight Thunder gods that have sprung from her putrefying body, Izanagi erects a number of boundaries between Yomi and the land of the living, separates from Izanami who thus becomes the Death goddess, kills Kagutsuchi / Fire, and engages in elaborate purificatory lustration, – in the process all the while generating new clusters of gods, including the two protagonists of the next mythical episode: the ocean / rainstorm god スサノオ Susanowo, and his sister the Sun goddess 天照大神 / 天照大御神 Amaterasu-ōmikami or 大日靈貴神 Ōhiru-menomuchi-no-kami (Florenz 1901; Aston 1896).

11.1.2. Central question and disclaimer

My argument seeks to answer the central question as to *why, after giving birth to islands, mountains, rivers and trees for which the human womb and the human natural birth channel are equally unequipped, giving birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire should be so utterly disruptive, both to Izanami and her sibling spouse, and*

¹ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.3.2; Pausanias, 9.30; Vergil, *Georgica*, 4.453.

to the narrative sequence of the canonical Japanese cosmogony?

My answer to our central question must necessarily rely on a comparative theoretical framework, some of the groundwork for which I explored in meetings of the Harvard Round Table and of the International Association of Comparative Mythology (van Binsbergen 2004a, 2008a, 2006b, 2007c / 2008d, 2010a). What informs the present argument is a view – perhaps somewhat unusual in circles of Japanologists and mythologists – of intensive transcontinental interactions since at least the Neolithic, if not much earlier. The extensive genetic, archaeological, linguistic, comparative ethnographic and comparative mythological empirical, methodological and theoretical background for such a view (largely indebted to the work of Martin Bernal and Michael Witzel)² I have extensively discussed elsewhere, also in the present book; they cannot adequately be recapitulated in the present chapter

11.2. Six registers together informing the ancient texts of the myth of Giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire

A formal and hermeneutical analysis of the principal ancient texts presenting variants of our myth (*Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*,³ 8th c. CE, available in scholarly English translations with extensive critical apparatus) suggests that, in each of these variants, the narrative oscillates between a limited number of registers:

1. *The ‘Sinsing’ (‘Chinese-ising’, ‘Chinesing’) register*: As a superficial embellishment, the peripheral respect for, and emulation of, classical Chinese cosmology and philosophy, as mediated via Korea – major themes in which were the cosmic egg, the cosmogonic myth of 盤古 P’an-ku (implied), the systems of 8 trigrams 八卦 *pa gua* and 64 hexagrams of 易經 *Yi Jing / I Ching* as a metamorphic correlative cosmology, and the distantly kindred correlative system of 五行 *wū xíng* ‘Five Elements’. As the beginning of the *Kojiki* has it (the entire book was written in classical Chinese with Japanese admixtures, as a convincing demonstration of Korean-mediated Chinese cultural domination over early Japan):

‘At the Great Palace of Kiyomihara did he ascend to [9] the Heavenly seat: in morality he outstripped Ken-Kō, in virtue he surpassed Shiu-Ō. Having grasped the celestial seals, he was paramount over the Six Cardinal Points; having obtained the heavenly supremacy, he annexed the Eight Wildernesses. He held the mean between the Two Essences [i.e. 陰陽 *Yin and Yang / Japanese In and Yō*] and regulated the order of the Five Elements [五行 *wū xíng*]’ (Chamberlain 1919: 3).

² Bernal 1987; Witzel 2001, 2010; van Binsbergen 2011, 2012d; van Binsbergen & Venbrux 2010; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011.

³ The *Kojiki* gives only one integrated version authored by one identified narrator, but the *Nihon Shoki* often cites (albeit without identifying sources) a considerable number of variants of the same episode.

A little further down is an explicit reference to two of the sixty-four configurations of the *Yi Jing* system.

2. *The geomythical register*: Much more centrally, a geomythical account of the origin and unity of the Japanese archipelago.

3. *The 'bureaucratic-proliferation' register*: Equally centrally, a charter of the early Japanese state bureaucracy, by attributing a specific god to each constituent aristocratic unit – on this point there are obvious parallels with Chinese theology and mythology.

4. *The bodily register*: Often hidden under layers of Chinese-induced 'civilising' prudery (cf. Elias 1939), a strongly *lingamic* / *yoniac* theme, befitting an account of origin and procreation, and apparently (cf. Buruma 1983) affirming a *longue-durée* orientation of Japanese culture. In addition to the obviously sexual passages, numerous oblique allusions could be cited, e.g. the 'pillar' and 'hall' as the scene of our divine sibling's wedding; or the smith god called to make the metal mirror with which the Sun goddess is to be lured out of her hiding: Chamberlain interprets the smith's name as 'Celestial Penis'. This body part is more frequently alluded to in the first part of the two Japanese traditions, for instance informing the symbolism of Izanagi's 'Jeweled Spear' (Aston 1896: 4 f., 'male pillar' – on authority of the 18th-c. CE Japanese commentator Hirata) that is instrumental in the creation of the islands...⁴ In this connection it is most remarkable⁵ that the least attractive aspects of human corporality (urine, faeces, death and putrefaction) are mainly illustrated, in the text, on *female* bodies, whose dying is almost depicted as essential for the continuity of life – not only in the case of Izanami, but also of the food goddess 保食神 Ukemochi – with many parallels worldwide. Yet it is not exclusively women's bodily functions that are depicted: some of the un-gendered bodily functions of male bodies are also evoked but then in contexts stressing not vulnerability but prowess: Izanagi urinates a boundary river between the land of the living and Yomi; male Susanowo like a naughty boy stealthily defecates on the throne of Amaterasu,⁶ with dramatic consequences – this being one of the reasons cited for her seclusion which plunges the entire world in darkness.⁷ Female ana-

⁴ For extensive comparative aspects of such a name, cf. Allegro 1970, although I am aware of the bad reputation of that book.

⁵ Although hardly surprising, from a depressing comparative perspective on literate misogyny ranging from Plato to the Christian Church Father St Augustine to traditional Jewish and Islamic conceptions of womanhood.

⁶ Or is this simply a peasant's matter-of-fact observation on the use of human manure to fertilise the Sun goddess' cherished rice fields?

⁷ More frequently mentioned is that Susanowo flays a live piebald horse backwards (from tail to head) and, through a hole he has made in the roof of the celestial weaving room, lowers it amidst the weaving ladies-in-waiting, who are so disturbed by the act that the weaving-shuttles hit them in the vulva,

tomical characteristics, although not conspicuously inspiring respect,⁸ yet at least can invoke laughter to the extent of saving the world: the pulled-out nipples and denuded vulva of the dawn goddess 天宇受壳命, 天鈿女命 *Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto* 'Heavenly-Alarming Female' are apparently so incomparably funny that the laughter they incite lures the Sun goddess out of her fatal seclusion.⁹

5. *The natural-phenomena register*: An evocation of natural phenomena, not at the level of extreme abstraction as in the elemental system shortly to be discussed, but at the phenomenological level the way they present themselves to the naïve observer: sunshine, rain, storm, volcanism, inland and seashore waters, etc. It is remarkable that the Rainbow, which in many other cosmologies features as an active element notably as the implacable enemy of Rain / Thunder, in the Japanese mythical account plays only a very passive and incidental role, as the bridge by which Izanami and Izanagi approach the world to begin their creative work; we will come back to this point. Nonetheless, the same kind of cosmological enmity plays a very central role in the Japanese account, notably as the struggle between the sibling Amaterasu the Sun goddess, and Susanowo the Ocean / Rainstorm.¹⁰ A-typical is here that the latter is depicted not as the central sup-

