

# Spider mythology world-wide as a window on possible Sunda effects resulting in East-West parallels

by Wim van Binsbergen (2020)

## 1. Introduction

Spiders speak to our human imagination, not only because of their miraculous capability of spinning thread issuing from their own body (a standard illustration of the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* – the greatest cosmogonic puzzle; cf. Weigl 1987) and the construction, with that material, of their glorious webs – but also because (like the mantis) their females tend to consume their male sexual partner after the act. In many cultures, the spider's act of spinning and tying has constituted a metaphor not only of creation, but particularly of occult powers, of sorcery, *par excellence*. Among the Ancient Egyptians, the spider, the mantis and the midge were the three principal animal familiars (helping spirits) of the sorcerer (Helck 1987). Spider mythology occurs world-wide. One might consider this a cultural expression of an allegedly universal, hereditary and genetically anchored fear of spiders (*arachnophobia*) among humans – but such a claim turns out to be contentious, for the universality which it entails is incompatible with the considerable variation in intensity of the phobia, and with the fact that in some human communities spiders are actually eaten (Anonymous, *Arachnophobia*, with references). From our inspection, below, of global distributions we shall conclude that spider mythology, although quite old, is probably not older than the Upper Palaeolithic. We will find evidence of a very old cosmological substrate, identifiable in several continents, in which the spider, visibly engaged in spinning, weaving and tying, is venerated as the Supreme Creation Deity – from which later weaving and spinning goddesses, in several continents, appear to be derived in Neolithic and later times. Since spider mythologies occur in both in the East and in the West of the Old World (and also in the New World), and since my current work is among other concerns focussing on East-West parallels, our principal aim in the present paper is to ascertain whether this parallelism is conducive to interpretation in Sunda terms – *i.e.*<sup>1</sup> the postulated spread, mainly through *demic diffusion* (*i.e.* cultural contents spreads geographically because their human owners spread geographically), of cultural elements from South East Asia / the Indo-Pacific region in all directions, also westward on to the Indian Ocean and its distant shores (the Indus Valley, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, Africa), in response to the world-wide rising of the ocean level by 200 m. at the onset of the Holocene (10 ka BP), when at the end of the Ice Ages the polar caps melted

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Oppenheimer 1998; Dick-Read 2005; van Binsbergen 2019b, and in press (a).

rapidly. In the past I have repeatedly engaged in the analysis of the same spider material (e.g. van Binsbergen 2010: 185 *f and passim*, 2012: 50, 181; in press (c)) but in the light of the present analysis these earlier attempts must be discarded as preliminary and, on closer scrutiny, partly wrong.

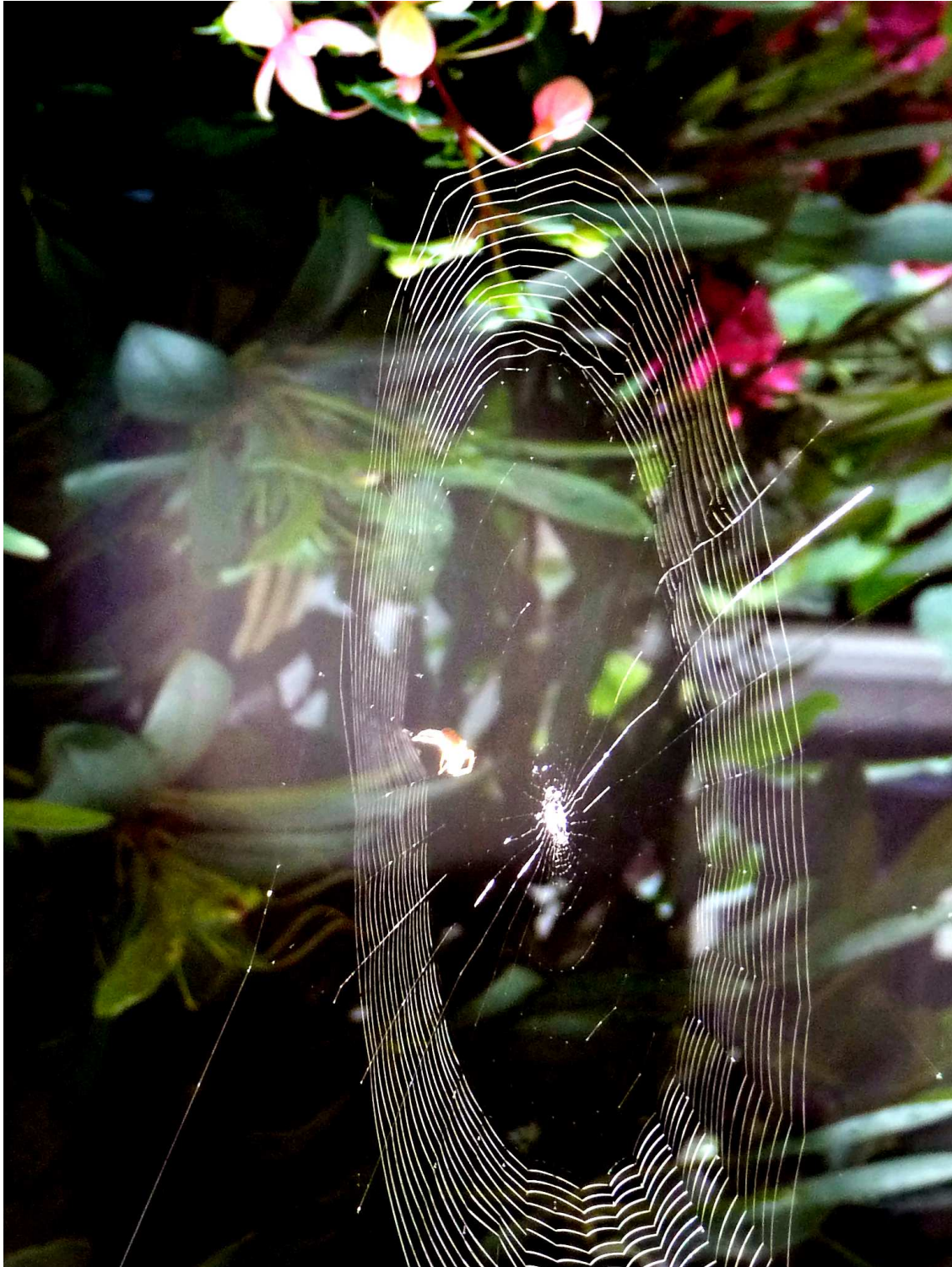


Fig. 1. A spider's web in a summer's garden


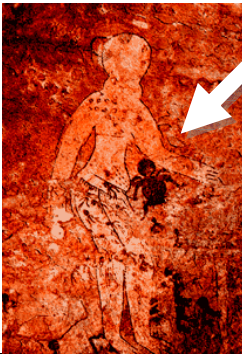
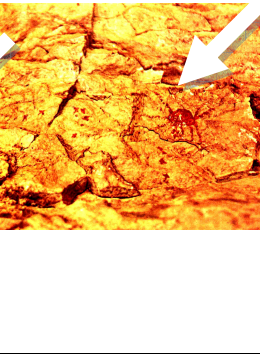

			
<p>a. Australian rock art, conventionally considered by scholars to be a 'sun symbol', more likely a spider's web (but ancient spider goddesses tend to be solar), undated, probably several ka old (Stubbs 1978: 21)</p>	<p>b. NarCom 15 ('The spider and the feminine arts'), Tassili, Sahara, Archaic period, 7 ka BP, from: <a href="http://creativity.bgsu.edu/africanArt/part1/xtassili/T2.html">http://creativity.bgsu.edu/africanArt/part1/xtassili/T2.html</a></p>	<p>c. NarCom 15 ('The spider and the feminine arts'), Iberian peninsula, Mesolithic (c. 15 ka BP) (Bandi &amp; Maringer 1952)</p>	<p>d. Nazca lines, Peru; source: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazca_Lines#/media/File:L%C3%AD-neas_de_Nazca,_Nazca,_Per%C3%BA,_2015-07-29,_DD_54.JPG">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazca_Lines#/media/File:L%C3%AD-neas_de_Nazca,_Nazca,_Per%C3%BA,_2015-07-29,_DD_54.JPG</a>; the spider image is about 600 m across and can mainly be seen from the air, which brought the fantasy writer von Däniken to an interpretation in terms of extraterrestrial intervention</p>

Fig. 2. Some of the rare prehistoric depictions of the spider from three continents

## 2. Available data on Spider mythemes world-wide

To prepare for our analysis, I present, in the following Table, the referenced data in time and place.

