

The case of kings as Tears of Rain (Nkoya, Zambia) / humankind as Tears of Re^c (Ancient Egypt)

A test-case of African / Egyptian continuity in myth

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses one particularly intriguing parallel between the modern Nkoya people of Zambia (South Central Africa), and Ancient Egypt: those revolving on the Nkoya image of kings as the tears of Mvula, 'Rain', the demiurge who is considered the child of the High God Nyambi. The point I will make is that the parallel between the Nkoya expression 'Our kingship is from the Drops (or Tears) of [the Demiurge] Rain', and the Egyptian imagery of humankind as emerging from the tears of Re^c, is so close, and the Egyptian imagery can be argued to have emerged in such a specific, and fairly identifiable, context in time and space, that here we are tempted to give up our prudence, and conclude to downright continuity between the Bronze Age Egyptian expression, and the present-day Nkoya one.

1. Introduction: Continuities between Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa

Numerous, and from all aspects of human productive, symbolic and political life, are the parallels that have been argued to exist between Ancient Egypt and the cultures and societies of sub-Saharan Africa as recorded, and made available to global scholarship, in historical times, mainly in the last few centuries. Not the fact of such parallels, but their explanation, has been the subject of heated debate for over a century now. Here basically three rival models have been proposed:

(a) *out of Egypt*: One does not have to be an Egyptocentrist, and one can remain critical of the Egyptocentrism displayed by others from Elliot Smith to Bernal,

Diop and other Afrocentrists, and yet admit that for three millennia Ancient Egypt was one of the world's most powerful states and economies, exerting an enormous influence all over the Mediterranean and West Asia, and inevitably (considering the Ancient Egyptian inroads to the South, in the form of military, tributary and trading contacts both of an incidental nature and persistent over time) also in the Northern half of Africa. After decades of ideological infatuation with Egypt as – allegedly – the Africa par excellence, the more recent research (e.g. that highlighted in the *Cahiers Caribéens d'Égyptologie*, or the work of the Cameroonian Egyptologist Oum Ndigi) is now applying sound scholarly methods to the assessment of Egypt-Africa relations, and making good progress. In the context of such work, two additional explanatory models have been invoked:

(b) the potentially Afrocentrist claim (also vocally represented, in mainstream scholarship, by leading scholars from Petrie 1914-15 to Hoffman 1979) that Ancient Egypt was essentially an African product, continuous with the contemporary societies of sub-Saharan Africa;¹ or,

(c) an appeal to common origins of both Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan African cultures, in this case the claim that both Egypt, and (largely passing via Egypt, admittedly) the cultural inroads from West Asia into sub-Saharan Africa (partly – only from the Middle Bronze Age onward – chariot-facilitated, as I have suggested), drew from West Asian proto-Neolithic culture, in which much of the Asian innovations and transformations of the Out-of-Africa heritage had come to fruition.

The competitive power of models (b) and (c) can be seen when we consider

¹ Model (b) is predicated on the assumption that the spatial distribution of linguistic, cultural and somatic traits now predominantly associated with sub-Saharan Africa (and of course such traits can only be grossly stereotyped, given the enormous variety in the African continent through space and time), was essentially already in place in the Early Bronze Age, when Early Dynastic Egypt came into being. This assumption is less founded than is commonly taken for granted. Of course, a Palaeo-African population of Anatomically Modern Humans has existed in the African continent since 200 ka BP, and it is gradually becoming possible to suggest the outlines of their productive and symbolic culture, their forms of social organisation and their genetic make-up – the basic ingredients that went into the original 'Out of Africa' package that was subsequently, from c. 80-60 ka BP onward, spread, transformed, and innovated all over the earth. However, the more immediate cultural, linguistic and genetic materials that shaped Ancient Egypt in Neolithic times, far from going back directly to the primal Palaeo-African stock, can only be understood as the products of intensive genetic, cultural and linguistic transformation and innovation, of the original Out-of-Africa heritage in the period 60-10 ka BP, especially in Asia but (due to the Back into Africa migration from West and Central Asia 15 ka BP onward) with inroads in the Northern part of Africa. Just as geneticists have detected a major Asian-derive gene flow in Africa from 15 ka BP onward, comparative mythology and the comparative study of socio-political institutions allows us to claim that the major African expressions in historical times (the institution of the kingship, and the image of the separation and re-connection of heaven and earth) display fundamental continuity with Eurasia, and have a relatively recent (proto-Neolithic) West to Central Asian origin before spilling over into Africa. On linguistic grounds, the same argument can be made for all four linguistic families represented in Africa in Early Modern times: Afro-Asiatic, Nbil-Saharan, Niger-Congo, and Khoi-San. This suggests that what has appeared as African traits in Early Modern times and in historic Antiquity (Iron Age), may not yet have been fully established there in the Early Bronze Age, since it was still on its way to sub-Saharan Africa as part of the Back into Africa migration.

Bernal's insistence on Ancient Greece's almost total dependence upon Egyptian cultural including mythical materials (Model a), which Bernal later, by an Afrocentrist afterthought to his argument, tended to interpret as a special case of the Afrocentrist model b, mediated via Ancient Egypt. Model (c) however brings us to suspect that Bernal's position amounts to an overstatement, because it does not take into account that to a considerable extent both Egypt, and the Aegean, draw from the same West Asian proto-Neolithic source. This common source is, incidentally, also responsible for the considerable affinities between the Egyptian Delta on the one hand, and West Asia (including Sumer and Neolithic Anatolia) on the other hand – an affinity which is also manifest in the reed-and-bee complex, and which may well have managed, in this form, to have penetrated to South Central Africa.