as a result of which they die – another powerful phallic evocation of the Bodily Register, 4, in its sexual aspects. The piebald horse is full of associations, of which however I cannot ascertain to what extent they may have existed in the conscious minds of the ancient Japanese editors of our texts. In the first place variegation may be an evocation of the star-spangled sky, as it is clearly and explicitly in the symbolism of the leopard skin in Ancient Egyptian ritual, especially in the context of the *imnut* portable shrine that consists of a bowl filled with (human sacrificial?) blood, a pole erected in the bowl (the world axis), and a leopard skin hanging from that pole (heaven) (cf. Stricker 1963-1989; Köhler 1975). Moreover, variegation is usually a sign of ambivalence, and in many comparative contexts, e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Werbner 1989) variegated skins are the typical attributes of the diviner, whose work makes him straddle the boundary between upper world and underworld. We may have to do with a Pelasgian 'cross-model' trait here, extending not so much to Japan but perhaps to China, where the culture hero 伏羲 Fu Xi is associated both with a deer skin (usually interpreted as merely a sign of primeval primitiveness; however, unmistakably with shamanic connotations – and many deer species have a variegated skin) and with an (apparently variegated) 'river horse, dragon or turtle', on whose skin he discovered the Eight Trigrams 八卦 *pa gua* that form the basis of the 易經 *Yi Jing* correlative system. Scapulimancy with deer shoulder bones is mentioned in our two classic Japanese texts, and shortly after his birth Kagutsuchi / Fire is, by his very name, associated with the Mt Kagu wooded mountain god Kagu 香 (modern (Beijing) reading: xiāng, 'fragrance'), whose name also has 'deer' connotations but (apart from the connection which also Chamberlain makes – 1919: 33, Fire being produced from Wood) few closer parallels can be discerned from my remote position as a non-reader of Japanese – except perhaps for the fact that a deer skin (inevitably from the celestial deer haunt Mr Kagu) is the standard material to make the Heavenly Bellows, without which Amaterasu's mirror could not have been forged. (One is distantly reminded of the Urlic > Finnish theme of the Sampo, a miraculous mill producing endless fortune, and also the masterpiece of the primal smith, there called Ilmarinen, 'Son of She of the Sky').

⁸ As they have been claimed to do in specific, ceremonialised contexts in modern Japan, cf. Buruma 2000 / 1983.

⁹ Cf. Witzel 2005 and references cited there.

¹⁰ The parallel goes even so far that Amaterasu and Susanowo, siblings of a later generation, emulate the marriage of Izanagi (their father) and Izanami (whom Susanowo repeatedly calls his mother, although according to the narrative she died before Susanowo and Amaterasu emerged during Izanagi's acts of

porter of agriculture which Rain is in most Old World cosmologies, but as its destroyer, corrupting food and upsetting the rice fields whose responsibility is the Sun goddess' (as the patron, not so much perhaps of agriculture, but of order and justice – a role the Sun also plays in West Asian, Egyptian and Graeco-Roman cosmologies). Japan shares this a-typical position with Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia, and the explanation may well be that all three regions have largely relied on irrigation rather than rain-fed agriculture, with rain-storms in Japan being notorious for their destructive effects on crops out in the fields.

6. *The elemental-transformative-cycle register*: Totally implicit, hidden from the modern authors' consciousness and likewise unnoticed, apparently, by most modern commentators (again); I write this with all the reservations of the non-specialist who has only seen a tiny fraction of the relevant Japanological literature), and not consciously making contact with the Sinising Register 1 of which the Taoist and Yi Jing correlative systems make an integral and self-evident part, there is the register of a transformative cycle of elements. This system is akin to, but quite distinct from, the classic Chinese ones mentioned under Register 1; to my mind, the system has constituted an integral part of Japanese culture from the oldest times on, and as such is continuous with a widespread, underlying cosmology of a transformation cycle of elements, surfacing not only in Ancient China but also in Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, sub-Saharan Africa, and even in North America.

I can safely leave the elaboration of registers 1-5 to specialists on the culture, language, history and literature of Japan and of East Asia in general. My claim however is that the answer to the obstetric puzzle signalled lies largely in register 6, a comparative discussion of which will form the central part of my argument. Izanami is directly involved in the production of the world, and in the process meets her destruction. In my opinion the details of this dramatic fate can only be understood as a distorted application of the widespread proto-historic model of the transformative cycle of elements.

purification; according to some variants in the *Nihongi*, however, Izanami is simply the Sun goddess' mother and so is also Susanowo the child of both Izanagi and Izanami, born immediately after the leech child). There are a few indications in the ancient texts that the distinctions between these generations is blurred and artificial, so that in fact there is considerable overlap (e.g. in ownership of divine weapons) between the two male, and between the two female, protagonists, respectively.

Amazingly, Amaterasu and Susanowo's marriage is meant as a form of divination: if the male partner produces children of his own gender, that will indicate that his intention *vis-à-vis* his spouse (and her kingship of Heaven) are good, and the other way around. That people in their interaction with the supernatural gamble on the basis of the gender of as yet unborn offspring, is not limited to the Japanese narratives. I suggest it may be a Pelasgian trait. For instance, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia in the late 1960s, peasants would constantly engage in wagers with the invisible, deceased saints associated with the major shrines that are dispersed all over the land: through a prayer, a (typically very small) herd of cattle, sheep or goat is put under the protection of the saint for the duration of the season, and any male offspring that will be born from the herd in that season will be ritually sacrificed for that saint, but any female offspring will remain the inalienable property of the human owner (van Binsbergen 1971a; Köbben 1975).

Meanwhile an obvious question is: *why it should be fire*, of all possible elements and of all possible offspring of the Cosmogonic Goddess, that is singled out as the special cause of her very destruction? The answer can hardly be found in the Japanese context alone. Fire occupies an ambivalent position in Shinto religion. On the one hand fire is not worshipped; Shinto shrines, as focal points of what is primarily considered a nature religion, do not have open fires, and candles and incense are not being burned there. On the other hand there are a number of instances where respectful and pious reference is made to fire (cf. Nobutaka & Havens 2002-2006). Of the conceivable elements, fire is particularly destructive – but so is storm, as is clearly brought out by the character of Susanowo, the Japanese storm god. A similar symbolism obtains in other mythologies, e.g. Graeco-Roman (Hephaistos / Vulcan), and Ancient Indian (Gonda 1943: 312, on the fire god Agni); in Uralic mythology a similar role is reserved for iron (Tamminen 1928; Lönnrot 1866), and of course iron is directly associated with fire, not only because of the role of fire in the production of iron, but also because of the destruction wrecked by both fire and iron in the human world. Agni did not kill his mother at birth, but could not be nursed by her because of his fierce nature. *Could a substrate element cosmology, widespread in the Bronze Age (when the rise of metallurgy was to give a new meaning to fire, however vital it has always been for human culture) and perhaps even in Upper Palaeolithic times (cf. van Binsbergen 2012d), be at least the partial answer to our question?*

11.3. The widespread model of the transformative cycle of elements

11.3.1. Cosmological systems worldwide

Worldwide, there are most instructive parallels, in the story of Izanami's death when giving birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire. These may be identified in the first place in East Asia especially classical Chinese culture; but also in Ancient South Asia, in Ancient Egypt; in Ancient Greece, in sub-Saharan Africa, and even in (reconstructions of) pre-conquest North American cultures. Having elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2012d) described and analysed the transformative elemental cycle in considerable detail and having traced its pre- and protohistoric attestations, I will here limit myself to the shortest summary.

It is a widespread idea that the entire universe is composed of a handful of essences, which are combined and dissociated so as to produce the myriad concrete manifestations of reality. Four elements (Ancient Greek: *ρίζωματα rizomata*, 'roots') were identified by the Presocratic Greek philosopher Empedocles of Acragas / Agrigentum in Southern Italy (first half of the fifth c. BCE), who in the Western tradition has been regarded as the inventor worldwide of a cosmological scheme recognizing only a handful of elements.¹¹ The model was subsequently reformulated and divulged by Aristotle, and became the cornerstone of Western astrology, medicine, psychology, literary and

¹¹ A cursory overview of the very extensive literature on the Presocratics and on Empedocles specifically has been offered in van Binsbergen 2012d.

artistic symbolism, until well into Early Modern times. However, I have elsewhere advanced the thesis that, in his Western periphery of a Greek world that had always been highly indebted to Asia and Africa, Empedocles merely reinterpreted a thought system which, in various local variants, had been circulating throughout Eurasia for at least centuries and probably millennia.