In the Table, reference will be made to *\*Borean*. On this point, rather more explanation is needed than can be offered in the present scope. *\*Borean* is a hypothetical language form, reconstructed from the systematically and intersubjectively reconstructed proto-forms of all linguistic macrophyla (highest-level clusters) currently spoken in the world, and supposed to have been spoken in Central to Eastern Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic. I performed a cluster analysis (a form of statistics) on the 1152 reconstructed *\*Borean* roots. I found that *\*Borean* desintegrated, well over 20 ka BP, at first into two branches: a Peripheral Branch, comprising Austric (Austroasiatic e.g. Thai,, Munda; and Austronesian, e.g. Malay, Maori), Amerind, and African languages (Khoisan, Nigercongo and Nilosaharan – with the exception of Afroasiatic); and (b) a Continental or Central Branch, comprising Eurasiatic (e.g. Indo-European, Dravidian, Altaic, Uralic, etc.), Afroasiatic (comprising Semitic, and the now Africa-based languages Berber, Chadic, Omotic, etc.), and Sinocaucasian (comprising Sinotibetan, Basque, Yeniseian, etc.). The further desintegration of these branches need not concern us here. The methodology and its results are provisionally described in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 73*f*; van Binsbergen 2012b; and will be treated in full in van Binsbergen, in press (d).

no. (some numbers had to be skipped)	reference	item	group / location / period NB it is meaningless to score the general items	type of spider attestation 1 = Spider Supreme ref, non-mythical 3 = weaving and spinning goddesses with spider associations explicit or implied 4 = connection heaven and earth 5 = trickster	comment
4	Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Long-range etymology'	'spider' semantics in all linguistic data bases	general	1	In the Continental branch of *Borean there is an etymon all the way to *Borean, but not so in the Peripheral Branch; the fact that in the latter the mytheme Spider Supreme prevails, suggests that in that branch the word / name was already tabooed in the Upper Palaeolithic
5	van Binsbergen 201b	extensive argument on spider associations of Neith c.s.	general	3	
7	Weigle 1987		general		3
11	Degh 1993.		general		
12	Graber 1925		general		
13	Doniger 1998.		general		
15	Ferber 2007	only modern Western <i>belles lettres</i> , esp. weaving and spinning (see also spider)	general		
16	Isbister 2001	not on comparative mythology but on medical myths about spiders	general		
17	Lewis-Williams 1981	ch. 9. p. 117-126: 'Divination and divinity', describes a San dance with two sticks imitating the mantis'	general		

		<p>stances. However, cannot be compared with spider divination in West Africa (various sources below) where a geomantic interpretative framework (cf. van Binsbergen 2012, and references cited there) is cast within which the spider's movements are interpreted; such an abstract framework is absent among the San.</p>			
18	Melic 2002		general		
20	Richter 1979		general		the spider is the natural enemy of the fly; spiders are fed to bee larvae
21	van Binsbergen 2018: 418-419		general		there I still situate the spider in Pandora's Box, and explore a number of associated etymological lines sometimes all the way to the *Borean level; the full implications of those data cannot yet be reflected in the present Table
22	van Binsbergen in press (c)	<p>I cite a relevant footnote from this text:  'On spider divination in West Africa, see also the more recent work by Zeitlyn, e.g. 1993. Further to the South, into South Central Africa, the inhabitants of the Kasai valley, Southern Congo (Le Scouézec et al 1965: 89; Fourché &amp; Morlichem 1939), attribute to the water spider a divinatory meaning, but merely as one item in a long series of everyday objects that can function as random generators for simple yes / no answers. The spider in West African folktales is treated in Cronise &amp; Ward 1903; Kropp</p>	general		

		<p>Dakubu 1990; Arkhurst &amp; Pinkney 1964; McDermott 1987; Crooke 1917. Inevitably, the motif has been transmitted to the New World. The spider theme also emerges occasionally in the West African vodoun / Voodoo cult (Koetting &amp; DePrince 2009). According to Dunbar (1985), the spider motif in West African textiles is associated not only with divination but also with royalty [ In fact, in Cameroon I have encountered elaborately decorated divinatory spider pots that were a king's / chief's prerogative – WvB 2020; cf. picture on first page, right, of this paper ] This would put the spider in one category with leopard and elephant. The common combination of spider and frog (Northern 1984) suggest the cosmological pair of Heaven and Earth – whose separation may be claimed to have formed the dominant theme in mythology since the Upper Palaeolithic.</p>		
23	Doniger 2010	reference to the spider in the title is mainly metaphorical	general	
24	Bloomberg [ year ]	reference to Arachne in the title is mainly metaphorical	general	
27	Anonymous, Cultural depiction of spiders, wiki, at: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_depictions_of_spiders">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_depictions_of_spiders</a>	cites a poems from 1829 CE	general	
29	van Binsbergen 2010c	my first attempt at interpreting the	general	

30	Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, Long range etymology	global distribution of spider mythologies, now largely obsolete	general: no spider in *Borean	1	On the basis of the Tower of Babel etymologies I have made a world map of varieties of the sun cult, in preparation for my book in press (e). It is remarkable that, although the sun has implied spider connotations in some African contexts (e.g. Nyambi, among the Nkoya and in West Africa), none of the many relevant higher-level etymologies of words with solar semantics display conspicuous spider elements. Even so *Borean has proto-roots for spider / spinning / twisting: PVNV (> spin), and MVRV (cf. Marawa, my entry 136, below)
32	Anonymous, Anansi	jaguar related	Africa West / New World	5	
33	Gebauer 1964		Africa West : Cameroon	2	
118		Neith	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3 / 1	Neith is one of the most supreme Ancient Egyptian deities, retains an echo of spider supreme
119	Fontenrose 1980: 139, 244, 253 n. 48; Bonnet 1971: 37f.	Anat	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3	
120	Cotterell 1989	Isis is also a weaving and spinning goddess	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	3	
121	Helck 1984d	the shaman's familiars are spider, midge / gnat, and locust / mantis .	Africa : Egypt, Ancient	2	In my opinion, such familiars are unlikely to have come from sub-Saharan Africa, even though in the late 2 <sup>nd</sup> mill CE the mantis appears as the Khoi trickster hero; in the Early Bronze Age, Khoisan speakers (identified by their ostrich-shell beads) were not yet confined to Southern Africa but lived throughout Africa and in the arid

						zones of West Asia. Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994: Fig. 3.2 gives a distribution map. I take it that such familiar indicate very old layers of cosmological material, supplanted by younger layers, e.g. Horus and other celestial gods) and then totally decontextualised
34	Werner 1933		p. 121 'The animals figuring most prominently in African folk-lore are the Hare, the Tortoise, the Spider, the little Dorcatherium antelope, the Jackal, the Chameleon, the Elephant, the Lion and the Hyena, with many others which are either less frequently met with or play less conspicuous parts'	Africa, Bantu-speaking	5	
36	Le Scouézec et al. 1965, based on Fourché & Morlicheim 1939		p. 89: 11 different 'methods of divination', among the inhabitants of the Kasai valley, including the water spider	Africa, Central: Congo: Kasai	2	
34a	Lhote 1959		p. 92. Antinea	Africa, North	3	
34b	Benoit 1920		Antinea	Africa, North	3	
38	Cleemann 1951.			Africa, NW : Morocco	2	
39	Jalla 1903: 319f		after persecution by humans, Nyambi ascends to heaven with the aid of a spider and a wagtail	Africa, South Central : Zambia	4	
40	Cotterell 1989,		120 Leza (the High God) departs to heaven on a spider's web	Africa, South Central : Zambia	4	spider being instrument in supreme god's departure to heaven, is a hybrid transition between spider supreme and spider connection
41	Hastings, I, s.v. 'animals': p. 528 'spider'		In a myth of the Kayowe myth (Barotseland, and closely related to the Nkoya) 'Old Spider' is the only creature to escape the Flood	Africa, South Central : Zambia	1	spider escaping from flood implies a socio-political confrontation, e.g. supporters of Spider Supreme vs. Flood as menacing instance; Old Spider also suggests an