Whatever the deficiencies of Afrocentrist and Bernallian scholarship (and I have suggested elsewhere – van Binsbergen 2000, 1997, 2005 – that these deficiencies have been somewhat exaggerated for reasons of North Atlantic hegemony and mainstream paradigmatic power games) the main thrust of such studies has been a counter-hegemonic exercise in the politics of knowledge. This makes them, even to sympathetic observers or partisans like myself, unmistakably and unavoidably ideological.² However, in my quest for scholarly, methodologically and theoretically underpinned valid knowledge I have repeatedly been forced to appear disloyal to such counter-hegemonic causes, and reject the wholesale claim that everything of value in global cultural history has an African origin, not only in the remotest past of the Out-of-Africa Exodus 80 – 60 ka ago (that claim is undeniable, but it is not central to the Afrocentrist and Bernallian argument), but also in Neolithic and Bronze Age times down to the present day. Thus my extensive empirical, comparative and theoretical research (even though partly informed by the post-modern position on local, multiple, manipulable and transient truths even in science), has forced me to admit an extra-African origin and subsequent transcontinental spread into Africa, for mankala board games ('the nation game of Africa', as Culin 1896 had it); for geomantic divination including Ifa, Sikidy and the Southern African Hakata; for many aspects of mythology (Late or Post-Palaeolithic) centring on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, shamanism, and the kingship; and – as my research in progress seems to indicate – even for the Niger-Congo / Bantu linguistic family. The primary aim of scholarship is not to vindicate African sensitivities in the face of historical misfortunes of the last few centuries. Thus also in my analysis, Africa's original contribution to global culture, religion and mythology lies mainly in the beginning, in the initiating and refining the Palaeo-African pre-Out of-Africa mythological package that was subsequently innovated, transformed, and diversified, mainly in Asia, between 60 and 15 ka BP, and then returned to Africa as a major basis for the African / Eurasian communalities that form the subject matter of this paper. If such a model is misinterpreted as reducing Africa and Africans to global passivity and lack of cultural initiative, so be it – before the last millennium or so, Europe found itself in very much the same position.

² The same objection, inevitably, has been brought against my own work, e.g. Amselle 2001. [Amselle, J.-L., 2001, *Branchements: Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures*, Paris: Flammarion]

In the course of the past fifteen years, a considerable part of my comparative work in the field of long-range (effectively transcontinental) cultural pre- and proto-history aimed at determining the relative weight to be given to the above rival models (a), (b) and (c), in the cultural interaction between sub-Saharan Africa and Ancient Egypt. Considering the vast expanses of time and space involved, no answer can be expected in the sense of an overall rule of thumb asserting the superiority of one of these three models of the other two.

In very specific cases however, we may be able to limit down the ramifications of cultural influence in time and space to such an extent, that – although only for that case – a more specific answer may perhaps be given, allowing us to argue the specific origin of a particular trait in either Ancient Egypt or sub-Saharan Africa, and to trace the subsequent long-distance transmission of that trait, with all the localising transformations of function and meaning such transmissions normally entail.

In the present argument I propose to present one such limited case: the parallel between the image, among the Nkoya people of Zambia (sub-Saharan Africa) today, of kingship are emanating from the ‘Tears of Rain’, on the one hand, and the well-known Ancient Egyptian expression according to which humankind has sprung from the ‘Tears of Rē^c. I will argue that the emergence of the Egyptian image is so specific in time and space, so clearly associated with processes of early state formation in the Nile valley, that the sub-Saharan African parallel can only be derived.

Meanwhile it is important to stress that the ‘Tears of Rain’/ ‘Tears of Re^c’ parallelism does not in the least exhaust the long list of similarities between Nkoya traditions and myths as collected in historical times, and Ancient Egypt and other parts of the Ancient Near East. I have discussed these other parallels elsewhere; they extend into royal nomenclature especially the *nsw-bit* and *nbtj* titles, the symbolism reed, bees and honey, of white and red animals, the concept of the Mḥ-wrt, ‘Great Inundation’, the veneration of the Morning Sun, etc. Here however I have singled out the Tears complex, because – as we shall see – it offers the best opportunities for fixing the emergence of that complex in time and space, and thus, for that complex only, to pinpoint the direction of African/Egyptian cultural flow.

2. The Nkoya people of Zambia: From myth to protohistory, and back, in tears...

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

- (a) traditions I had collected in the region in the course of two decades, not only at the royal courts (where central dynastic oral histories are managed, controlled

and transmitted), but also in commoner villages where the traditions were relatively decentralised and unprocessed in the light of dynastic aspirations, and therefore reveal many flaws, contradictions and manipulations in the integrated courtly accounts

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

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

Further exposure to Assyriology, Egyptology and comparative mythology in the first half of the 1990s, however, made me realise that what I had considered to be an distorted traditional account of historical events in Iron Age South Central Africa up to half a millennium BP, contained many highly specific parallels with the mythologies attested in the texts of civilisations extremely remote in space and time from Nkoyaland. Below I will offer a discussion of these possible specific mythological correspondences with Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Graeco-Roman mythology and South Asia, against the more general and systematic background of my Aggregative Diachronic Model of Global Mythology. So I had to face, tearfully, the possibility (van Binsbergen 1998-2006) that my historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*, however acclaimed by the dean of Central African protohistory Jan Vansina (1993), was yet largely fictitious and based on some sort of proto-historical *fallacy of misplaced concreteness* (Whitehead 1925) – that I had systematically mistaken for

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

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

‘Debates over the “Zimba” period of Zambesian history prompt a new consideration of the mythical element in oral traditions. The work of M. Schoffeleers on Mbona, presiding spirit of a famous rainshrine in southern Malawi, is exploited in order to

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

cast doubt on his reconstruction of 16th and 17th-century political history. It is suggested that Mbona was the serpentine power immanent in the Zambesi; that reports of his 'martyrdom' at the hands of a secular ruler are versions of an ancient myth of the lightning and the rainbow; that his journey to, and subsequent flight from, Kaphiri-ntiwa, scene of the Maravi creation myth, is a variant of the visit made to the sky by Kintu, the 'First Man' of Ganda tradition. It is not very likely that such stories attest the rise of a great military State c. 1600 and the ensuing suppression of religious institutions.'