No.	Tradition	Earth	Water	Air	Fire	5th (Quintessence)	Other
1	Greek	Earth	Water	Air	Fire	Aether / Idea	n.a.
2	Latin	Earth	Water	Air	Fire	Quintessence	n.a.
3	Hindu and Buddhist ¹²	Earth <i>khsiti</i> or <i>bhumi</i>	Water <i>ap</i> or <i>jala</i>	Air <i>marut</i> or <i>pavan</i> (Air or Wind)	Fire <i>agni</i> or <i>tejas</i>	Aether / Sound and <i>byom</i> or <i>akasha</i> (Aether);	
4	Japanese: <i>Godai</i> 五大	Earth 地 <i>chi</i>	Water 水 <i>sui, mizu</i>	Wind 風 <i>fu, kaze</i>	Fire 火 <i>ka, hi</i>	Void / Sky / Heaven (空) <i>kū, sora</i>	Consciousness
5	Chinese <i>Wu Xing</i> 五行 'Five Phases' ¹³	Earth 土 <i>tū</i>	Water 水 <i>shuǐ</i>	n.a.	Fire 火 <i>huǒ</i>	Void	Metal 金 <i>jīn</i> ; Wood 木 <i>mù</i>
6	Bön (Tibet)	Earth	Water	Air	Fire	Space	n.a.
7	Ancient Egypt	Earth	Water	Air	Fire		Sky, Aether

Given my lack of specialist East Asian philological knowledge, my rendering of Eurasian traditions in Table 11.1 must inevitably remain based on secondary sources. For many details of this scheme I am indebted to Anonymous n.d. I have mediated my own view of the Ancient Egyptian system, cf. van Binsbergen 2012d. I have suppressed, as a modern eclectic artefact, a line on 'Neo-Paganism' (more or less coinciding with the New Age movement of the later 20th c. CE).

For similar reasons I have omitted a line 'Seven Chakras philosophy (combining Hindu and Buddhist themes)', for which the following entries were specified in the original: *Muladhara* ('Root'): Earth; *Svadhishthana* ('Sacral'): Water; *Vishuddha* ('Throat'): Ether / Sound / *Anabata* ('Heart'): Air; *Manipura* ('Navel'): Fire; *Sahasrara* ('Crown'): Thought / Space / *Anja* ('Third Eye'): Light / Time.

Table 11.1. Four or more elements in various Eurasian cosmological traditions.

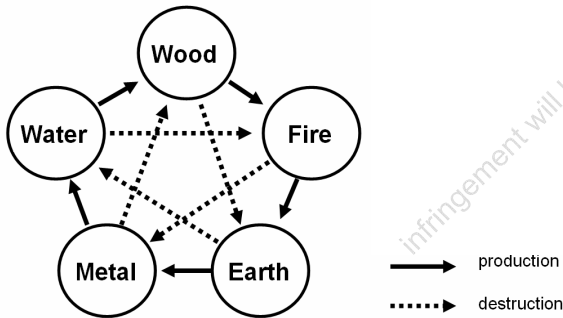
The local varieties of this system may be distinguished along several dimensions:

- Number of elements.
- Nature of the difference between elements:
 - full transformation cycle.
 - Intermediate forms between (i) the full transformation cycle and (ii) the idea of immutable element as fixed, parallel categories.
 - immutable categories without transitions or transformations from one into the other.

¹² The *pancha mahabhuta*, or 'five great elements' of Hinduism; the *mahabhuta* ('great elements') or *catudhatu* ('four elements') of Pali / Early Buddhist literature are earth, water, fire and air. Given the strong Hellenistic influence exerted on Central and South Asia from the late 1st millennium BCE onwards, also very conspicuous in the realm of wisdom systems, cosmologies and divination (cf. Pingree 1978), probably the Hindu and Buddhist listings in Table 1 are indebted to the Greek four-element system attributed to Empedocles, which had become the general Greek norm by Hellenistic times.

¹³ Cf.: Fung Yu-lan 1952: II, 13; Needham c.s., II, 260 f.; Maciocia 2005.

As far as the number of elements in the transformative cycle is concerned, Empedocles' four-element system presents almost a bare minimum, whereas throughout Greek and Roman Antiquity a five-element system would appear to have been the standard one, adding a 'fifth element' (literally: quintessence) to Empedocles' series of: earth, water, air and fire. As Table 1 indicates, a five-fold partition is found in many parts of Eurasia, including in Hinduism and Buddhism, Japan, China, and in the Bön religion of Tibet. In addition to these Eurasian data, and in considerable and surprising continuity with them, systems of a transformative cycle of elements may be identified in sub-Saharan Africa and North America (see van Binsbergen 2012d).



In attenuated form, the relationships of production and destruction as indicated may also be conceived as furtherance, friendship and praise (for production), and hindrance, enmity and insult (for destruction), respectively

Fig. 11.1. Basic transformations in the classic Taoist cycle of elements.

11.3.2. The transformative cycle of elements in East Asia: Two classical Chinese correlative systems

The literate wisdom systems that we find in classic East Asian civilisation are known as 'correlative systems':¹⁴ reality is subdivided into a limited number of named symbolic domains, and each of these domains systematically takes on a specific value on a number of cosmological and human-existential dimensions (the heavens, minerals, animal life, plant life, kinship, politics, colours, music, topography *etc.*— so that the entire cosmos can be subsumed in a matrix whose columns define a symbolic domains and whose rows define cosmological / existential dimension. Correlative systems are, however, not specific to East Asia, as our Table 11.1 demonstrates. A familiar example of a correlative system is ancient Greek astrology, which developed in the middle of the first millennium BCE under Mesopotamian and Egyptian influence, and subsequently greatly influenced divination, arts and belles lettres in Europe, the Arabian world and South Asia. Correlative

¹⁴ Needham c.s. 1956; Fiskejo 2000; Carus 1898.

systems are powerful, comprehensive and tautological cosmological statements, conducive to argued meaning and connections in personal and societal affairs, and therefore an inexhaustible source of inspiration for divination.

At the heart of Taoism (道) as a wisdom philosophy of transformation with divinatory applications, is most clearly a transformation cycle. Earth, Water, Fire, Metal and Wood constantly produce each other and work upon each other in a complex cycle that shows how the specific position of each 'element' at each moment in each specific situation is ephemeral and incidental, giving way to another elemental phase under specific circumstances.

Fig. 11.1 renders, as a special case, the Taoist, classic Chinese transformation cycle in its simplest form. Here, Destruction and Production are the two basic relations between elements in this proto-historic transformative cycle, secondary relations are Furtherance / Blessing and Hindrance / Insult.

In fact, however, the model is much more complicated, because for each relation between two elements that produce or destroy each other, there is a third element that controls the process – as some sort of catalyst, as in Fig. 11.2.

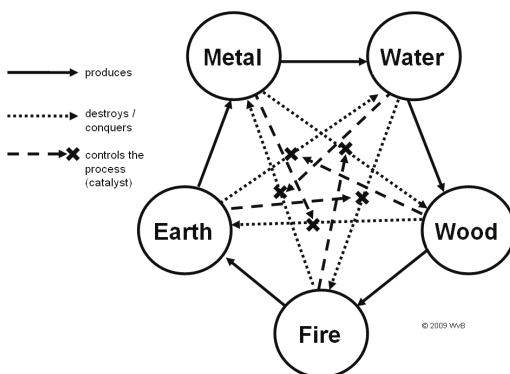


Fig. 11.2. The Taoist five-element transformative cycle with catalysts, according to Needham with Wang Ling.

This is essentially a rendering of the formula given by Needham with Wang Ling (1956: II, 260f):

'Wood destroys (conquers, dotted arrow) Earth, but Metal controls (x) the process
 Metal destroys (conquers, dotted arrow) Wood, but Fire controls (x) the process
 Fire destroys (conquers, dotted arrow) Metal, but water controls (x) the process
 Water destroys (conquers, dotted arrow) Fire, but Earth controls (x) the process
 Earth destroys (conquers, dotted arrow) water, but Wood controls (x) the process'

with this proviso that in addition to the destruction relations, I have also shown the productive relations.

This cycle of transformation essentially defines three roles: the Destructor, the Destroyed, and the Catalyst. Even more elaborate versions have been published, in which the cycles shown here are complemented by other cycles:

		Column number									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Trigram	Binary value	Name	Translation: Wilhelm, others	Image in nature	Direction	Family relationship	Body part	Attribute	Stage / state	Animal	
1	☰ (☰)	111	乾 qián	the Creative, Force	heaven, aether (天)	North-west	father	head	strong	creative	horse
2	☱ (☱)	110	兌 duì	the Joyous, Open	swamp, marsh (澤)	West	third daughter	mouth	pleasure	tranquil (complete devotion)	sheep
3	☲ (☲)	101	離 lí	the Clinging, Radiance	fire (火)	South	second daughter	eye	light-giving, dependence	clinging, clarity, adaptable	pheasant
4	☳ (☳)	100	震 zhèn	the Arousing, Shake	Thunder (雷)	East	first son	foot	inciting movement	initiative	dragon
5	☴ (☴)	011	巽 xùn	the Gentle, Ground	wind (風), wood (木)	South-east	first daughter	thigh	penetrating	gentle entrance	fowl
6	☵ (☵)	010	坎 kǎn	the Abysmal, Gorge	water (水)	North	second son	ear	dangerous	in-motion	pig
7	☶ (☶)	001	艮 gèn	Keeping Still, Bound	mountain (山)	North-east	third son	hand	resting, stand-still	completion	wolf, dog
8	☷ (☷)	000	坤 kūn	the Receptive, Field	earth (地)	South-west	mother	belly	devoted, yielding	receptive	cow

By analogy with some of the meanings of geomantic signs (where e.g. ☰, six dots enclosing a central space, comes to mean 'prison', and ☰, a row of four dots, 'road', one wonders to what extent the sheer shape of the Chinese characters may have influenced their correlative meaning. It is remarkable that in column 4, the characters for heaven, fire, wood and water seem to display a similar geometry, as does the character for 'man', 人 ren. Although they are not in the least associated with the same radicals, one may suspect an esoteric meta-reading here.

