


(whence, in Mali and Nigeria, the *Bori* cult¹⁹¹ had exerted considerable influence on the ecstatic forms of North African popular religion). And finally, and as another *spirit of the wilds* next to the *jenūn* but far more formidable, the ominous mythical being of غربان Ḡrbān, who would suddenly materialise in lonely places on the mountain slopes, and strike you with his fingers – leaving you with as few days to live as he left dark bruises on your skin.

J.J.J. THE MYTHICAL BEING ḠRBĀN IN THE LIGHT OF COMPARATIVE MYTHOLOGY.

Ḡrbān (apparently a cognate with the Arabic root غرب meaning 'West') is a puzzling demonic being, but comparative mythology helps us to situate it fairly convincingly. I am indebted to my brother Peter Broers, a Romance and Hebrew scholar and a former Franciscan friar novice, for spontaneously identifying Ḡrbān as the *daemon meridionalis* at a very early stage, shortly after my first field-work. There is a frequent occurrence of Jewish elements in Ḥumīrī life and its popular Islam (van Binsbergen forthcoming; e.g. the standard local name for God is not الله Allah but ربي Rābbi; the injunction 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk' (*Exodus* 23:19) was spontaneously cited to me there; and a common man's name is there كشرود Kašrūd, cf. Hebrew כשרוד Kašrūd 'state of purity'). Rural North Africa is permeated with Judaism – e.g. the author of the main Islamic geomancy, Muḥammad az-Zānāti, is named after the Zānāta Berber tribe well-known for its Jewish elements. Therefore, a connection may be sought between the name Ḡrbān and the Hebrew קרבן *korban*, in Judaism the standard expression for 'approach, sacrifice' (de Vries 1968: 16, 167), which makes sense both phonologically and semantically (the human victim apparently being considered as sacrifice), but does not bring out all the layers of implication apparently involved. The Ḥumīrī description reminds us of the Ancient Persian 'Lord of the Noonday Heat' (Hinnells 1973). In early Christian conceptions of sin – which certainly once obtained in this part of Tunisia, not far from St Augustine's Hippo – a demon was recognised under the name of *accidie* or 'midday demon' (cf. *Psalms* 90:6), with similar sinister connotations as Ḡrbān, although originally just a sense of sloth and extreme fatigue bringing monks to fall asleep in their cells (Taylor 1908-1920). There is also a connection with the zodiacal sign of ♌ Leo, since the sun (which rules Leo in astrological discourse) is at its highest culmination at the noon hour. Other associations are with Saturn, under the Ancient Assyrian name of Ninib (Graves 1988: 264, n. 1). The destructive connotations of the noon sun have still more pre-Christian antecedents: they are also found in the Ancient Mesopotamian god Nergal (Ions 1980: 14) and in Ancient Egypt in the

destructive figure of the Sun's Eye,  Hwt-Ḥr / Hathor, who (according to texts inscribed in the graves of Seti I and Ramses III) would have destroyed the whole of humankind if the sun god Ra^c had not tricked her with beer she mistook for human blood (Smith 1984; Spiegelberg 1917; Dumas 1975-1986; Obbink n.d.: 10 f.). Under the heading 'climatic anxieties in the tropics', Kennedy (1990) describes the same belief system and confirms my identification here. The obligation to be the first to greet Ḡrbān, on penalty of grave misfortune or death, reminds us of the unilateral mythical being which plays a considerable role in comparative mythology (von Sicard 1968-1969, with all major sources for Africa and the rest of the Old World). The comparative mythology of the unilateral figure includes, for instance, the South Asian god Aruna / Dawn, unilateral because he was born from the broken one of the two eggs

¹⁹¹ From the extensive literature I only mention: Tremearne 1914, 1915; Onwuejeogwu 1971; Monfouga-Nicolas 1972; Masquelier 1995.

his mother Vinata laid (Cotterell 1989). Grossato (1987) points at other unilateral characters in the South Asian context. Vinata is reminiscent of Leda mother of the Dioskouroi, Helena and Klutaimnestra in Greek mythology.¹⁹² The global distribution of the mytheme of the unilateral figure was traced by me in van Binsbergen 2010a: 198 f.; and I used this distribution along with that of other Old-World traits (geomantic divination, the *mankala* board-game, the spiked wheel trap, the Bantu language phylum), to argue the typical Pelasgian distribution pattern: widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, yet in all probability originating in Asia (van Binsbergen 2010b). The Eurasian distribution of the Luwe figure is considerable; the Dutch writer Augusta de Wit even evokes it for rural Java (de Wit 1903), and it also crops up, surprisingly, as a legendary human 'Medio-hombre' (a soldier who in combat lost an arm and a leg), in the recent novel *Caesarion* by the Dutch author Tommy Wieringa (2009).¹⁹³ The Mwendanjangula unilateral figure with first-greeting obligation is also described for Southern Africa, e.g. as the unilateral Tintibane, 'Child of God and Child of Earth', *alias Thobege a Phachwa*, 'Dappled / Speckled Lame-leg' (Matumo 1993 / 1875). Speckledness has, of course, leopard-skin connotations,¹⁹⁴ which according to Brown (1926) is the god whose name is most common among the Tswana. Working in Western Zambia, the missionary Jacotet (1899-1901) has published many vernacular texts in which Mwendanjangula plays an important role. Interestingly, in that connection the figure is possessed of a staff – which seems to return in the North African myth of Sidi Mhammad, who (like the South Central African figure) is a cow herd and uses the staff to put a spell on the cows, so that the saint may go to sleep without his charges coming to any harm.¹⁹⁵ That mythological themes in Africa, especially in the hands of pastoralists, may span the entire continent has been noted before; for instance, unmistakable echoes of Ancient Israelite mythology and ethics were picked up among the Masaai herders of East Africa (Julien n.d.; citing Merker 1904, but also H. Baumann's criticism of Merker's findings). Cognate with the unilateral figure seems to be the Graeco-Roman figure of Herakles / Hercules¹⁹⁶ is likewise in possession of a club, and in my opinion one of its references is the *celestial axis* – around which also the Ancients, just like we ourselves today, could see the circumpolar stars rotate every clear night. The emergence of such mythical motifs on the two extremes of the African continent suggests once more a confirmation of a principle which comparative mythologists have been familiar with for some time: *that North African mythology tends to contain very ancient layers of World mythology*. At the back is another, well-known principle: that ancient cultural material is best preserved in a periphery, where the seething of cultural initiative and innovation has been less overwhelming.

In Ĥumiriyya, however, most misfortune, meanwhile, was not even interpreted in terms of such evils, but as the result of perfectly rational and justified vengeance by invisible local saints with whom the living villagers had entered into

¹⁹² Apollodorus III.10.7; Hyginus, *Fabula*, 77; Homer, *Ilias* III, 426, *Odyssea* XI, 299.

¹⁹³ *Belles lettres* are full of surprises; Mwendanjangula is the name of the unilateral figure in Zambia and Angola (cf. van Binsbergen 2011a), and there is also a recent Dutch study of AIDS in Zambia with that name – exploiting the fact that under the AIDS epidemic of the last few decades, the terrifying theonym Mwendanjangula became a nickname for the disease (van Kesteren & van Amerongen 2000).

¹⁹⁴ van Binsbergen 2003k, 2004d, and in press (h).

¹⁹⁵ van Binsbergen 1971, 1980a, 1980b, 1985a, 1985b, and forthcoming.

¹⁹⁶ Herakles / Hercules, who, as Melqart / 'Town Lord' was almost certainly associated with some of the Ĥumiri shrines in Antiquity, before these were Christianised and subsequently Islamised.