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

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

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

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

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

If beyond the relatively safe (for mainstream-affirmed) world of Bantu cosmology and mythology as codified by competent specialists, I wish to appeal to an ulterior array of very ancient mythemes claimed to have been widely circulating throughout the Old World, then I make a claim to massive intercontinental cultural continuities and to Africa's being an integral part of the cultural history of humankind. In principle such a claim should be self-evident, yet it is controversial, for a number of reasons. In the first place, how can such a claim be distinguished from the most entrenched, naïve, and discredited forms of classic diffusionism? For the most obvious way to explain whatever parallels are perceived – rightly or wrongly – between sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the Old World, is by assuming that the traits in question originated in one region and subsequently diffused to the other region – either (a) into sub-Saharan Africa (as older, Eurocentric scholarship would a priori assume, e.g. in the context of the notorious Hamitic thesis) or (b) from Africa into the rest of the Old World, as Afrocentrists and the closely related *Black Athena* thesis would have it. Any argument concerning African/Eurasian parallels would risk to be swamped by unsophisticated and dogmatic ideological preferences, until one realises that an alternative, and generally productive and preferable, model is to look for a common prehistoric source of both the African and the Eurasian attestations – and then seek to define the nature and the localisation of that postulated origin in the light of a systematic, empirically underpinned theory – which is in fact the approach advocated (through not necessarily realised) in the present argument. Then again, as already noted, out of a potentially counter-hegemonic yet by and large ill-advised sense of continental distinctiveness, historical rehabilitation and vicarious chauvinism, modern Africanists have tended to explain African phenomena by exclusive reference to Africa; claiming Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Graeco-Roman, and South Asian

mythemically parallels in Africa is likely to incur the accusation that one is trying to reduce Africans to transcultural passive receptivity and nothing more. Less lofty, and implying an inveterate racism, have been the tacit assumptions that Africa cannot have greatly participated in the give and take of transcontinental exchanges in prehistory, because the inhabitants (and their displaced descendants), societies and economies of that continent have been globally relegated to passive marginality in the most recent centuries. Finally, more as an accident of scholarship than as a deliberate analytical principle, until the work by Michael Witzel (2001 and in press) African mythologies (which have been relatively poorly collected, studied and anthologised as compared to other continents) tend to have been aloof from comprehensive global statements of comparative mythology. And even in Witzel's work, as in so many other intellectual, ideological and media contexts today, Africa features as the ultimate Other (van Binsbergen 2006), whose 'Gondwanan' mythologies (allegedly shared with New Guinea and Australia) are alleged to lack linear time and a sense of sustained history, true cosmogony, flood myths, kingship etc., – features that, by contrast, constitute the 'Laurasian' mythological heritage of Asia, Europe, Oceania and the New World.

3. Nkoya: Kings as the 'Tears of Rain'

In the Nkoya case, my task has been rendered easier but more complex by the availability of a local compilation of mythology, *Likota lya Bankoya*, which circulated in one or two heavily contested manuscript copies before I edited and published the text around 1990 – however, it is the confrontation of *Likota lya Bankoya* with other, more diffuse and less controlled, oral traditions that produced my proto-historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*.

Kingship is one of the central Nkoya institutions and the one most highlighted in publicly circulating mythology. Therefore one expects a Nkoya myth of origin of kingship, and this is in fact available, in the following form – which finds its apotheosis in the 'Tears of Rain image' at the end. I present both the Nkoya text and my English translation; the rendition of the text retains the biblical format which, for the compiler the first Nkoya pastor Rev. Shimunika, was the only form of text production with which he was familiar.

4₁
 fuma wene wa Bankoya ha nyungu ya mundilo. Bantu babengi bakulwane bambilenga ngayi, Mwene Nyambi wenga kayoni. Mwanendi Mvula wenga kayoni kami bambilenga ngayi mikoka yibili hano hanci bawushinda wa Mvula. Kubatuyoni Shinkwehe, ku bantu boni Bakambunze.
 2 Nohobene Shikalamo sha Mundemba niye wa wungile linyungu lyalinene ha liziko. Niho akungwile nkuni na kwibika litatamundilo, niho a punwine kayamana wa kaketwezelele mu nyungu ni mwako. Pele niho a yakile nyungu ha liziko wa telekele, ku fumisha ku lumenemene ku twala hakati ka mutwe,

Ha **4**₁ The
 king-ship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large cooking-pot full of game meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that Mwene Nyambi is a bird; and that Mwene Nyambi has a child, Rain (Mvula), also a bird; and that two clans in this world are the relatives of Rain: the Nkwehe [Hawks] on the part of the birds, and the Mbusze [Buzzards] on the part of the people.
 2 Shikalamo sha Mundemba was therefore the one who prepared the large pot with game meat he had bagged; he put the pot on the fire and started cooking the meat. The meat had been cooking from the early morning till

Mpungumushi sha Mundemba wambile ku bantu nimwabo ngayi,

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

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

‘Yekenu tulyenga.’

Oho bamanishile kulya kwakatukile wamina na bawushinda wendi ngayi,

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

6 Nohobene Shikalamo sha Mundemba wa tongwezele bantu nimwabo ngayi,

‘Enu nimwenu munakwanga kutewula nyungu ha litatamundilo. Niho ou mwanami Shilayi Mashiku niye una yitewuluho na kulyamo nyama, na bawushinda wendi, niye “liyoni lya mulela bana” niye ukwinga Mwene, a mikome nimwenu. Pele kami nenu munakonzo ha zindonga muli Bamyene bakawukonzo munakonzo ha zindonga za wene. Bakasheta na Bankonze bantu bamo, Bamyene nimwabo.’