Table 11.2. General overview of the 易經 *Yi Jing* as a correlative system.

The essence of the Chinese Taoist system is that the difference between each element is accidental and situational, and that each of them may turn into all others in one or two steps. Belonging to a particular element is an accidental and incidental condition, not an ontological given. Since the distinctions between the elements are ephemeral and non-essential, there is no fundamental difference between them – absolute, transcendental differences are absent from the Taoist system, which is geared to a constant flow of *immanentalism*, in other words, which is an expression of a worldview that at no point needs to take recourse to the idea of an order of Being that is radically and absolutely different from the natural order of the here and now, in which the human ex-

perience evolves itself. Perhaps the transformation cycle is shamanic in origin, and, like shamanism as an institution, could be argued to go back to the Upper Palaeolithic of West to Central Asia (c. 20-15 ka BP).¹⁵

As far as the famous *Yi Jing* 易經 system of changes is concerned: its dynamic logic resides in the systematic ways in which pairs of trigrams (☰, ☷, ☱, ☴, ☲, ☵, ☳, ☶; all the eight three-item permutations that can be made of broken and unbroken lines) are combined into 64 named configurations; between these configurations systematic transformations exist, whose generation and interpretation is the basis of *Yi Jing* as a cosmological, divinatory and psychological system.

11.4. Return to Izanami's plight

11.4.1. *Izanami hardly one particular element*

At this point we are properly equipped to return to our myth of Izanami giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire.

Fire, of course, has been among the basic elements or positions in this cyclical transformative cosmology for many millennia, and so have water, earth, air (though not included in the Taoist scheme), and probably also metal and wood, thunder and aether (the latter two again not included in the Taoist scheme). Being destroyed by Kagutsuchi / Fire, and (see my initial numbered series, Register 1) being situated in a cultural context where the peripheral influence of the Taoist scheme is *consciously* present among 8th-c. CE Japanese, one would be tempted to equate Izanami with Metal. In this connection let us recall Figs 11.1 and 11.2; but the details of the ancient Japanese text provide hardly any basis for such a reading.

11.4.2. *Kagutsuchi / Fire within a transformative cycle of elements*

A more abstract approach appears to be called for. Being involved in the total process of (re-)production of the world, Izanami cannot in herself be totally equated with any of the handful of constituent elements, but should rather be conceived as some underlying *prima materia*, or better still, as the overarching ontological framework within which their transformations take place. Significantly, the gods that emerge in the process of Izanami's fatal confinement, her death, and the (almost alchemical) killing of Kagutsuchi / Fire, evoke a range of other elements – earth, wood, air / storm, thunder *etc.* (the latter two indicat-

¹⁵ It is a widely-held view that shamanism already existed in Upper Palaeolithic Eurasia (*e.g.* Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996; Layton 2001); the comparative mythologist Witzel even suggests a Middle Palaeolithic presence. Elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2012d: 255 *f.* and my *The Reality of Religion*) I present a provisional typological analysis of traits connected with shamanism, that appears to confirm the emergence of shamanism in the Upper Palaeolithic in West to Central Asia.

ing that a more comprehensive, and older, locally Japanese, system is at work and not the imported Taoist one).

These clusters of elements are unmistakable. Already the first gods to be born after Izanagi and Izanami had produced the islands, were clusters of wind / 'air', rock / 'earth' and ocean / 'water' gods, soon to be followed by vegetation / 'wood' gods. When Izanami lies dying,

The names of the Deities born from her vomit were the Deity Metal-Mountain-Prince and next the Deity Metal-Mountain-Princess ['metal'] The names of the Deities that were born from her faeces were the Deity Clay-Viscid-Prince and next the Deity Clay-Viscid-Princess. ['earth'] The names of the Deities that were next born from her urine were the Deity Mitsuhanome ['Water-snake-woman'; cf. Nishioka Kazuhiko 2002] ['water'] and next the Young-Wondrous-Producing-Deity. (Chamberlain 1919; my interpretation between brackets).

A crucial passage here is the lament Izanagi makes when his spouse / sister has died in childbirth, rendered in the Chamberlain translation as:

'Oh! Thine Augustness my lovely younger sister! Oh that I should have exchanged thee for this single child!'

Single child?¹⁶ Not in the sense of having no siblings – numerous were already the children of Izanagi and Izanami: trees, islands, rivers, *etc.* and more (especially spirits, *kami*) will be born from her decaying body. Neither single in the sense of the only element to be explicitly mentioned as the child of this union, for we have already seen how the other clusters of gods can be interpreted as evocations of the other elements.

The un-integrated recourse to this 6th register on my above numbered series, within the evolving flow of the mythical narrative, and the probability that the ancient Japanese authors themselves no longer had a grasp on the full dynamic logic of the transformative cycle as part of Japan's prehistoric heritage but only knew the imported Taoist and *Yi Jing* versions, explains the one-sided drama of Izanami's *Giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire* – a one-sidedness which has fortunately given us one of the finest narratives in world mythology. The one-sidedness exists in the fact that, with Izanami's death, *the cycle is broken*: although various elements are evoked, the thread of the personalised narrative is taken up again before the implication can be taken into account that, under the transformative cycle, whatever is destroyed also

¹⁶ Chamberlain comments at length on the very unusual phrasing of the text (the Japanese early classics were written in classical Chinese admixed with Japanese words, the songs in Japanese but using Chinese script phonetically), which scarcely follows the standard way of expressing 'single child' and instead seems to make allusion to 'tree' (木, modern Beijing pronunciation *mù*) or 'hair' (毛, modern Beijing pronunciation *máo*). So Kagutsuchi / Fire himself is named after the element from which it is supposed to be produced, in reality, and also according to the Chinese version of the transformation cycle.

Incidentally, there are two *Borean roots with the same consonantal structure *PV_nHV_{n+1}, one of which means 'tree', the other 'fire' (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, section 'long-range etymologies'). Do we have here already an Upper Palaeolithic indication of the link (so obvious at the level of everyday reality) between 'tree' and 'fire', later to be enshrined in the correlative systems of the Bronze Age?

produces something new and lives on in that new form. However, Izanami is dead and remains dead – she even becomes ‘death’ *par excellence*, the Death Goddess. At this point Register 6 gives way to the other registers again, and for cosmological and narrative reasons that are not in the least dictated by the notion of the transformative cycle, Izanami returns and remains in Yomi, Izanagi kills their last child Kagutsuchi / Fire and goes to purify himself, and although again a dazzling fireworks of element-related theogony is triggered by both acts, the thrust of the narrative is then dominated by Register 5, natural phenomena, notably the struggle between Rain-storm and Sun. Just as Empedocles’ system of four immutable elements constitutes the demise of the transformative element cycle as the dominant cosmology, so does at the other end of the Old World Izanami’s death the same.