									ancient deity
42	Mackintosh 1922		pp. 367.f: tells the story of the first human, Kamunu, based on Jalla; evidence of a solar cult		Africa, South Central: Zambia	4			
43	Werner 1933		p. 132: Nyambi fetched to heaven by spider's thread		Africa, South Central: Zambia	4			
44			Anansi		Africa, West	5			
45			Nyambi		Africa, West	1			
46	Cronise & Ward 1903 .		Mr Spider		Africa, West	5			
47	Zeitlyn 1993		spider divination		Africa, West	2			
48	Jeffreys 1953		only the chief / king is entitled to a spider oracle, used to detect witches, and giving him power over life and death pp. 61.f: spider divination, + photographs, Bamenda		Africa, West : Cameroon : Bamenda	2			
49	Le Scouézec et al. 1965		pp. 155 f.: Among the Bassa of Cameroon, Ngambi is the spider, and Ngambi-sa is the spider oracle; link with West-Bantu: Nzambi/Nyambi is obvious		Africa, West : Bassa	2			
50	McDermott 1972		Anansi		Africa, West : Ghana	5			
51	Giddens & Gidden 2006		a bracelet from Benin. Carved on the bracelet is a spider		Africa, West: Benin	2			
52	Northern 1984		the spider is often paired with the frog (heaven and earth ?		Africa, West: Cameroon	2			
53	la Roche 1957		pp. 101-104: Bassa spider divination		Africa, West: Cameroon [ bassa ]	2			
54	Le Scouézec et al. 1965		p. 158: Bafias divination with the spider called Ngambi (cf. Nyambi)		Africa, West: Cameroon: Bafia	2			
55	Pare 1956		Bamun spider divination, multiple symbolic elements		Africa, West: Cameroon:	2			

56	Labouret 1934-35	p. 140 spider divination		Bamun Africa, West: Côte d'Ivoire	2			
57	Cotterell 1989,	p. 143: Ogun (war god Yoruba) climbs down from heaven on a spider's web before creation		Africa, West: Yoruba	4			
58	Chamberlain 1897	spider as creator god [ = Nyambi, WvB ]		Africa, West , various groups	1			
59	Kaberry 1966.	spider divination		Africa: Cameroon	2			
60	van Binsbergen 2006	'the abundance of spider themes -- now attenuated so as to become a symbol of zealous human work, but (as its use in divination, cosmogonic and state legitimization still indicates, often in the presence of other symbols of the primal and cosmogonic divinity) originally as an evocation of a maternal cosmogonic deity associated with weaving, initiation and often also warfare -- incidentally, an entity which may also be invoked, in the Grassfields and elsewhere in West Africa and far beyond, in the Janus-like combination of beginning and end'		Africa: Cameroon: Bamileke	2			
61	Breuil 1949	'At Yochmann (...) on the flank of a vast animal there are signs, so far unique, set side by side. They each have two appendages above, diverging like the horns of cattle, and they may well be derived from a stylisation of these. A similar head occurs to the right, in a style with		Africa: Namibia rock art	2			

				completely distorted perspective, with horns and ears set frontwise on a profile. The ear-hair is very exaggerated, formed by bundles of radiating strokes. Probably at least two of these signs are derived from this; but if the third has this origin as well it would seem to have undergone a reinterpretation and to have changed to the figure of a large tarantula or other spider. I am led to see in these symbols tribal marks; put up on the occasion of some ceremonial, temporarily reuniting various families'			
62	Bouchet 1922			p. 26 f.: again the story of Kamunu, apparently copied from the earlier missionary accounts by Coillard, Jacottet (1899-1901), etc. ..	Africa: South Central : Zambia	4	
63	Feldman 1963			pp. 36 f.: again the story of Kamunu and Nyambi but erroneously attributed to Mozambique instead of Western Zambia	Africa: South Central : Zambia	4	
64	van Binsbergen 2010			including provisional (now obsolete) distribution diagram spider mythology world-wide	Africa: South Central : Zambia; and comparative	1 / 2	
65	Wissler & Duvall 1909			spiders play a very small role here ,only some mentions deep in vol ii	America North ;2 Blackfoot	2	
66	Bogoras 1913				Asia, North East: Beringia: Chukchee people	1 / 5	
68	Leeming & Page 2000			Coyote, Spider Woman, Glooscap ...	America, North	1	

69	Cotterell 1989,	pp. 134, 240, Spider woman	America, North	1	
70	Sherman 2015	p. 624 Spider Woman	America, North	1	
71	Fewkes 1895	Spider in Sia cosmogony that they were "two women," Utset and Nowutset	America, North : Arizona	1	
72	Anonymous, Iktomi	spider trickster woman of the Lakota	America, North : Lakota [ Dakota ]	5	
73	Chamberlain 1897		America, North : Blackfoot: invention of snares through spider examplle	2	
74	Cotterell 1989,	224 Spider woman Naste Estsan [ a palindrome!] was the benevolent god of the Navaho	America, North : Navaho	1	
75	Cotterell, Arthur., 1989,	134 Spider woman among the Navaho [ for spider, also see hastings ] ; de spider hier is niet de zonnegod maar maakt voor twee heldenzonen de toegang tot deze zonnegod mogelijk	America, North : Navaho	1	
76	Chamberlain 1897	The Mythology and Folk-Lore of Invention, spider is more than once referred to. In a myth of the Awik-y'enog, Masmalianiq [one of the creators], in answer to (...) prayer (...) tried to make a net so that men might catch fish ... more than a dozen refs to spider as inventor	America, North : North West Coast: Awik- y'enog people	2	
77	Chamberlain 1897 based on F. Boas (cf. Ballard 1982)		America, North : North West Coast	2	

79	Ballard 1982	'Essentially Boas arrived at the conclusion that this mythology of the Northwest had no systematic order and that it must be understood simply as a ... which can be reduced to eight different types: the Earth-diver myth, the World Parent, the Emergence myth, the Spider myth...'	spider as inventor of nets and needles America, North,1 NorthwestCoast	
80	Chamberlain 1897	'Sussistinako, spider as creator deity(...) in the cosmogony of the Sia Pueblo Indians (...) who by singing called forth, first, two women, Ut set (mother of all Indians) and Now it set (mother of all other nations), and afterwards animals, birds, etc., till the creation was complete. The first cult-society of these Indians was the Kipina, which included only the spider people, its ho-na-ai-te, or theurgist, being [ Sussistinako ] himself; and the members of this society were directly associated with [ Sussistinako ] , -they knew his medicine secrets" (Mrs. Stevenson, "Rep. Bur. of Ethn." 1889-90, pp. 26, 69). ]	America, North,1 Sia Pueblo	
81	Russell 1898	does mention spider extensively	America, North: Apache	
82	Kritsky & Cherry 2000	"The monolith, Spider Rock, at the Canyon de Chelly National Monument in Arizona, was named	America, North:1 Arizona: Navaho people	