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

‘Enu haya muli Bakasheta munalishete kunyungu ya mundilo.’

Pele kami niho batumbile bamina ngayi

‘Enu kami muli Bankonze munakonze Baka-

midday, and when the pot of meat was still on the fire Mpungumushi⁶ sha Mundemba called all the people. He said to them:

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

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

‘Let us eat.’

After they had eaten one of her relatives shouted:

‘Come so that you can lick the plates of the Sheta⁷ who have gone around the pot of meat which was on the fire.’

Then Shikalamo sha Mundemba told all the people:

‘You have all failed to take the pot of meat off the fire, but my daughter Shilayi Mashiku has managed to do so. She has eaten the meat with her relatives. She is “the bird⁸ that takes good care of its young ones” and she is to be your Mwene. You who have licked the plates are the junior Myene henceforth known as Nkonze⁹. The Sheta and the Nkonze are the same people, all Myene.’

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

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

To the others they said:

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

At the end of the ceremony it rained so heavily that the

⁶ A name or title which is evidently not modern Nkoya, and in which the Luba words mpungu (‘buzzard’, perhaps ‘fish eagle’) and mushi (‘village’) can be detected; their present-day Nkoya equivalents are chipungu and munzi.

⁷ ‘The Dizzy Ones’, affected by the circling around the pot of meat.

⁸ Here the bird theme with which this passage began, comes back. It would look as if calling rain was predominantly a female affair (even the gender of Mwene Nyambi and of Mvula is left sufficiently unspecific to allow it to be interpreted as female), and one which evoked (through the bird theme) major representations of the supernatural.

⁹ ‘Lickers’.



sheta ha zindonga zabo.’
 Hakukotoka mvula walokele na kuzima mundilo. Pele
 haya nibo ngayi,
 ‘Wene wetu wa Limata Iya Mvula.’

fire was extinguished. The people said :
 ‘Our Kingship comes from the Raindrop.’

After thus documenting the Nkoya side of our central parallel, let us now look at the Tears complex in the Ancient Egyptian context.

4. Ancient Egypt: humankind as the Tears of Re^c

For Ancient Egypt, the ‘tears of the divinity’ image is ascertained to emerge only in the Middle Kingdom,¹⁰ i.e. a time when the Egyptian unified state and its religion had been in existence for a thousand years. Meanwhile, in another version humankind did not directly issue from Re^c’s tears, but Re^c’s tears fertilised the earth so that it could bring forth mankind:

‘Re is sometimes called the “weeper” which refers to his creation of mankind, explained by means of a play on words: the sun-god wept and from the tear (Egyptian *remy* []) that fell on earth, there sprang man (Egyptian *remet* [])’¹¹

This is probably a late version. It is alien to the dominant orientation of Ancient Egyptian religion, where earth is male, partner to the female sky. On the other hand there is a remarkable parallel here with the Erichthonius myth of Greek Antiquity. That apical ancestor of Attica was supposed to have sprung from Hephaestus’ seed, spent when the latter was aroused by the presence of the virgin goddess Athena. The male god ejaculated against her thigh and she, in disgust, wiped off the issue with a tuft of wool and cast it onto the Earth; the latter immediately conceived and produced Erichthonius, and Athena knew no better than adopting the babe on the spot – perhaps by the very act squeamishly admitting that her role in the child’s production had even extended beyond her somewhat hypocritical preservation of virginity while catalytically acting as ejaculation-stimulating pin-up at the same time. I earlier dis-

¹⁰ Anthes, R., ‘Mythology In Ancient Egypt’, in: Kramer, S.N., 1961, *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, Garden City (NY): Doubleday, pp. 15-92, p. 30.

¹¹ Hart, *o.c.*, p. 181 hieroglyphic text added. Speaking of transcontinental parallels and the *Black Athena* connection, genuine or spurious, one cannot help being reminded of Empedocles (Fragments, 6; cf. Leonard 1908):

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

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

cussed this theme in the context of the *Black Athena* thesis.¹² At the time I reluctantly admitted the possibility of a link with Egyptian mythology on the general basis that the latter corpus contains several instances of irregular sexual and procreative behaviour; however, when I wrote I was not yet in a position to make the obvious connection with the ‘tears of the divinity’ theme, and I preferred an Anatolian or Tyrrhenian reading. Now the Egyptian parallels to the Erichthonius myth seem obvious,¹³ although I would prefer to derive both from a common source that remains to be identified.

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

1. By a horizontal process of gender replacement, in other words through *masculinisation*, giving birth is transferred from woman to man, Rē^c undoubtedly¹⁴ being a male god.

¹² Van Binsbergen, W.M.J., ‘Alternative models of intercontinental interaction towards the earliest Cretan script’, in: *Black Athena, o.c.*, pp. 131-148.

¹³ Incidentally, this is more or less what Graves claimed half a century ago. Graves, R., 1988, *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth*, London/ Boston: Faber & Faber, reprint of 1961 edition, first published 1948, pp. 140f, 436f. Graves preferred to call the myth Libyan rather than Egyptian for excellent reasons we shall come back to in the following chapters.