11.4.3. *Cosmic order through firm and lasting boundaries*

The struggle to establish firm and lasting boundaries is a central theme in our Japanese myth. The initial word is chaotic, fluid, dripping, cloudy, even the cosmic egg is said to have only blurred boundaries, and the order which the creative process of Izanagi and Izanami establishes, is one of firm boundaries – the outlines of the Japanese archipelago as bounded by the sea, the definition of the male and female body by its respective anatomical features, the demarcation of the land in the form of the Amaterasu’s carefully tended, dyked rice-fields, which Susanowo (the impetuous attacker and destroyer of boundaries) does not succeed in permanently upsetting. And most of all the boundary between life and death. While Izanami is still in an intermediate, ambivalent state (eager to return to the land of the living, prepared to ask the Yomi authorities for permission to do so, her condition still invisible in the darkness (*cf.* the fate of Schroedinger’s cat in the famous quantum-mechanical thought experiment / *koan* – Gribbin 1984), yet having to admit that – by an almost universal fairy-tale logic – she has already partaken of the food of the dead) Izanagi *virtually brings about her death* by casting light in the darkness attending Yomi. Finally and most dramatically, pursued by Izanami and the eight Thunder gods that have arisen from her putrid (boundary-effacing) dead body, Izanagi particularly effects the boundary between life and death, in fact *creates* death once for all as a permanent irreversible and non-negotiable state (in total departure from the *range semantics* of *Borean thought – van Binsbergen 2012d; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), first by a number of partly ineffective measures (throwing peaches, his staff, urinating a boundary river, *etc.*), and finally by erecting an incredibly large boundary stone, at which point Izanami has no option but to give up: they separate.

That Izanagi, and not Kagutsuchi / Fire is, in the last analysis, responsible for Izanami’s death appears to me a valid and highly significant point. In the narrative the polluting environment of Yomi is cited as the reason why Izanagi must purify himself after his return in the land of the living. Such post-funerary purification through washing has many comparative parallels, some of which are cited by the commentators. However, the most common form of post-mortem purification concerns the person who has actually caused the death, the killer. With triangulation points in sub-Saharan Africa

(Nilotic-speaking Nuer (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1967 (1940), Bantu-speaking Nkoya and other inhabitants of South Central Africa (Marks 1976; author's field-notes 1972-1996), where the custom also applies to hunters of big game after making their kill), and the Aegean (in whose mythology Heracles and Peleus, among others, must make great efforts to find purification after killing, and in the process – irate at the purification priests' reluctance – incur further pollution by further killings), and possibly early Japan. This makes me suspect that, in the underlying mythical logic of the Japanese narrative, Izanagi killed not only Kagutsuchi / Fire, but also Izanami.¹⁷

Region and period	Mother goddess of early times	Subdued by male god of subsequent times	Reduced to a secondary role as
Ancient Mesopotamia	Spider goddess Uttu	Raped by Enki 'Lord Water' (has usurped the sea, as one of the domains of the Mother of the Primal Waters)	Uttu, goddess of weaving and clothing Ninhursaq, Earth and Underworld goddess
Ancient Iran	Anahita	?	Anahita largely reduced to domestic and subservient function, but still a weaving virgin with control over the waters
Ancient Egypt	Neith in the 1 st dynasty (3100 BCE), goddess of warfare and hunting	Horus, Rē ^c	Goddess of weaving and funerary goddess in the New Kingdom c. 1300 BCE (but continues to rule the waters and to have a final say in the assembly of gods)
Ancient Greece	Athena, Hera	Zeus, Poseidon, Hades	Demeter, Persephone, Athena as goddess of handicrafts and weaving
Ancient Rome	Magna Mater	Jupiter	Juno
Ancient Judaism	El, Elohim, Yam	Jahweh	Names of Jahweh; Leviathan
Ancient Arabia	The pre-Islamic female goddesses at Mecca	Allah	Names of Allah
Early Japanese society	Izanami, giving birth to the entire world and to the elements as her epiphany	Izanagi, Susanowo	Izanami as death goddess; but the celestial realm remains under female rule, notably that of the Sun goddess Amaterasu, who is mainly a female weaver
Mexico	Chalchiuhtlicue	Tlaloc	consort
South Asia	Devi	Shiva	consort

Most data derive from Hastings 1908-21 / 1926. Neith appears as funerary goddess in the tomb of Tut-anĥ-Amun, cf. Carter & Mace 1923-33. Japanese mythology also in the *Kojiki* classic, cf. Philippi 1977.

Table 11.3. Old-World mythological and religious development: Towards male celestial gods (after van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142).

Thus the absolute difference between life and death has become thinkable – a binary opposition that has always been a part of human life, but that funerary rites and representations of an afterlife, of reincarnation, *etc.* have managed to obscure from consciousness because firm, lasting and total binary oppositions could not yet be thought. The boundary stone that Izanagi erects is at the same time a milestone in human thought – and like a typical male thing, such achievement in thought had to imply

¹⁷ I can add a few from personal field-work: North African Muslims returning from a funeral must first solemnly wash their hands and face in a collective wash basin before they can partake of the funerary meal (1968); and Southern African spirit mediums returning from the funeral of one of their midst must first wash their entire body near the river before returning to society (1989).

disregard of his wife's and sister's sensitivities and her love of life.¹⁸

In a way, Izanami also represents a (woman-centred) cosmology that Izanagi's boundary erection (with all its phallic implications) renders painfully and nostalgically obsolete. In my opinion, it does not go too far to claim that, at one level of analysis, Izanagi and Izanami stand for successive and irreconcilable worldviews: the world view of the terrestrial mother goddess, and that of celestial male god.¹⁹ If we may invoke here my hypothesis of the succession of dominant cosmogonies (first the Separation of Land and Water, then the Separation of Heaven and Earth) between the Upper Palaeolithic and the Early Bronze Ages, then what seems to be involved is the following: in the Upper Palaeolithic a putative 'Mother of the Primal Waters' held sway over the waters above (the sky, although the conceptual elaboration of heaven had not yet taken place), those in the horizontal plane (the sea), and those below (the underworld, chaos, Sumerian *apsu* etc.); essentially horizontalist, these three watery realms were supposed to be continuous, in line with the 'range semantics' which we have suggested to exist for *Borean, spoken at that time. When (in a combined effort also leading to the emergence of shamanism and of naked-eye astronomy) this cosmogony was replaced by that of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, the three watery realms lost their earlier continuity, and heaven was conceptually and ritually detached from earth-underworld. A general tendency towards masculinisation, noticeable in several ancient civilisations, led to the installation of male celestial gods as rulers of the universe, and the degradation of formerly omnipotent creation goddesses ('Mothers of the Primal Waters') to become mere underworld goddesses, or worse still, mere domestic and subservient female goddesses in a pantheon otherwise dominated by male gods, cf. Table 11.3.

In this perspective, Izanami, whatever her other trappings as the female sibling in a pair of paradisiacal flood surviving twins, is also an epiphany of the Palaeolithic and Neolithic mother goddess, and her divorce from Izanagi and her subsequent fate as a death goddess brings out the triumph of male-dominated celestial relation.

¹⁸ The passage also bears some resemblance with the Biblical account of Adam and Eve after the fall: suddenly aware of their nakedness and incestuousness (which in the Bible remains only implicit but could be extrapolated on the basis of numerous flood myths where the initial human couple repopulating the earth, are both siblings and flood survivors). Meanwhile we must be careful lest we attribute too much of an advancement in thought to Izanagi's articulation of death. At a different level of analysis and comparison, Izanagi's actions at the boundary between life and death simply amount to a myth explaining the origin of death – and such myth are already found among the oldest mythical repertoire of humankind, almost certainly to be included in the original package before the Out of Africa exodus, and still one of Africa's most cherished and most widespread myths. On the basis of Berezkin's authority, I have now revised my earlier (2006a, 2006b) reconstruction of this package so as to include this type of myth. Oppenheimer's suggestion (1998) that the myth of the origin of death originates from South East Asia, must be rejected, for methodological and empirical reasons I have set out elsewhere (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008d).

¹⁹ Cf. Ishida 1955 for a discussion of related themes from a Japanese perspective (also Eder 1957); and on China, Ye Shuxian 2003.

In such a context, we can begin to understand why the references to, and the systematic implications of, the essential archaic and obsolete, recursion-based transformative cycle of elements, although surfacing many times in the narrative, yet could not be acknowledged and pursued by the early 8th century CE historical actors that were the authors of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*.