83	Cherry 2006	by the Navaho for Spider Woman' ... The actions of the Spider Grandmother (Fig. 2) are important in the origin of the world in Hopi mythology (Hogue 1987) ... Associated with the Choctaw emergence mythology is another interesting story explaining how Grandmother Spider first obtained fire for the Choctaw ...	America, North:1 Choctaw		
84	Beckwith 1930	'Beliefs about Iktomi (Spider), from various sources'	America, North:5 Dakota		
85	Wissler 1905	spider	America, North:5 Dakota (trickster)		
86	Radin et al. 1972	spider [ only implied as trickster ]	America, North:5 Dakota		
87	Voth 1905	Spider Woman! wanderings of the spider clan	America, North:1 Hopi		
88	Boas 1897	... On their way they meet the Spider Woman, who advises them in regard to a number of dangers	America, North:1 Navaho		
89	Reichard 1997	Spider Woman: A Story of Navajo Weavers and Chanters	America, North:1 Navaho		
90	Willis 1994	p. 227: the Spider Inktomi appears as culture hero and trickster5 in parts of the N. American prairie	America, North:5 Prairie		
91	Dorsey 1892	p. 9 ... A Santee myth tells how in his rage at having been robbed of his dinner, Ufiktomi committed suicide in such a manner that only a small and charred part of him remained, and this resembled the form of a spider	America, North:5 Santee Sioux		

92	Farabee 1924	Twenty string figures and tricks from Western Guiana, Makusi and Wapishana people, include Moroi or Spider's web aka Spider's nest; Maiyosi or Spider	America, South Guiana [ not myth but cat's cradle ]	2	
93	Cherry 1993	[ spider references ] ... numerous and widespread. In South America, the Nazca made an enormous figure of a spider on the desert plains of Peru (Reiche 1949).	America, South Peru	2	
94	Forte & Siliotti 1997 / 1996	p. 279 spider in Peruvian geoglyphs	America, South Peru petroglyphs	2	
95	Farabee 1918	Description of thirteen figures and tricks from the Wapishana tribe of Guiana, with instructions, and line drawings of two figures. Most of the figures are identical with those known in other parts of the world, but methods of construction are different. Contains geographical references and references to other sources; includes: Sucinik [ cf. Pueblo: Sussistinako - WvB ] or Spider's nest	America, South; Guiana [ not myth but cat's cradle ]	2	
96	Meletinskii 1975	... Among the Chukchi, "raven" mythology has been partially displaced by the influence of Eskimo folklore, but the Chukchi have retained genuine myths ... miraculous helper (even though such a helper is sometimes found, for example, in the form of a little old spider-woman; this	Asia : East : Beringia : Chukchi	1 / 5	
97	Forte & Siliotti 1997 / 1996	p. 199 Altyn Tepe: goddess with	Asia, Central :	2 / 1 / 3	

			what appears to be a spider's body [ perhaps to be identified with. Anahita ]	Turkmenistan archaeological find		
98	Anonymous, Jorogumo		a spider woman mythical figure, Japan	Asia, East : Japan	1	
99	Anonymous Tsuchigumo		Tsuchigumo earth spider = Japanese clans that reject the sovereignty of the emperor	Asia, East : Japan	2	
101	Cotterell 1989		Amaterasu the sun goddess is another weaving goddess	Asia, East : Japan	2	In the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu, we have a link with another major mythological theme we shall investigate with a view on Sunda related East West parallels: it is a reversed ogre story, after her brother the storm god's violence she locks herself in a cave. The ramifications of this theme in space and time are interesting, e.g. Witzel 2005. Another ogre parallel we find under our nos. 102 and 103 in the Table.
102	Ions 1980		p. 211: giant spider is destroyed by Japanese equivalent of Western European Jan Pikkedan	Asia, East : Japan	1/ 5 / 2	
103	Ions 1980		p. 216: same theme as 103, a great Japanese hero is threatened by the Earth Spider.	Asia, East : Japan	1 / 5 / 2	Apparently in East Asia the spider has developed from a positive solar symbol and even Supreme God, to a chthonic demon. Perhaps the reference to Heaven (the sun's proper location) and Earth was a later development (which we may situate in the Upper Palaeolithic, when the separation of Heaven and Earth became the dominant mythical theme worldwide). Was the spider originally a chthonic Earth deity, probably female, and as such heading the first trinity (Earth / Sky / Underworld)? In fact, the spider is a liminal being, in principle terrestrial but capable of ascending to the



						sky through its web – hence its capability of transforming into the connection between Heaven and Earth in later mythological dispensations
104				weaven, spider goddesses: Amaterasu Japan	Asia, East : Japan	1/ 3
134	Thomson et al. 1885			A collection of eighteen Japanese traditional tales and folklore retold in English, including (but not prominently) Goblin spider	Asia, East : JAPAN	5
107	Cotterell 1989,			p. 86 Enki (water god) pursues his daughters incetuously, and his wife Nimhursage retrieves Enki's semen from the body of Uttu the spider goddess of weaving, 'whom the god had used and left'. Fox persuades Nimhursagato put the wounded Enki in her womb, from which he is reborn. This makes Enki another leg child, of a mythical category we shall shortly discuss separately in another study. He came from sea, was part man / fish er part man/goat [ cf. Oannes ] His Babylonian equivalent is Ea.	Asia, West : Mesopotamia, Ancient	3
108	Cummont 1911			Anahita	Asia, West : Syria, Ancient; Mesopotamia, Ancient	3
109	Cotterell 1989,			The spider is an ancient Australian icon	Australia	2
110	Stubbs 1978/ 1974,			21 Australian Aboriginal art knows a pattern of concentric circles with radial lines; it is often conceived as a solar motif but looks even more	Australia	2

		like a spider nest				
111	Venbrux 2003			Australia, N	2 / 3	
112	McCarthy 1960	An excellent record and analysis of an assemblage of string figures, collected, mounted and preserved by the author, during an expedition to Arnhem Land in 1948, including as no. 41: St.Andrews's Cross spider making web between trees or Garr.		Australia: Arnhem Land [ string figures ]	2	
113	Punnett & Greenidge 2009	Anancy		Caribbean	5	
115	Koetting & DePrince 2009	spider references in Voodoo		Caribbean / Africa, West	5 / 1	
116	Cotterell 1989,	p. 185 Spider Anansi / Annency ook in VS / Caribbean		Caribbean / Southern VS / West Africa	5	
117		weaving girl, spider goddesses: <i>niu</i> as lunar mansion		China	3 / 2	
122	Snow 2002	spider web and loom		Europe / China	3	
123	Caisson 1983			Europe : Corsica	2	
124	Graves 1954	'Numerous seals with a spider emblem which have been found at Cretan Miletus-the mother city of Carian Miletus and the largest exporter of dyed woollens in the ancient world-suggest a public textile industry'		Europe : Crete, Early Iron Age	2	
125		Athena		Europe : Graeco-Roman	3	
148	miscell	Nornes, goddesses of fate, spinning and cutting a person's life thread		Europe : Graeco-Roman etc.	3 / 1	
126	Bandi & Maringer 1952	p. 139: here also the spider of Cingle de la Mola Remigia, Gasulla cañon, Castellon, Spain, Levant art		Europe : Spain, Mesolithic	2	