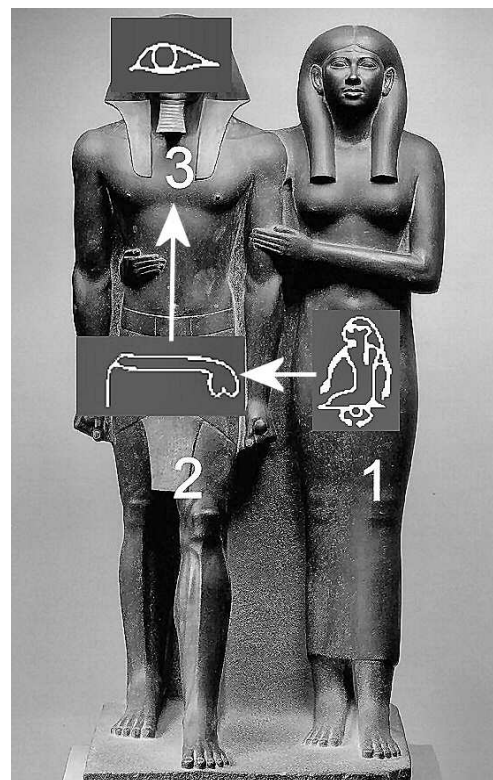
¹⁴ *Undoubtedly*, that is, ever since Rē^c’s rise to exalted prominence, in the Fifth dynasty. However, there are indications that underneath the emphatic male nature of the sun god lurks a more original female identity, well in line with the sun’s central nurturative role for all life on earth. Some of these indications derive from Ancient Egypt itself, e.g. the tradition according to which Rē^c is the son of a more primal Nt [Neith], whose female nature is never doubted. Other indications are comparative, e.g. the fact that the sun is female in the traditions of Ancient Crete (cf. Goodison, L., 1989, *Death, Women and the Sun: Symbolism and Regeneration in Early Aegean Religion*, London: Institute of Classical Studies), implicitly in the Germanic world (where ‘die Sonne’ has female gender), and also in the African Niger-Congo speaking world, where Anansi / Nzamb / Nyambi is a female spider / sun god. The suggestion that emanates from my comparative historical research over the years is that these various cultural areas, including Ancient Egypt, are considerably continuous. For an independent corroboration of this thesis from an accomplished Egyptologist, cf. Stricker, o.c., who argues with incredible display of an erudite referential apparatus that in the specific domain of the thinking about conception, pregnancy and birth – highly relevant in the present connexion –, Ancient Egypt, classical Graeco-Roman civilisation, Ancient Germanic civilisation, Ancient Iranian civilisation, and Ancient Indian civilisation, constitute, in fact, one continuous cultural and historical region. He could have added several post-Neolithic civilisations to which he had no intellectual access: Ancient Mesopotamia (cf. Stol, M., 1998, *Pregnancy and birth in ancient Mesopotamia*, Leiden: Brill, originally published in Dutch 1975), and two regions on which the relevant documentation stills needs to be compiled: Ancient China, and Niger-Congo speaking Africa in historic times.

- Subsequently, by a process of vertical displacement from a lower region of the human body (the groin) to a higher level (the face), in other words through *sublimation*, the male usurpation of parturition is transferred from the male genitals (with sperm as the standard product) to the eyes (with tears as the standard product).


A schematic representation of this dual structural shift is presented in Figure 1, which shows from left to right: a female body giving birth; a male body in the act of masturbation; and an implicitly male body weeping.



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

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



the hieroglyphic signs shown:

number in diagram	sign	Gardiner number	phonetic or morphological value	object represented by the pictographic aspect of the sign
1		B3	ideogram (<i>msi</i>) or determinative	woman giving birth

			'bear, give birth'	
2		D53	determinative of 'maleness'	'phallus with liquid issuing from it'
3		D4	ideogram of <i>irt</i> , 'eye'	eye


The choice of this particular statue of this particular king Mn-kaw-Re^c ('Mycerinus') from this particular (4th) dynasty is entirely arbitrary, and solely dictated by its clear-cut design and male-female complementarity. Needless to say, the hieroglyphic signs do not appear on the original statue but were projected onto the image by the present author.

5. From structural analysis to history in the Egyptian case

After this formal, structural analysis, our next step is to search for historical indications that such a twofold process has actually taken place. This does not prove difficult. Budge gives a very late version of the myth according to which humans are the tears of the sun-god; it derives from a text entitled *The Book of knowing the Evolutions of Ra* [Rē^c], and of *Overthrowing Apepi* [Apopi]¹⁵, written by Nesi-Amsu, c. 312 BCE. The text gives our Victorian Egyptologist considerable difficulty, because of its original yet logical solution to the problem of parthenogenetic creation in male hands...: masturbation. In ways which half a century later Anthes was still to circumscribe as 'unnatural though human',¹⁶ the first god (*Hpri*, 'the sun-god at his rising',¹⁷ a form of Rē^c) says

'I had union with my hand, and I embraced my shadow in a love embrace; I poured seed into my own mouth, and I sent forth from myself issue in the form of the gods Šw and Tfnt',¹⁸

Šw and Tfnt being the original sibling pair of Air (or Sunshine) and Moisture, out of whom the other major gods were subsequently born. Unable to hide his embarrassment, Budge shows himself to be truly a child of his racialist, imperialist age;¹⁹ and he is quite relieved when another late text, the *Book of Pylons*,²⁰ seems to offer

¹⁵ Apopi is the snake-like cosmic enemy; his hieroglyphic sign  shows a horizontal snake with undulating coils, with a knife stuck at the top of every coil and in the head; Budge, *Gods*, o.c., p. ii: 245.

¹⁶ Anthes, 'Mythology', o.c., p. 36

¹⁷ Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, o.c., p. 584.


¹⁸ Budge, *Gods*, o.c., p. i: 297.

¹⁹ Budge, *Gods*, o.c., pp. i: 297f.

²⁰ Original [but, as usual with Budge, imprecise] reference to: Bonomi, Joseph, & Sharpe, Samuel (ed.), 1864, *The Alabaster sarcophagus of Oimeneptah I., king of Egypt : now in sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields*, London : Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, plates 7 and 6b.

reasons to relegate the masturbation motif, however physiologically and logically plausible, and however *universally* human, to what was from the standpoint of Victorian England a remote global periphery: sub-Saharan Africa, thus saving the moral purity of the ancient Egyptians.