11.4.4. Flood myths as a possibly implied background of Izanami's Giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire

The above does far from exhaust the possibility of casting light on the Izanami's Giving Birth to Kagutsuchi / Fire myth from a perspective of recent developments in comparative mythology and its long-range auxiliary sciences such as molecular genetics and linguistics. The narrative has too many resonances with the global corpus of flood myths not to mention a few of the most striking parallels and implications, even though we cannot pursue this point much further. We have already touched on flood myths because their North American exponents (which make up nearly half the global corpus!) show evidence of the same transformative cycle of elements whose discussion has cast some additional light on our narrative. But the applicability of the flood myth model goes much further. Without wishing to reduce the enormous, creative variety of flood myths to a handful of fixed formulae, my painstaking statistical analysis (forthcoming (a); 2010g) of the global corpus brought up a number of frequently recurrent models:

1. the discovery of sexuality (often with connotations of incest) as the likely cause of the flood;
2. the tower, bridge, rainbow *etc.* that used to connect heaven and earth before the flood, that is destroyed in the flood, but replaced by analogous devices (god-made, natural, or man-made) after the flood
3. the complete extinction of fire as a result of the flood (in other words, Water taking over completely and destroying Fire), hence the difficulties, rites and taboos attending the lighting of fire after the flood (the Prometheus myth is only one case in point)
4. similar difficulties attending sexuality (often cosmologically equivalent to fire), which had ceased during the flood and is only reluctantly (see point 1 of this series!) resumed after the flood – yet repopulation of the world through procreation is imperative, and often a compromise is reached where the first act of procreation is not of a genital but rather of a vegetal nature: a featureless, smooth gourd-like product is at first produced (sometimes by human intercourse, sometimes by human-plant or human-animal intercourse or through no physiological act at all), from which later true humans emerge; a fairly typical example (with amazing Biblical parallels) from East Asia is the following, from the Yao people of Northern Vietnam:

'Chang Lo Co built a house roofed with banana leaves. The thunder chief, wanting to destroy the house, transformed himself into a cock and landed on it, but

he fell from the slippery roof and was caught and caged by Chang. Chang planned to slaughter the cock for a party and went to buy some wine. While he was away, his son Phuc Hy saw a man now in the cage and went to investigate. The thunder chief asked for a drink of water, which the boy fetched for him. The water gave the thunder chief his strength back, and he broke from his cage. Grateful to the boy, he gave Phuc Hy a tooth, telling him to sow it (cf. the Greek myths of Kadmos, and of Deucalian on Pyrrha), and it would grow into a gourd in seven days. He warned the boy to take refuge inside the gourd then. Phuc Hy did as he was instructed. on the seventh day, the gourd was mature, a heavy rain had begun, and he and his sister entered the gourd and sealed the opening with beeswax. They also brought food and a pair of each species of domestic animal. Chang Lo Co was also aware of the thunder chief's vengeance. He built a raft and sailed on the flood to the gate of heaven to fight the thunder chief, but the flood withdrew too quickly. Chang's raft crashed on a mountain, killing him. The gourd carrying the siblings landed on Con Lon mountain. Each sought a spouse, but all other people had been killed. One day, Phuc Hy met a tortoise which told him to marry his sister. Angered by this, he threw a stone at the tortoise, breaking its shell. The tortoise regained its form immediately, but with marks where it had broken.²⁰ Later, a bamboo told Phuc Hy the same thing, and he cut the bamboo to pieces. The bamboo regenerated, albeit with marks where it had been cut. Seeing these omens, Phuc Hy told his sister that they should marry, but the sister refused. That night, they slept on opposite sides of a stream. Two trees grew from their bellies as they slept and entangled together. Three years, three months, and three days later, she gave birth to a gourd. Phuc Hy told her to cut it open and sow the seeds, which grew into people. She began sowing in the lowlands and had just a few seeds left when she reached the uplands, which is why the population is greater in the plains.²¹

In this connection it seems highly significant that much of the reproduction depicted at the beginning of our Japanese classics, is not of a sexual and genital nature either: individual gods or clusters of gods emerge from separate body parts and products, or from implements such as spears, from clothing, *etc.* Note that it is particularly the god Izanagi – whose male body lacks the anatomy and physiology to produce recognisable and viable life from his own body – who produces gods, not from his body but from his material attributes. Here there is a very striking parallel with the male Sun god Marduk of Babylon, who prior to engaging in battle with the watery chaos goddess Tīāmat has to prove his superior creative powers by creating a garment (a typical product of the *female labour* of spinning and weaving), not by any physical effort but with the sheer, disembodied power of his word (cf. Fromm 1976: 231 f).

5. the resuming of 'normal', genital, heterosexual intercourse between humans is not the only hurdle to be taken for post-flood repopulation, for very often the only flood survivors are siblings of complementary gender, and the incest taboo needs to be lifted or relaxed before the future of humankind will

²⁰ Probably an oblique reference to the 八卦 *pa gua*, 'the eight symbols, or trigrams', which Fu Xi is reputed to have discovered in various situations including on the back of a tortoise.

²¹ Dang Nghiem Van 1993: 326-327.

be assured again.

One cannot help to perceive the many parallels between these points, and our Japanese myth. No mention is made of a global or total flood, but many of the ingredients are there – enough to make us wonder how illuminating it would be to consider the narrative of Izanami and Izanagi as re-assembled from the detached elements of an earlier flood myth, from which however the very flood element had been taken away – as another obsolescent idiom, after all: the Cosmogony of the Separation of Land and Water had been largely supplanted by the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth already thousands of years earlier. The rainbow only appears in the beginning, clearly reminiscent of the ubiquitous bridge or tower into heaven (Judaism and Christianity know it from the narrative of the Tower of Babel, immediately following the biblical flood story). Izanami and Izanagi are the typical sibling spouses destined to populate the world. The incestuous nature of their union apparently does not upset them – Izanami explicitly refers to their close consanguinity as a reason why her dead body cannot be seen by her brother, but sexuality is obviously a very different matter – and²² the same term *imo* denotes ‘wife’ and ‘[younger] sister’ in the context of these ancient Japanese narratives. Sexuality is new to our two siblings, so much so that they question each other about the details of their respective bodies, and in one version need to learn about sexual practice from the wag-tail, with its tell-tale rhythmic movements of the lower body. Although the various version differ significantly as to the sequence of Izanami’s births, at one stage she produces Hiruko 蛭子, Leech, later known as a popular fisherman god Ebisu (惠比須, 惠比寿, 夷, 戎) – and the type of leech common in Japan has exactly the featureless, smooth appearance we know from the flood stories.²³ Like all leeches, it is hermaphroditic. Hiruko is the only character in our Japanese mythical complex to come close to a flood hero: after birth, he is put in a reed or rock-camphor-tree boat (according to one version Izanami first had to give birth to that boat),²⁴ and put out to sea, later to be installed as a popular fisherman god – the parallels with the magical birth and early infancy attributed to Moses and Sargon II have not been lost on the modern commentators.

Less obvious is the other miscreant, which some authorities have identified as the placenta (although the Chinese character 泡 沬 for ‘foam’ is often used in this con-

²² Like in many African and West Asian societies including those of Ancient Egypt and (cf. the *Song of Songs*) Ancient Israel. This is another instance of a ‘cross-model’ trait. Aigle (2008, 2015) reminds us of how Islam, too, can contribute to the global diffusion of cosmogonic myth, e.g. of shamanic origin.

²³ Also the ‘tree’ 木 connotations of Kagutsuchi / Fire, alluded to in Izanagi’s lament as discussed above, carry the suggestion of an intermediate, vegetal birth product of the kind known from many flood stories world-wide when it comes to first attempts at repopulating the world after the Flood.

²⁴ The Celestial Boat is a central theme both of Mesopotamian and of Egyptian cosmologies. McHugh (1999) draws a direct link between such boats, and flood heroes in their arks.

nection) and connected with the name of the island of Aha. Foam or froth can be issued as a result of an early miscarriage. Placed at the beginning of the series of birth, as most versions do, hardly the placenta can be meant for this is always produced *after* the child: apart from the nature of her children, Izanami's confinements follow the usual obstetric pattern, and with usual pre-20th century CE medical technology except perhaps a very expertly executed and early caesarean operation, it would be virtually impossible to survive a confinement, and to continue to produce healthy children, after a *placenta praevia* condition, which neither mother (for haemorrhage) nor child would survive. What probably caused this particular obstetric problem is that in Japanese the homonyms *ye* (or is it one word with an extended semantic field?) are used for both 'placenta' and 'elder brother', *i.e.* the one born *before*, and not *after*, Ego.²⁵

In many versions of this episode, the miscreants are attributed to the defective execution of the marriage rite: Izanami is reproached for having spoken first, which is a male prerogative.²⁶ In view of the comparative flood-story background of such miscreants, I am inclined to consider this ritual explanation a rationalisation imposed on archaic mythemes (notably, the non-human, a-sexual variants of post-flood procreation) that were no longer understood at the time these classic texts were compiled.