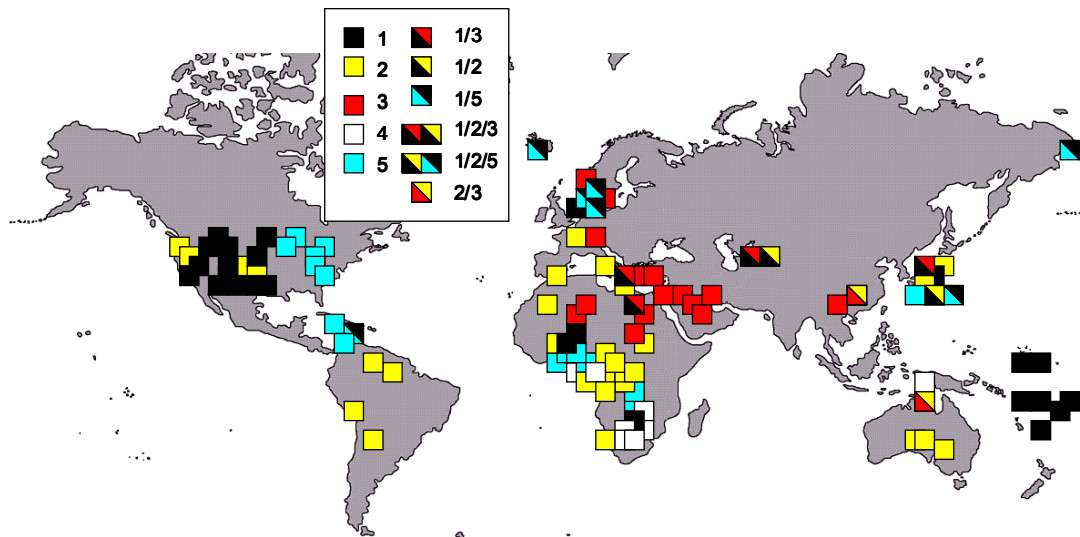
127	Heide 2011	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
128	Rooth 1961	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
129	Anonymous, Loki	Loki as shapeshifter (occasionally transgender) and trickster	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
130	Brunvand 1962	Loki as spider	Europe, Nordic	5 / 1	
131		weaving, spider goddesses: also Frigg	Europe, Nordic	3	
145	Anonymous, Arachne		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	
146	Anonymous, 'Athena'		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	Starostin & Starostin 1998=2008, show that proto-IE, proto-Altaic and proto-Uralic as far as the semantics 'spider' is concerned have much in common, which suggests that the myth of Arachne may have a Central Asian origin
147	Ovid, Metamorphoses 6. 1 - 148		Europe: Graeco-Roman	3	
132	Cotterell 1989	pp. 151 f.: a spider at the roots of the world tree Yggdrasil	Europe: Nordic	1	this suggest the confrontation between two world views, one featuring the spider as Supreme god, the other a later dispensation featuring the celestial gods / Ases; or between Spider and Earth as rival primal deities
132a	Cotterell 1989	pp. 151 f. Wyrð is another weaving goddess	Europe: Nordic	3	
133	Goldsmid et al. 1886 / 1614-1669		European Early Modern	2	
135	Cotterell 1989	Melanesian spider spirit 151;	Oceania : Melanesia	1	
136	Cotterell 1989	p. 219: Marawa: Melanesian spider spirit	Oceania : Melanesia	1	
137	Cotterell 1989,	p. 151: Banks Isl, Melanesia: death was introduced by theSpidercreatorspirit, Marawa	Oceania : Melanesia: Banks Isl	1	

138	Anonymous, Areop-Enap			Oceania : Micronesia : Gilbert Isl	1	
139	Cotterell 1989,	p. 133 Gilbert Isl: Nareau = spider lord, creator deity		Oceania : Micronesia: Gilbert Isl	1	
140	Cotterell 1989,	p. 224: Gilbert Isl: spider creation god Nareau; made Na Atibun, from his spin grew the sacred tree where all mankind came from the people scattered falling from this tree [ CONFUSION OF NATIONS - tower motif ] luminaries, skie etc. was made from Na Atibu's body parts		Oceania : Micronesia: Gilbert Isl	1	
141	Cotterell 1989,	p. 242: Nareau the older (the spider spirit) and also Nareau the younger		Oceania : Micronesia: Gilbert Isl	1	
142	Willis 1994	p. 294: Nauru (west of Gilbert Islands): the primal spider Areop- enap, creates heaven and earth from shell with the assistance of insects		Oceania: Micronesia: Gilbert	1	
143	Little 1966	In the Mythology of Oceania, Larousse – see my entry 144 below – reports that on the Island of Nahrū, a spider was considered to be involved in the origin of life and the world		Oceania: Micronesia: Nauru	1	
144	Larousse 1975	as my entry 144		Oceania: Micronesia: Nauru	1	
200	Tassili frescoes, see Fig. 2	spider prominently depicted		Africa, Saharan	1	

Table 1. Attestations of spider mythemes world-wide, with references

### 3. Mapping

The following diagram maps the cases listed in Table 1:



#### LEGEND

1. NarCom 15a: Spider Supreme
2. NarCom 15c: oblique, non-mythical, e.g. divinatory or decorative
3. NarCom 15b: spinning and weaving goddesses, with explicit or implicit spider connotations
4. NarCom 15: connection between Heaven and Earth
5. NarCom 15: trickster

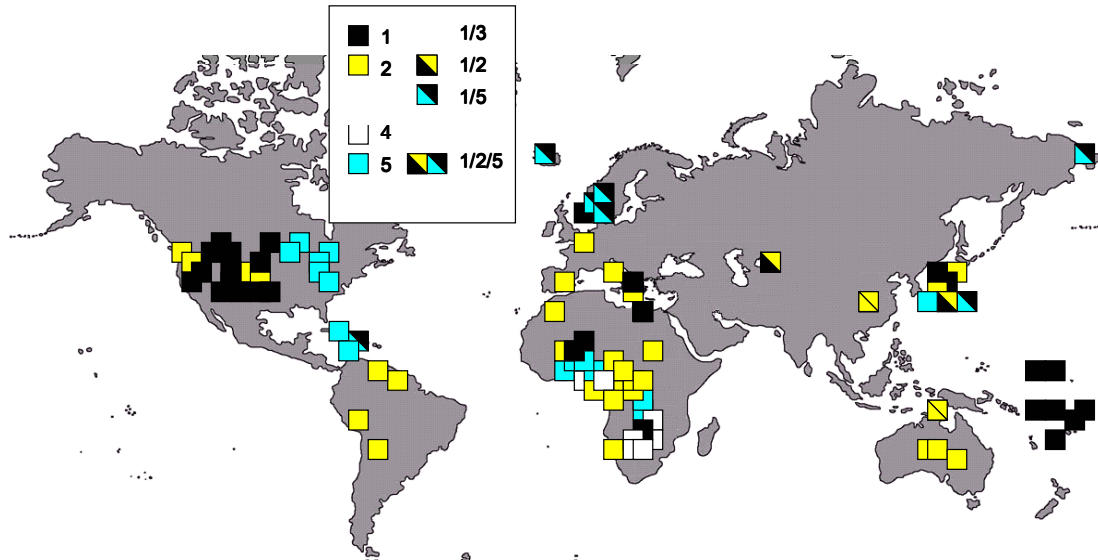
Fig. 3. Global distribution of the mytheme narCom 15: The Spider

### 4. Discussion:

When we look at this distribution, we note a number of peculiarities.

1. *Not in Pandora's Box*. For over a decade I have assumed, in earlier analyses of this mytheme, that spider mythology belongs to *Pandora's Box* (the term I have coined for the package of cultural including mythological traits that were developed among Anatomically Modern Humans in Africa prior to their global dispersal in the Out-of-Africa migration c. 80-60 ka BP) as NarCom [ Narrative Complex ] 15, The Spider, subsequently transformed into 'the feminine arts' in CITI [ Context of Intensified Transformation and Innovation ] VI; cf. van Binsbergen 2006a). On recent closer examination, however, the distribution does not meet the general rules of thumb (van Binsbergen 2014) where I have formulated criteria for such an historical assertion. These criteria are: if a trait has been attested in historical times in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea and Australia we take it that that trait already found itself in Pandora's Box at the beginning of the Out-of-Africa migration (c. 80 ka BP). Now the trait is attested all right for Africa and Australia, but much as I sought I could not find spider mythology for the Andaman Islands and for New Guinea (which however is often counted as a part of Melanesia – in other parts of which the trait is attested).
2. My claims as to the transformation of this trait into 'the feminine arts' under CITI VI, implies that after the Neolithic pre-existing spider mythology was re-defined so as to reflect the general subjugation of women and their works under newly emerging, male-dominated modes of production – a transformation which I have tried to capture several times in tables listing the supplanting of