The motif of creation through masturbation is a very ancient part of Egyptian cosmogony.²¹

‘The oldest legend about the origin of the gods is contained in the text of Pepi I [c. 2300 BCE], wherein it is said (line 465) that once upon a time Tem [*Tm, itm*, i.e. ‘Atum’] went to the city of Annu and that he there produced from his own body by the irregular means of masturbation his two children Shu and Tefnut. In this crude form the myth is probably of Libyan origin, [again, Budge relegate the masturbation theme to non-Egyptian savagery, although the ancient Libyans were supposed to be light-skinned and Afro-Asiatic (Berber) speaking] and it suggests that its inventors were in a semi-savage, or perhaps wholly savage, state when it was first promulgated. In later times, as we have already seen, the Egyptians appear to have rejected certain of the details of the myth, or to have felt some difficulty in believing that Shu and Tefnut were begotten and conceived and brought forth by Tem, and they therefore assumed that his shadow, , *khaibit*, acted the part of wife to him; another view was that the goddess Iusaaset was his wife. The old ideas about the origin of the twin gods, however, maintained their position in the minds of the Egyptians, and we find them categorically expressed in some of the hymns addressed to Amen-Ra, who under the New Empire was identified with Tem, just as at an earlier period Ra was identified with the same god. (...) The Twin Lion-gods [in two hymns quoted by Brugsch²²] are, of course, Shu and Tefnut’.²³

²¹ For the Ancient Egyptians of dynastic times, male masturbation constituted the principal solution to the intellectual puzzle of how to account for the first birth, for cosmogony and anthropogony, if in common experience every birth springs from the coupling to two living human beings of complementary gender. Comparatively, this solution of the puzzle is far from standard, and already reflects the masculinisation process (the male usurpation and transformation of a woman-centred world view) on which I believe the Ancient Egyptian dynastic state was built. Two much more standard solutions are:

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

²² Brugsch, [Heinrich, 1891/1969,] *Religion [und Mythologie der alten Ägypter: Nach den Denkmälern. Zweite Ausgabe mit Namenregister*, Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung 1891, Reprint Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Leipzig 1969] p. 422.

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

Anthes²⁴ says that the complex as a whole – and his summary includes the masturbation motif –

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

The first attestation of the ‘men as *tears* of the divinity’ motif in the Ancient Egyptian context is almost a full millennium later, while until very late times a rival motif of human creation through direct masturbation persists. Therefore, and considering also the symbolic equivalence of transparent human fluids: tears, sperm, saliva, throughout the ancient Mediterranean and much of the Old World, I would interpret the masturbation theme not so much as an *alien* element but as the *original* element, as the first step in the symbolic operation of masculinisation, which was subsequently bowdlerised, literally sublimated from the groin upwards to the face and the eyes. Budge (*Gods, o.c.*, p. i: 304) also indicates the existence of an intermediate model, an ‘older version’, of imperfect sublimation but with the same male parthenogenetic delusion, where the tears fall on the male sexual organs and cause them to produce. The possibility of punning on the ancient Egyptian words for ‘weeping’ and for ‘mankind’ did help, but did not cause the theme ‘men as tears of the divinity’ motif to come into being in the first place. The latter is a simple transformation, along the lines illustrated in Fig 7, from the adult – possibly esoteric, secret – language domain to that of public everyday speech. We can only guess at the reasons for such a transformation. Had the masturbation motif become embarrassing in the light of later cultural conceptions of decency? Was it no longer properly understood? Did it need to be reformulated in terms of a later, more sophisticated concept of the sacred, where notions of power no longer primarily derived from human physiology and the tangible world in general, but in an increasingly logocentric manner from abstract symbolic concepts sublimated beyond their original materiality? Was this development a further stage in the masculinisation process that separated the First Dynasty queen from the more strongly (but still incompletely) masculine pharaonic state of the Old Kingdom and after? Or, alternatively (but this scarcely sounds convincing or in line with the historical evidence), did the masturbation theme have to be sublimated precisely for lack of success of the masculinisation process, in other words when, in the face of later feminine power, men could no longer get away with the open assertion of male parthenogenetic power as in the masturbation theme?

In passing we note that the masturbation motif offers a possible link between ancient Egyptian and classical Greek myths, not only the myth of Erichthonius but also e.g.

²³ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 88.

²⁴ Anthes, *o.c.*, p. 36

the doubly parthenogenetic birth of Athena from Zeus's head²⁵ (where as a sign of even more advanced sublimation towards logocentricity all reference to bodily fluids, even to tears, is suppressed, and a male god single-handedly produces a virgin goddess) and the birth of Aphrodite from foam or sperm when Uranus's severed genitals were cast into the sea.²⁶

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

The psychoanalyst Fromm perceives the same gender shift in procreation as it informs the founding myth of the Babylonian conception of patriarchal order, in heaven as on earth²⁷ Of course, as a psychoanalyst, Fromm is tempted to appropriate the ancient Babylonian myth and use it to understand the male individual psyche in a general, even universal perspective. His important insight however becomes all the more illuminating when we realise that Marduk symbolises the moment of the historical emergence, in the Late Neolithic, of the state as a distinct institutional domain, whose internal conceptualisation and structure is no longer derived from the pre-existing domains of production, reproduction and sociability in the family, the village, the clan.²⁸ Marduk's fight against Tiāmat (whose maternal connotations sum up the nurturative, reciprocal, pacifist, gender-complementary orientation of many pre-state (proto-)Neolithic societies, often expressed in a balanced, gendered, dualist cosmology) means the disruption of reciprocity, gender complementarity and non-violence. Male Marduk's battle against Tiāmat at one level of analysis is the battle of the political domain to gain its independence from the pre-existing inclusive domain where kinship reigned supreme and violence therefore had to be mitigated or even banned from the domestic domain. Masculinisation (complete with male, especially priestly and royal, claims to control the fertility of the land and the human body) is merely an expression of state formation. When I encountered the same masculinisation process in Nkoya traditions, I was tempted to take these at face value and situate Nkoya state

²⁵ Pindar, *Odes*, 7, 35ff; Euripides, *Ion* 454ff.