I believe I detect another such rationalisation when it comes to the complex dynamics of Izanagi's and Izanami's dealings in Yomi. The versions are quite divergent, to complicate matters. In some, Izanami reproaches her brother / husband for being too late, she has

²⁵ The authority for this claim is: Aston 1896: 17 n. 2:

The Japanese word for placenta is *ye* or *yena*. *Ye* is also Japanese for elder brother. The Kijiki has in the corresponding passage 兄 or elder brother.

²⁶ A comment from Chamberlain (1919) to the passage in which Izanami and Izanagi go around the wedding column, and she speaks first:

'22:3 *Aha-ji* signifies "foam-way," *i.e.*, "the way to Foam (Aha)-Island," on account, it is said, of its intermediate position between the mainland and the province of Aha in what is in modern parlance the Island of Shikoku. The author of the "Chronicles of Old Affairs" fancifully derives the name from a *hoji* "my shame." The etymology of Ho-no-sa-wake is disputed; but Hirata, who in the body of Vol. III of his *Exposition of the Ancient Histories* had already expended much ingenuity in discussing it, gives the most satisfactory interpretation that has yet been proposed in a postscript to that volume, where he explains it to signify "Rice-ear-True-Youth." *Wake* (sometimes *wake* or *waku*) is a word of frequent occurrence in the names of gods and heroes. Whether it really signifies "youth," as Hirata believes and as it is most natural to suppose, or whether Motowori's guess that it is an honorific title corrupted from *waga kimi ye* (lit. "my prince elder brother" more freely "lord") remains undecided. When it is used as a "gentile name," the translator renders it by "lord," as that in such cases is its import apart from the question of derivation. *Sa*, rendered "true," may almost be considered to have dwindled down to a simple Honorific. It is this little island which is said by the author of the *Chronicles* to have been the caul with which the great island of Yamato was born. Ahaji and Ho-no-sa-wake must be understood to be alternative names, the latter being what in other cases is prefaced by the phrase "another name for whom."

already eaten from the food of the dead and therefore cannot be retrieved to the land of the living. The *Kojiki* version, at least in Chamberlain's translation, can be read to suggest that Izanami is mortally disappointed by Izanagi and sets her thunder gods upon him, not because (the usual explanation) he lights the end tooth of his comb (another 'male pillar', according to Aston 1896) and thus, against her injunction, is able to see the putrefying body of Izanami, but because he flees at the onset of the thunder demons. Apparently, Izanami appeals to a rule according to which it is not permitted for close relations to see each other in a dead or decaying state. In the light of comparative ethnography this rings a bell: many societies, e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa, have developed institutions of funerary obligations between more or less strangers, so as to prevent close kin to handle a dead body. If such a rule applies here, then the episode could be explained by reference to a breach of etiquette, just like the ritual blemish on the wedding rite. However, Izanami's parting words suggest (at least, for the West European reader of the English translation, i.e. an admitted outsider to Japanese historical cultural codes) that it was not so much Izanagi's seeing her, but his failure to bring his beloved sister-spouse back from the dead, which was the greatest source of the latter's distress. Her eagerness to return to the land of the living is clear from how she devours the grapes and the bamboo shoots that²⁷ come into being as Izanagi runs for the way out of Yomi: food of the living, by consumption of which Izanami may hope to reverse the effect of the food of the dead which she has already ingested. What is the rationalisation here, what the underlying cultural truth? The extensive flood-myth parallels that I draw suggest that already the ancient Japanese scholar(s) originally responsible for the redaction of this myth may have concealed that cultural truth under so many layers of censorship, 'sinising' and otherwise, that we may be forever unable to retrieve it. Comparative mythology would be our best strategy to retrieve at least some of it. Above I suggested, on comparative grounds, that the real reason for Izanami's reproach to Izanagi is that he, structurally and perhaps factually, kills her. One passage in *Nihongi* even may be read to suggest how he killed her:

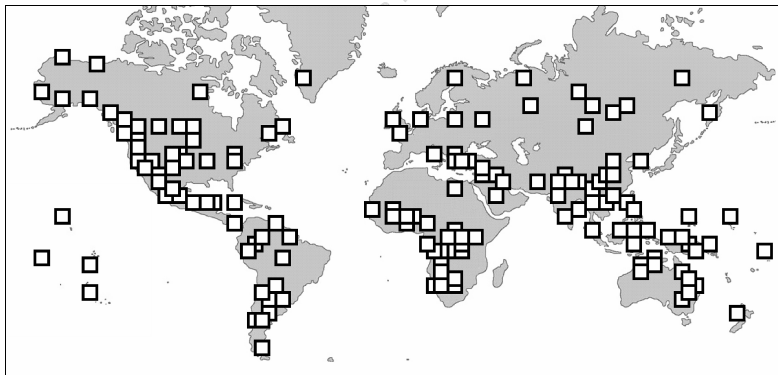
'My lord and husband, why is thy coming so late? I have already eaten of the cooking-furnace of Yomi. Nevertheless, I am about to lie down to rest. I pray thee, do not thou look on me.'

At this point we may realise that if Izanami, Kagutsuchi and Izanagi represent a transformation cycle of elements, it is not in the basic form of dyadic relationships, but in the advanced form of the triadic relationship involving a catalyst. Further reflection is to decide whether, in Izanami's destruction, it is Fire which is the catalyst and Izanagi who is the destructor, or the other way around. If Fire is to be the catalyst, the destruction is to be of Wood by Metal, which refers to the clearing of forest for fields – which may well be taken to stand for the entire Earth in her maternal generosity and fertility – the Mother Goddess par excellence. This makes more sense than to have (as in a naïve reading of the myth) Fire as destructor, notably of Metal.

²⁷ After Izanagi has tried to buy time by throwing three peaches – cf. the apples of the Hesperids which were likewise at the boundary of the Western realm of the dead (e.g. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, II.5.11); and the golden apples by which Atalanta was lured in her running-match against her suitors Hippomenes or Melanion (e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII).

Izanagi, with his Jeweled Spear and the sword with which he kills Fire, has all the connotations of Metal. Thus it is not Fire at all who kills Izanami! And we need not resort to the somewhat artificial construction where Izanami, although mentioned in a context reminiscent of the transformative cycle of elements, is not an element, but merely the overall matrix. She is both the overall matrix, and an element. And of course, by 'killing' her, Izanagi does nothing but to create order in the unbridled creative principle she represents.) What did it mean in ancient Japan if a husband looked upon his wife lying down? Could it not be that Izanami succumbed under Izanagi's untimely sexual demands on her? In several societies under influence of the 'cross-model' (e.g. the Zambian Nkoya), a husband's sexual advances towards his wife for which she has not explicitly given her permission then and there, constitute a serious offence, reason for divorce. Could this not be at the root of Izanami's disappointment and anger? Something to this effect is also suggested by the following variant:

'Izanagi no Mikoto followed after Izanami no Mikoto, and, arriving at the place where she was, spoke to her and said : 'I have come because I sorrowed for thee.' She answered and said, 'We are relations. 3 Do not thou look upon me.' Izanagi no Mikoto would not obey, but continued to look on her. Wherefore Izanami no Mikoto was ashamed and angry, and said, 'Thou hast seen my nakedness. Now I will in turn see thine.' Then Izanagi no Mikoto was ashamed, and prepared to depart. He did not, however, merely go away in silence, but said solemnly, ' Our relationship is severed.' (...) Again he said, ' I will not submit to be beaten.'



all types and sources aggregated; sources include Frazer 1918; Dundes 1988; Isaak 2006; this Fig. derives from: van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008d.

Fig. 11.3. Geographic distribution of Flood myths attested in historical times.

Which takes us back to the idea of the confrontation between Izanagi and Izanami as a power struggle between two rival cosmologies, an earlier one in which women are equal or superior to men, and another, later one, in which

women are subordinate to men, and sexually submissive. Gimbutas nostalgically associates the latter situation with the Bronze Age, bringing male violence into the allegedly peaceful Neolithic society of gender equality).