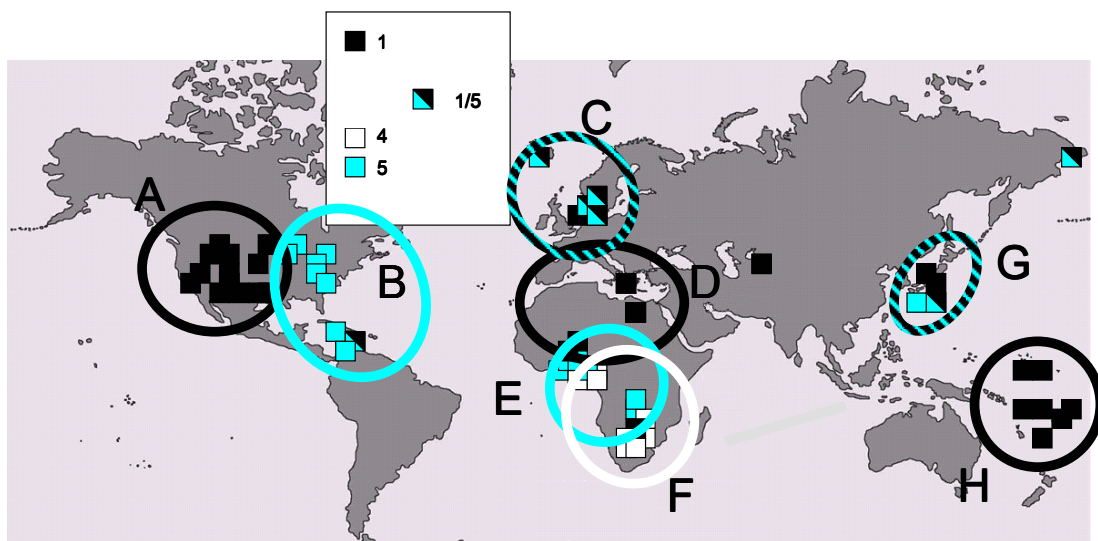
female by male deities in their Old World in the course of the Bronze Age (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4). That means that *for the periods preceding the Bronze Age*, the global distribution is easier to interpret if we temporarily leave out all cases of category 3 ('weaving goddesses'). This gives us the following distribution:



Legend as previous figure

Fig. 4. Spider mythemes : The global distribution of Fig. 3 reconsidered while omitting female deities of spinning and weaving

We can attempt yet another simplification to our distribution: category 2 brings out those cases where no spider mythology proper is attested, but where the spider appears in a non-mythological capacity e.g. as an element in divination or decoration. What happens if we leave out those cases? The following diagram gives the result. In order to assist the interpretation, I identify more or less contiguous distribution areas, by ellipses.

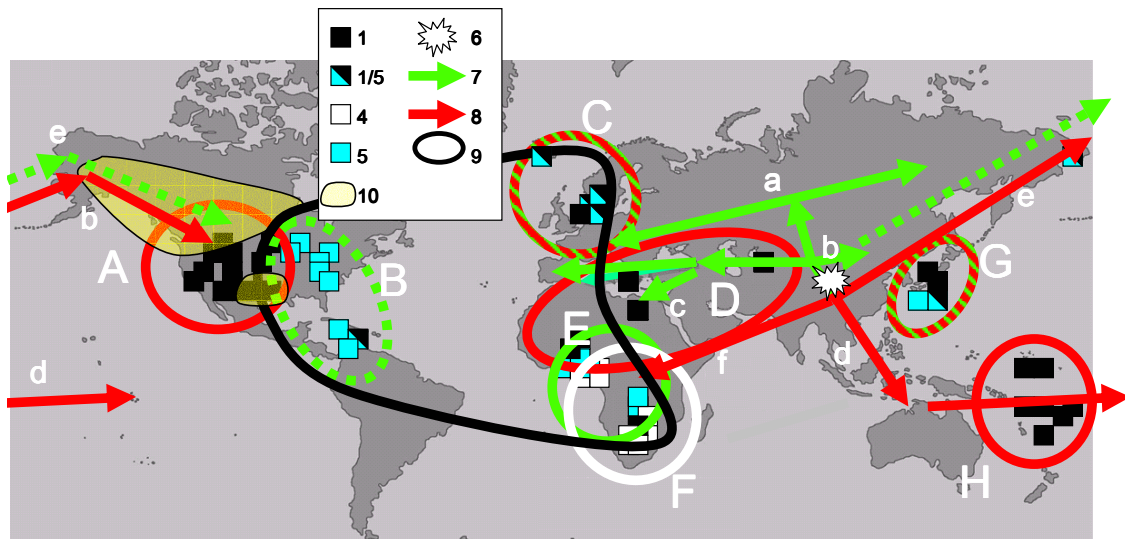


Legend as previous figure

Fig. 5. Spider mythology before the Bronze Age ; secondary applications (divination, decoration, etc.) omitted

After these reductions, it becomes clear that the data may be neatly clustered into clusters A through H.

The following, concluding diagram summarises my analysis of spider mythologies in terms of East-West parallels:



LEGEND

1. NarCom 15a: Spider Supreme
2. NarCom 15c: oblique, non-mythical, e.g. divinatory or decorative
3. NarCom 15b: spinning and weaving goddesses, with explicit or implicit spider connotations
4. NarCom 15: connection between Heaven and Earth
5. NarCom 15: trickster
6. proposed origin of \*Borean
7. Continental Branch of desintegrating \*Borean: Eurasiac (a), Sinocaucasian (b) and Afroasiatic (c)
8. Peripheral Branch of desintegrating \*Borean: Austric (d), Amerind (e), and African languages (f) (Khoisan, Nigercongo, Nilosaharan)
9. trans-Atlantic distribution area Spider as Trickster
10. present-day geographic distribution Na-Dene speakers

broken line = conjectural

Fig. 6. Tentative historical reconstruction of the mytheme narCom 15: The Spider, taking into account the reconstructed history of the desintegration of \*Borean, from c. 25 ka BP onward

Now it becomes possible to interpret the distribution in the preceding diagrams somewhat more specifically.

What we see in Africa, Oceania and the Americas we may associate with the spread of the Peripheral Branch of desintegrating \*Borean. That is why I have given the enclosing ellipses in question the same colour as the Peripheral Branch. This means that with considerable certainty we may pose that the mytheme of Spider Supreme emerged and was spread within the Peripheral Branch of desintegrating \*Borean, c. 20 ka BP. We forever leave behind us the conception of Spider Supreme as a part of Pandora's Box. The attestations of Spider Supreme in the heart of the Old World (West Asia, Northern Africa) may then be attributed to the passing, through this region, of speakers of proto-African languages on their way to their definitive place of residence in Africa. There are indications (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 170, 405; Cavalli-Sforza *et al* 1994) that particularly the distribution area of Bantu- (< Nigercongo) -speakers and of Khoisan-speakers ranged far outside sub-Saharan Africa during the Upper Palaeolithic and the Neolithic.

It is tempting to follow the same logic in regard of the mytheme of Spider as Trickster.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>2</sup> The trickster is extremely important in older layers of global mythology. The Khoi figure Heitsi-Eibib (the

mytheme then would have to be associated with the Central / Continental Branch of desintegrating Borean, especially with Afroasiatic in the Old World (Africa, Middle East). For North America this would imply that Spider as Trickster would have to be associated with the spread of Nadene languages, which an authoritative minority of present-day long-range linguists (notably the Starostins) is reckoning to belong to Sinocaucasian. However, such a proposition would run in the face of the fact that Nadene languages are currently concentrated in the western part of North America, and not in the eastern part, which is where we predominantly seem to find the Spider as Trickster myths. Further research and reflection is needed on this point.