²⁶ Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 176ff.

²⁷ Fromm, E., 1976, *The forgotten language: An introduction to the understanding of dreams, fairy tales, and myths*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, first published 1951, p. 231f. Original reference to: Heidel, A., 1942, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago: Chicago University Press: ENUMA ELISH (When Above), Tablet IV. Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. i: 305, refers to the same Babylonian story but misses the point about gender rivalry.

²⁸ Cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann, *o.c.*

formation through masculinisation in the second half of the second millennium CE;²⁹ however, it is not impossible that all that was really involved was distant echoes from the earliest historical state formation in the Ancient Near East, both in Early Dynastic Egypt and in Mesopotamia. In the latter context the Enuma Elish myth, meanwhile, evokes two distinct historical processes at the same time:

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

It is masturbation which logically enables the authors of the Egyptian myths to effect the gender shift towards procreation as a divine male prerogative, as an aspect of the installation of a distinct political domain – in other words, of state formation. Through a simple process of sublimation – which yet probably took centuries, perhaps a full millennium, to take effect – the ‘tears’ are direct transformations of the ‘sperm’. At the end of the development stands the ‘tears of the divinity’ theme, and a fully-fledged pharaonic state; at the beginning, human procreation by women, a pre-statal domain of kinship and clanship, and presumably the first divine procreation by a female divinity. The abundance of female original creators in Egyptian mythology (in the form of Nt [Neith], Ht-r [Athor], and Mh-wrt, primarily) throughout the millennia makes it very likely that the postulated primary idea of ‘first divine procreation by a female divinity’ was truly the baseline of the earliest Egyptian ideas on creation – in line with the standard Neolithic conception of female parthenogenetic cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis as set out above. There is even a specific, albeit late, source which claims that the Great Goddess Nt produced the snake of chaos Apopi from her spittle;³⁰ this is highly significant in the light of the fact that there are several myths linking Nt closely to Rē^c, and that in certain version about the creation of Šw and Tfnt a distinction is made between the latter two: whereas Šw is created from Rē^c ejaculated sperm, Tfnt is alleged to have sprung from Rē^c's spittle. Clearly underneath the dominant male version a female one lurks, which attributes to Nt the procreative role which Rē^c has apparently usurped. It is amazing that this theme was preserved into Late Antiquity, when Plutarch records:

‘In Saïs the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: ‘I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered’’³¹

²⁹ Incidentally, this passage is effectively my answer to Vansina, who in an otherwise highly positive review of my *Tears of Rain* yet doubts whether the political formations I describe for the Nkoya, deserve to be called states. Vansina, J., 1993, [Review of : Binsbergen, W.M.J. van, 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in Central Western Zambia*, London/ Boston: Kegan Paul International], *Anthropos*, 88: 215-217.

³⁰ Hart, Dictionary, *o.c.*

³¹ Plutarch, *De Iride et Osiride*, 9, in: *Moralia*, vol V, tr. Frank Cole Babitt, Loeb Classical

Even several centuries later again, Proclus³² is to reveal another part of the inscription on this statue, making Nt the mother of Rē^c:

‘And the fruit I bore is the sun.’

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

The transformation process involved must not be seen as simply unilineal, and without inner contradictions. Despite masculinisation, gender complementarity has remained an element in ancient Egyptian religion, politics and culture throughout three millennia.³³ This is already obvious in the relationship between Šw and Tfnt as the first twin pair of created gods. Neither should we automatically assume the primacy of bodily physiological images, as if these are only self-referential, or non-referential, and in themselves could not be the symbol of relationships and expressions that are primarily not of a bodily (including sexual) but of a social and spiritual nature.³⁴

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

‘that which Tem, or Ra-Tem, has poured out [in order to produce Šw] is the light, and light was declared to be the prop of the sky.’³⁵

Meanwhile we must admit that the theme of ‘mankind as the tears of a male

Library, London: Heinemann, 1936; now, thanks to the Herculean labours of Bill Thayer, available at: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Isis_and_Osiris*/home.html

³² Proclus, *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. Ernestus Diehl, Lipsiae, 1903.

³³ Schultze, P.H., 1993, *Vrouwen in de Egyptische oudheid*, The Hague: BZZTôH, first published 1988; Dutch translation of: *Frauen im alten Ägypten*, Lübbe, 1987

³⁴ The same problem comes up time and again when we wish to determine our position vis-à-vis the sexual reductionism that was characteristic of Freud’s work before *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (Freud, S., *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, 13, 1, Frankfurt a/M.: Fischer, 1968-1977; Freud, S., n.d., *Het levensmysterie en de psycho-analyse*, Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek) and that is unfortunately still the hallmark of routinised psychoanalytical truisms schematised for popular consumption. As Jung has argued, (Jung, C.G., 1944, *Psychologie und Alchemie*, Zürich: Rascher; Jung, C.G., 1955, *Mysterium coniunctionis*, Zürich: Rascher) sexuality is far from the necessary and final end of a chain of symbolic associations; Hermetic, alchemistic and Christian mysticism, among others, demonstrates that sexuality in itself often functions as a mere metaphor of processes of amalgamation and union in the world of abstract concepts and religious symbols.