So, considering the fact (for which I have Chamberlain's authority, 1919) that the 'Sinising' register is particularly dominant in the first pages of the two ancient Japanese histories, before we reach Izanami and Izanagi, makes it attractive to think that originally the story of Izanami and Izanagi was a standard flood story, with them as the typical twins of complementary gender, sole flood survivors in a paradisiacal post-flood situation where the incest taboo is unknown, and that, before this post-flood situation was reached in the narrative, the flood story itself had been deleted and replaced by a standard Chinese cosmogonic account inspired by the 盤古 P'an-Ku myth, *etc.*

There is no shortage of flood stories in China and Korea (*cf.* Isaak 2006; in Southern China and its ethnic minorities they are usually connected with the mythical figure of Nu Wa 女媧 'Lady Gourd / Frog' (although these may be popular etymologies), sometimes also with her spouse Fu Xi 伏羲), and in fact *the taming of the waters* is the central image of the creation of socio-political order in early China. In this regional environment, the remarkable absence of flood stories in Japan might be explained as the result of deliberate censorship – perhaps in order to deny the Rainstorm-Ocean god Susanowo even a temporary victory over his rival and sister, the Sun goddess Amaterasu who in many ways ('Land of the Rising Sun') is the emblem of Japan itself. Nonetheless, an oblique reference to Nu Wa may be detected in the *Nihongi's* statement about the dying Izanami:

'She also brought forth the gourd of Heaven.'²⁸

These parallels offer more food for thought than I can begin to consume at the

²⁸ In what I would call a presentist, anti-humanities, and scientific approach, the science-fiction writer Graham Hancock (2002) offers a very different explanation, which Young (2003) summarises as follows:

'Japan was not covered by an ice cap, had naturally precipitous coastlines and few low-lying plains, meaning that it largely escaped the ravages of the Ice Age cataclysms. If Japanese mythology is grounded in the myth-memories of the Jomon, it is not surprising that Japan has no indigenous flood myth. *Underworld* [title of Hancock's 2002 book – WvB] presents the idea that the Jomon lost their 'beachfront' properties only, including coastal temples and other sacred and functional sites that now lie 30 meters under water. The recurring Japanese myth of the Kingdom of the Sea King connects closely with Japan's undersea ruins in two ways: that of the kingdom remembered as an island, and as an underwater sanctuary of walls, palaces, and mansions. In Hancock's words,

"could it be a memory that great structures with 'turrets and tall towers of exceeding beauty' once stood above water but are now beneath waves?" ([Hancock 2002:] 594).'

This explanation is utterly unconvincing, because it is predicated on the obviously wrong assumption (not unlike Oppenheimer's, 1998) that flood myths occur there, and only there, where they reflect the local collective memory of a local flood that has actually occurred in the distant past. For the near-global distribution of flood myths, *cf.* Isaak 2006, and for a distribution map see van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008d, which I reproduce here as Fig. 11.3.

end of my present argument. They must be left for further research. *It looks as if, in the truncated and fragmented flood theme, we have discovered a seventh register to inform, in a selective and oscillating manner, the flow of narrative in the beginning of the two early Japanese histories.* However, considering the dominant place that the extinction and production of fire occupies in the flood context, it is quite conceivable that here lies an additional answer to the central question of our argument, as to why giving birth of Kagutsuchi / Fire should make so much of a difference to the seasoned mother that Izanami certainly was at that point of our story. Had the order of events been reversed, and was (like in some Graeco-Roman versions of the Prometheus story) the unmentioned (unmentionable?) flood triggered by the human appropriation or misuse of fire?²⁹ Is Izanami's death then, at the moment of her giving birth to fire, at one level simply a celestial punishment for human *hubris* comparable to Prometheus' being chained onto the rocks of the Caucasus? What makes this a very interesting suggestion from a point of view of comparative mythology, is that the theme of the theft of fire has a distribution very well comparable with that of the transformative cycle of elements: West and South Asia, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, Oceania, and North America – which suggests it to be of such antiquity that it may well have left implicit traces in the oldest Japanese traditions.

11.5. Conclusion

Thus, applying the lessons of these parallels to Japanese cosmogonic and theogonic myths will make us look with new eyes at the Japanese material, realise its many-faceted transcontinental and temporally long-range connections, and also arrive at new interpretations informing the close-reading of its specific local details.

11.6. Postscript 2016

This chapter was first written in May 2009, half a year after I drafted a book-length manuscript with the less satisfactory working title (which, perhaps undeservedly, smacks of epigonism; cf. Bernal 1987-2006) *'Black Vulcan' ? A long-range comparative mythological and linguistic analysis of the complex relations between the Greek god Hephaistos and the Egyptian god Ptḥ – Exploring the Pelasgian realm and its African connections c. 3000 BCE – c. 400 CE.* Unlike Ptḥ (pace Blažek 2008), the Greek God Ἡφαίστος Hēphaistos is identified with Fire, and can be seen as a reflex (surprisingly, in the specific context of *proto-Berber

²⁹ Other images come to mind, which may also have informed the productive relation between Earth and Fire in the East Asian transformational cycles: if Fire produces Land, this could be the volcanic fire that, after the eruption has cooled down, produces notoriously fertile land; or simply the logic of slash-and-burn (most probably in prehistoric use also in East Asia), where fire burns wood so as to produce fields (Earth?).

**hifau* < Afroasiatic, i.e. the linguistic macrophylum to which, next to Berber, also e.g. Semitic, Old Egyptian, Omotic, Chadic belong), of a *Borean root *PVHV, 'fire', also with extensive reflexes in Eurasian > Altaic > Proto-Japanese: **pí* 'Sun, day', > modern Tokyo Japanese: *hi* (Martin 1987: 404; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, section 'Japanese etymology' (in some sections of the huge and inevitably somewhat rambling *Tower of Babel* website, Japanese is not classified under Altaic but under a separate phylum Korean-Japanese-Ainu, however the Altaic conception prevails throughout, and this I have followed, as a non-specialist). In view of the very extensive trans-Eurasian connections that exist, especially via the Scythian-Korean-Japanese branch of the 'cross-model', it is obvious that we also need to consider the Japanese myth of the origin of Kagutsuchi / Fire in the context of Western Eurasian mythical and ritual elaboration of the fire complex. Perhaps the dramatic birth of Kagutsuchi / Fire in the Japanese myth can be compared with the unusual birth of Hephaestus in Greek myth – although sometimes affirmed as the son of Zeus and Hera (e.g. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3.22), the more dominant story is that Hera produced Hephaestus parthenogenetically out of spite over her husband's producing Athena in similar manner.³⁰ There is no explicit suggestion in the Japanese story that Kagutsuchi / Fire was the parthenogenetic child of only Izanami, although (in reversed Oedipal fashion) the latter's brother / husband Izanagi hates him and kills him. However, that Kagutsuchi / Fire in that context is an outsider to the extent of being killed, may have a parallel in Hephaestus' being kicked out of heaven, by his mother³¹ or alternatively by his father.³² Perhaps further connections may be pointed out. For instance: beyond the Indian and Uralic parallels I have indicated above, the exceptional and ominous birth of fire in our Japanese myth, has a close parallel especially in the Graeco-Roman account of the birth, not of Hephaestus / Fire, but of Dionysus: the young woman Semele has become the lover of the Supreme God Zeus, without knowing his true identity; then Zeus' lawful wife Hera incites Semele to ask her lover to appear to her in his true splendour – which he cannot refuse, only to burn Semele to death with his lightning force (cf. the thunders that emerge from

³⁰ Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 924 f., 929a f.; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1. 19; Pseudo-Hyginus, *Preface*. An alternative father for Hephaestus is mentioned by Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 8. 53. 5; there Hephaestus is claimed to be a son of the Cretan Sun god and guardian of the island, Talos, linking him not only with a widespread and ancient solar 'fire' complex but also with the 'artisanal' complex of both Talos and his virtual namesake – and alleged murderer (another reference to cyclical element transformation?) – Daidalos; as we have seen, the likely etymology of *-tal- from proto-Austric 'star, luminary' further extends and complicates the semantic field.

³¹ Homer, *Ilias*, 18.136 f.; 'Homer', *Hymnus Pyth. Apoll. III*, 310 f.; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, Ez. 9; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 8. 41. 5; Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthomerica* / *Fall of Troy*, 2. 549 f.).

³² Homer, *Ilias*, 1. 568 f.; Plato, *De Re Publica*, 378d; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1. 19; Pausanias, *Descriptio Graeciae*, 3. 17. 3. In addition to the standard *Pauly-Wissowa* 1905-, I acknowledge Aaron J. Abma's splendid website at <http://www.theoi.com> – Atsma 2008 – which gives, for all major Graeco-Roman gods, the principal primary sources and iconography in a most useful way.

Izanami's body), so Zeus has to take the unborn Dionysus from his mother's dead body and sew it into his thigh, from which it will later be born as one of the puzzling leg children of comparative mythology. There are strange correspondences between Hephaestus and Dionysus in Greek mythology. However, the obvious task of systematically confronting the Japanese fire god with Hephaestus must be reserved for later, and probably for another author.

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