Now that we have failed, so far, to explain the distribution of Spider as Trickster through an argument based on the desintegration of \*Borean, we may try to press the trans-Atlantic distribution into service on this point. At face value the clusters B and E on either side of the Atlantic Ocean do constitute a contiguous area, but that is about all we can say for now. The distribution in South Central Africa, in its turn, seems merely an extension of the distribution in West Africa. But for the time being there is no obvious and credible link between Eastern North America, on the one hand, and West Africa (and Scandinavia!) on the other! Oppenheimer (1994) sees a – in my opinion spurious – Sunda link with Scandinavia (mainly on the basis of circular axe blades), and Sunda elements are conspicuous in West Africa, but the evidence is too flimsy to account for an imaginable extension to the trans-Atlantic New World. Much would depend on the status we are prepared to accord to the trickster figure in comparison with Spider Supreme:



Fig. 7. A royal spider pot for divination, from Western Cameroon, now at the Tandeng Muna Museum, Yaounde, Cameroon, 2015

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praying mantis) is a trickster, and so is Anansi the spider -- and the trickster motif is also very prominent in Native North American myth; in Western Eurasia, Odinn, Loki, Mercury, Seth and Thoth, are also forms of the divine trickster -- and some of these appear under the guise of the leopard.



- Is the trickster (who is particularly conspicuous in North American Flood stories) derived from the Supreme variety, a degeneration of a more exalted image of the deity? (this does not sound convincing to me for the trickster figure seems to be an adequate representation of how nature makes itself be felt at a low level of the development of modes of production – in other words, especially in the periods of the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic – : as capricious, uncontrollable, aggressive.
- Or is the immanent trickster rather an older from out of which the transcendent Supreme variety has emerged? This would seem more obvious, as a further progress in human thought (whose relevant phases I have investigated e.g. in 2012, 2018). A broad and extended belt of both the Old World and the New World (notably Meso America) has seen the development of the logocentric package (comprising writing, the state, organised religion, and proto-science), and I would be surprised that the Spider Supreme variety would not be at home in such a context – but it is not.

Maybe we should consider the Spider Supreme variety in connection with the solar cult – where the Trickster may not be at home but Nyambi certainly is.

My recent research suggests the name Nyambi – although its name variants such as Nzambi, Zamb, are at home in West Africa and although its Nkoya name may be given a folk etymology (possibly modern and Bible-inspired) deriving from *ku amba*, ‘to speak, apparently referring to a creator deity who create through the spoken world – like the Biblical Eloim – yet is connected with yams and with yams’s global spread along Sunda lines. This may help to explain the distribution of the Nyambi theonym in West and South Central Africa – but it does not illuminate the apparent continuity with the eastern part of the New World, let alone with Scandinavia. In the latter region, the trickster connotations of Loki (again with spider connotations) seem to me to be too old to be due to Sunda impact (which cannot predate the mid-Holocene)– also because the trickster figure with spider connotations does not seem to play a role in South East Asia / Oceania (where the trickster tends to be a small mammal such as the dwarf deer *kantjil*).

*While many details remain, inviting for further analysis and reflection, what emerges clearly from the present analysis so far is the connection between Spider mythology and the two branches into which Borean can be demonstrated to have desintegrated ca. 20 ka BP.*

Finally we should consider the theme of the Spider as connection between Heaven and Earth. Let us remember that, from the Late Palaeolithic on, the horizontal cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land was supplanted by the Separation of Heaven and Earth, including the attempts to remedy – through various ways of reconnection: mountains, altars, priests, shamans, kings, twins – the painful consequences of that Separation, has installed itself as the key mythology among Anatomically Modern Humans – and such it has remained right until Modern times. In our distribution analysis, the theme of Spider as Connection is limited to cluster F, i.e. West and South Central Africa. I take it that this is a degradation or subjugation of Spider Supreme, the latter being found in adjacent geographic areas. With the establishment of the solar religion and other transcendence-based religious systems (as another expression of the shift towards the logocentric package – transcendence is both an effect and a precondition *par excellence* of writing, the state, organised religion and protoscience – cf. van Binsbergen 2012, 2018, 2015) Spider can no longer serve as Supreme Deity, but only a derivative of his capability of spinning is emphasised: the connection between Heaven and Earth. The subjugation perspective (which also suggests specific population groups in conflict, each associated with the rival cosmology and cult) may also be discerned in the stories where

Nyambi flees to heaven along a spider's thread because humans make Nyambi's life on earth into a hell. One would tend to analyse such a shift in perspective in cosmology as resulting from a power struggle between two conflicting socio-political human groups – e.g. immigrants or locals, or a pre-existing mode of production about to be supplanted by a new mode of production. The same question must of course be considered when we try to analyse (cf. van Binsbergen in press (e)), in space and time, the installation of a solar religion in Old World prehistory, at the expense ultimately of, e.g., the cult of the Mother of the Waters, the Great Mother Goddess, the Earth, chthonic spirits. However, such a socio-political historical interpretation is outside our present scope.

## 5. Conclusion

While many details remain unclear and many loose ends remain, we can derive from this analysis of spider mythology the concluding insight that *spider myths constitute a case of East West parallels in comparative mythology, which however seem to have a time depth of c. 20 ka, and therefore cannot by any stretch of the imagination be attributed to the – relatively recent – Sunda effect – for which there are no distributional indications anyway*. My initial impression of a clearcut Sunda effect was based on a confusion of categories: in Africa most spider-associated attestations are situated in a potential Sunda path (South Central Africa, Cameroon, Bight of Benin) but they are not of the Spider Supreme variety which reign in the Indo-Pacific / Oceania. It is possible that the African decorative and divinatory spider attestations are in fact due to a Sunda impact, but in that case we have failed so far to identify some original application of precisely such divinatory / decorative spider themes in South East Asia / Indo-Pacific. Plausibly the decorative / divinatory use is a local, African transformation of a more central cosmological role for the spider (divination derives its authority from the divine associations of the divinatory procedure, even this is merely the locomotion patterns of a spider; in many cultures the spider is intimately associated with human fate), but given the Spider Supreme mytheme which appears to have been around in Africa, Oceania and the New World for about twenty millennia, an appeal to direct Sunda impact to explain this pattern would appear to be an anachronism.

## 6. Afterthought: The enigmatic wagtail myths: Again no Sunda explanation to be preferred

In the mythical accounts the Western African theonym Nyambi is associated with the *wagtail* bird, especially in South Central Africa notably among the Zambian Nkoya people whose mythology has formed my principal inspiration in comparative mythology over the decades, based on my close association and fieldwork with this group ever since 1972. Here (Jacottet 1899-1901; van Binsbergen 2010c) Nyambi is attended not only by a spider but also by a wagtail bird (*Motacilla capensis*). This opens up an interesting comparative angle: in the main Japanese creation myth virtually the same bird (*Motacilla grandis*) showed the first creatures Izanami and Izanagi how to engage in sexual intercourse by the suggestive, incessant up and down movements of its tail, after which it is named (Kojiki, cf. Philippi 1977; van Binsbergen 2009 / 2017). It may be relevant that the wagtail is an insectivore and presumably eats spiders. It is as if the wagtail in the Western Zambia story signals that, implicitly, we are in the presence of a Flood caused by the invention of sexuality. We hit here upon a controversial but logical and crucial implication of the idea of transcontinental continuities: if the latter can

be taken for a fact, then in principle well-attested, studied and understood symbolic relationships in one location may be used to illuminate less explicit similar relationships in another location belonging to the same complex, even though in another continent - not just on the basis of a formal analysis and an appeal to inherent convergent properties of the mind of Anatomically Modern Humans, but on the basis of real historical cognateship. This methodological claim (which I already made in my earliest work on transcontinental continuities; van Binsbergen 1997a) is basic to my work in the field of comparative mythology, geomantic divination, transformative cycles of elements, astronomical nomenclature etc.