³⁵ Budge, *Gods, o.c.*, p. ii: 90:

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

Šw, god of the dry air and of sunshine,³⁶ has an exact counterpart in the Sumerian Enlil, ‘Lord Ether’. In evocation of the fundamental act by which he (technically their father) raised the sky goddess Nwt from out of her embrace on top of the male earth god Gb, Šw’s name includes the notion of: ‘to raise’.³⁷

As the link between heaven and earth, Šw has the ladder among his characteristic paraphernalia.³⁸ The vital instrument of honey hunters, the ladder is of very great antiquity and already features in prehistoric attestations of honey collecting – but in Egyptian funerary magic Budge³⁹ identified this theme as a relatively late development, yet it is simply interpretable as a straightforward devise to re-connect Heaven and Earth, in a cosmology hinging on their Separation (according to my Aggregative Diachronic Model already many thousands of years old when dynastic Egypt was established)

The Egyptologist Kees maintains that Tfnt is simply the semantically empty female complement of male Šw, produced solely by the formal compulsion in Egyptian mythology to have gendered pairs of all the primal divinities. Budge however cites etymological reasons (none too convincing, I suspect) to accord Tfnt an identity of her own as a goddess of gentle rain and soft wind.⁴⁰ According to Egyptian sacred genealogies Šw and Tfnt were Horus’ grandparents, and it seems as if the little boy has usurped their sacred birth-place, *3ḥ-bit* / Chemmis. In the words of the prominent modern Egyptologist Helck:

‘Ch[emmis] hieß nach H[erodotus]⁴¹ eine schwimmende Insel bei Buto im Westdelta, auf der Isis Apollon und Artemis geboren habe. Die Göttin Buto [i.e. W3dyt] habe als Amme des Horus die Insel zum Schwimmen gebracht, um ihn gegen Seth zu

³⁶ Anthes, ‘Mythology’, *o.c.*, p. 37

³⁷ Viaud, J., 1975, ‘Egyptian mythology’, in: *New Larousse Encyclopedia of mythology*, introduction R. Graves, London/ New York/ Sidney/ Toronto: Larousse, 11th edition, pp. 9-48. The semantic field activated by the name Šw further comprises (cf. Faulkner, R.O., 1962, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford: Griffith Institute/ Ashmolean Museum, p. 262), ‘to be empty’, ‘sunlight’, ‘dryness’, ‘shade’ (both as absence of sunlight, as parasol, and as aspect of men’s personality), and ‘feather’.

³⁸ Budge, *Gods*, *o.c.*, p. ii: 92, 241

³⁹ Budge, *Gods*, *o.c.*, pp. i: 167f.

⁴⁰ Budge, *Gods*, *o.c.*, p. ii: 92

⁴¹ Original reference to: Hist. 2, 156.

schützen. In äg[yptische] Texten versteckte Isis ihren Sohn Horus in einem *3ḥ-bit* genannten Dickicht. Eine ältere Sage von den “beiden Kindern des unter-äg[yptischen] Königs” läßt diese als Sonne und Mond (später als Schu und Tfn̄t = Apollon und Artemis erklärt) im Papyrusumpf von Buto geboren werden. H[erodotus]’ Bericht geht also auf eine altäg[yptischen] Mythe zurück.⁴²


Helck translates here ‘the two children of the king of Lower Egypt’, presumably from *hrdwy bit*. When he stresses the aspect that Chemmis is a *floating* island, we are reminded of the Nkoya tradition that’, as a people, they ‘originally’ lived on floating islands up in the north; my ‘de-mystifying attempt, in *Tears of Rain*, to interpret this as a reminiscence of an earlier historical stay in the swamps in Kasempa district, scarcely 100 km. north of the present-day Nkoya region, looks shamefully inadequate against this background of an ancient Egyptian myth, in which we can also trace prototypical parallels of Nkoya traditional royal figures such as Lipepo, Luhamba and Katete: forms of Šw and Tfn̄t hiding at Chemmis.⁴³

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed one particularly intriguing parallel between the modern Nkoya people of Zambia (South Central Africa), and Ancient Egypt: those revolving on the Nkoya image of kings as the tears of Mvula, ‘Rain’, the demiurge who is considered the child of the High God Nyambi. The point I will make is that the parallel between the Nkoya expression ‘Our kingship is from the Drops (or Tears) of [the Demiurge] Rain’, and the Egyptian imagery of humankind as emerging from the tears of Re^c, is so close, and the Egyptian imagery can be argued to have emerged in such a specific, and fairly identifiable, context in time and space, that here we are tempted to give up our prudence, and conclude to downright continuity between the Bronze Age Egyptian expression, and the present-day Nkoya one.

Thus for this very specific African/Egyptian parallel can one decide between the three rival models with which my argument opened: (a) Out of Africa (b) Out of Africa (c) Neither but from a common source elsewhere. I wish to stress that the one case discussed here is too limited than that its conclusion could be applied wholesale to decide between these rival models, which should be treated as complementary.

⁴² Helck, W., ‘Chemmis’, in: K. Ziegler & W. Sontheimer, eds., *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, cols. i: 1143.

⁴³ Gardiner, however, calls Chemmis a town instead of a floating island. Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, o.c., p. 550, s. v. , and s.v. *i3ḥ*, p. 551; cf. *w3ḥy*, ‘hall of inundation in Palace’, Gardiner, *Egyptian grammar*, o.c. We are also reminded of the hypothetical ‘aquatic’ African societies that crop up time and again in reconstructions of African social and linguistic prehistory, cf. Sutton, J.E.G., 1974, ‘The aquatic civilization of Middle Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 15: 527-546; Sutton, J.E.G., 1977, ‘The African aqualithic’, *Antiquity*, 51: 25-34; Sanchez-Mazas, A., E.S. Poloni1, B. Kervaire, J-M Dugoujon, S. Tornay, F. Rodhain, L. Excoffier, Y. Naciri-Graven, J-M Tiercy, and A. Langaney, n.d., ‘A genetic view on Nilo-Saharan’, at: <http://www.santafe.edu/files/gems/ehlchronology/SanchezMazas.pdf>

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