a. *Motacilla capensis* (sub-Saharan Africa);

b. *Motacilla grandis* (Japan)



sources: a. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Cape\\_wagtail\\_\(Motacilla\\_capensis\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Cape_wagtail_(Motacilla_capensis).jpg); photo: Charles J. Sharp; b. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Motacilla\\_grandis\\_-Japan-8.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wagtail#/media/File:Motacilla_grandis_-Japan-8.jpg)

Fig. 2a. The wagtail in sub-Saharan Africa and in Japan

The wagtail features in the mythologies of many peoples. In Ancient Greece it was associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love (Francis 2018) – initially probably because it represented the divine creative force, later under a cruder, adulterated, though still related interpretation, as in Japan: because its tail movements are suggestive of human (or in general: mammal) sexual intercourse. If the wagtail is supposed to be a harbinger of rain, this may be for the, not unrelated, ancient cosmology (cf. Allegro 1970 / 1971) which sees rain as celestial emission / ejaculation. The ‘hysterical’ *transformation of sexual body fluids into tears* may also be noted in Ancient Egyptian mythology of the Late period, where humans (the results of the primal god’s masturbation according to an earlier dispensation) became ‘the tears of Ra’<sup>3</sup> —a notion which apparently was ultimately transmitted to South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2010c, 2020a). Illuminating in this connection is Ainu mythology (Northern Japan), which combines West Eurasian traits with a manifest continuity with classic Japanese mythology. Here the wagtail assumes various roles, e.g. that of the Earth diver.<sup>3</sup> Presenting adequate

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<sup>3</sup> The earth driver constitutes a widespread circumpolar mythological complex according to which a bird – usually an aquatic bird such as a coot; cf. Villems 2006; Weigle 1987 – brings up the first land from the pre-cosmogonic Primal Waters – or after the Flood; Anonymous, Wagtail tales; Leeming 1995. Aquatic birds signify, or are identical with, the primal Mother of the Waters, whose epiphany is the swan, the white duck, the white heron, etc. This form needed to be transformed when the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land was to be supplanted, by the Late Palaeolithic, by the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth. Then the

references to well-known mythological collections, the anonymous author of the *Japanese Mythology & Folklore* website adduces parallel wagtail myths from India; Australia; Egypt (provided the solar  or  bennu bird, *the self-creating being which alighted on the primal mount*,<sup>4</sup> and behind which we suspect the Greek mythical bird Phoenix, often considered a heron may be identified as a mythical version of the wagtail); the Xhosa of South Africa (where the wagtail is merely a bird of cattle and good omen – perhaps a faint echo of more articulate wagtail mythologies from around the Mediterranean, or more likely an adaptation of the far more specific role attributed to the wagtail in South Central African mythologies as related above); and the Kelabit of Borneo (where the wagtail marks a crucial point in the agricultural calendar).

In the case of *Motacilla*, the East-West parallel might also be attributed to accidental maritime contact, or to recent intellectual appropriation. In 1790 Count de Benyowsky, an Austrian / Hungarian high-ranking naval officer, reported on his sailing both to Japan and to Madagascar in the vicinity of South Central Africa – which is one conceivable (but extremely unlikely) external and recent way in which two such outlying points might have come to be connected. By the same token, the historian of Madagascar Françoise Raison-Jourde (1994) discusses how a myth of Japanese-Malagasy relations gained some popularity among Malagasy intellectuals in the course of the 20th c. CE. For completeness's sake, let us admit that a mythological parallel surfacing in both Japan and South Central Africa might also be explained as an effect of relatively recent Sunda effect from a common Sunda epicentre in insular South East Asia. This would also take care of the relatively isolated Borneo attestation., and of cases in Australia and India.

However, I believe we must, in this case, reject the somewhat facile and historically shallow Sunda explanation in favour of a long-range argument. Against the comparative background summarised above the coincidence between Japan and South Central Africa may not be so strange any more. The two attestations, although separated by the length and width of the two largest continents, are likely to share a common origin, of which the other attestations of wagtail mythology are further manifestations. If we may follow the suggestion made by the authoritative long-range linguists Kaiser & Shevoroshkin (1988) to the effect that Niger-Congo (> Bantu) may be considered a form of 'Super-Nostratic' *i.e.* an extended version of Eurasiatic – one of the principal macrophyla into which \*Borean desintegrated c. 25 ka BP – we would have a linguistic equivalent of such a transcontinental distribution with a common source in Central to East Asia, and probably with a similar time scale. Given the general westbound movement associated with the Back-into-Africa movement which has been a major feature of Old World population dynamics ever since 15 ka BP (Coia 2005; Hammer 1998; Cruciani 2002), and considering the special place which the Ainu people of Japan occupy

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bird could function as a straight-forward celestial symbol, and its aquatic connotations could be dropped.

<sup>4</sup> One may even suspect a parallel here with *Genesis 1:2*, 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'. Also in Nkoya traditions (van Binsbergen 1988, 1992), the High God and the latter's Child are in the first place birds – and the royal clans bear bird names. *Although simplified and reified into a mere spectre of a cosmogonic entity, ultimately all these birds may be evocations of a transcendent, celestial creator.*

in this context,<sup>5</sup> I am inclined to suggest that the myths highlighting the wagtail bird or its equivalents (myths that are remarkably absent from American mythologies which are embedded in Amerind – another Peripheral desintegration product of \*Borean) originated in Central to East Asia at about the time of the desintegration of the Peripheral Branch of \*Borean, and was thus taken westward to West Asia, North-eastern Africa, and further into sub-Saharan Africa.

Further clues may be found when we look at the etymology of words with ‘wagtail’ semantics in various macrophyla. An indication for an ancient semantic / lexical / mythological complex focusing on the wagtail<sup>6</sup> – albeit situated in the Central or Continental Branch of \*Borean instead of in the Peripheral Branch with which Ainu is claimed to have affinity – may be found in the fact that already in \*Borean a root \*CVPV (where V indicates an unspecified vowel) may be identified, ‘small bird’ (also applied, in some of its lower-level reflexes, to the wagtail), with reflexes in Eurasiatic (Indoeuropean, Altaic (including Japanese, Turkic, Tungus-Manchu, etc.), Kartvelian, Dravidian) and Afroasiatic.<sup>7</sup> In these macrophyla and their descendent phyla the root in question generally takes the form of \*-c[V]il-, \*k[V]il- (where V is again an unspecified vowel). Semantically the complex is close to Proto-Sinocaucasian \*čHwīlV̄ (~ č-, -ē-, -ř-), ‘small bird’; however, etymologically, the *Tower of Babel* invokes a different \*Borean root \*CVLV instead of \*CVPV. Since these lexical items may have an onomatopaeic aspect, the admitted difference must not be exaggerated.

*In other words, also the case of wagtail mythology worldwide cannot persuade us to a Sunda interpretation; instead, the apparent coincidences dissolve into systematic transcontinental connections, but not in the comparatively recent Sunda perspective, but in the long-range perspective of 20 ka or more.*

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<sup>5</sup> Watson n.d. / 1963; Batchelor 1889; Tajima et al. 2004; especially the Aino’s affinity – Blažek 2000; Bengtson 1992; Bengtson & Blažek 2000 – to what I have called the Peripheral branch of desintegrating \*Borean: Austric, Amerind and African macrophyla with the exception of Afroasiatic.

<sup>6</sup> Or any other similar small bird, e.g. the wren – it is abundantly clear that folk taxonomies of animal species, while rational and applying their own systematic categorisations, yet may differ greatly from modern scientific nomenclature and the latter’s distinctions based on morphology, genetics, evolution, etc.; e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1962; Douglas 1973; Marciniak 2011. Translations of 脊令, i.e. the name for a small bird in ancient Chinese texts, e.g. in the 詩經 *Shi Jing* (Legge 1879: 220 f. and 1876) oscillate between ‘wren’ and ‘wagtail’.

<sup>7</sup> Starostin & Starostin, 1998-2008, *Indoeuropean etymology, Altaic etymology, Nostratic etymology, Long-range etymology, Afroasiatic etymology, Sinocaucasian etymology*.

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