

Chapter 7. The emergence of the first people from the underworld:

Another cosmogonic myth of a possible African origin

by Yuri Berezkin¹

Abstract: Among cosmogonic tales, the Emergence of the first people from the underworld (further: EP) and the Earth-diver are spread across by far the largest areas of the globe. These tales seem to be initially connected with different cultural traditions. The EP is typical for sub-Saharan Africa, Indo-Pacific borderlands of Asia, Australia and Melanesia, South and Central America, southern part of North America. Stories in question tell how people of all sexes and ages come out of the ground, rock, tree trunk, etc. and spread across the earth. These stories should not be mixed up with tales about emergence of the primeval couple (the latter are also predominantly characteristic for the Indo-Pacific world but are less specific). The EP is unknown in Northern and Central Eurasia besides few texts (Nganasan, Selkup) which speak about people growing out of the ground 'like grass'. In sub-Saharan Africa the EP is the only widespread anthropogenic myth and it can well form part of the primeval mythology known to the first people migrated out of Africa. In South and South-East Asia the EP probably acquired additional details which were later brought to the Americas by the first migrants. 1) People who come out of their original enclosure are menaced by monster (in Asia: Lushei, Wa, Kond; in America: Seneca, Arikara, Lipan, Murato, Witoto, Wanka, Yurakare, Yabuti, Kamaiura, Toba, Kaduveo). 2) The way from one part of the universe into another leads through a narrow opening; certain person or creature sticks in it broking for ever the communication between the worlds (in Asia: Kond, Moi, Ma, Sre, Banhar, Visaya, Paivan; in America: Kiowa, Caddo, Seminole, Yaruro, Warao, Kariña, Shuar, Mai Huna, Witoto, Surui, Gavião, Zoro, Paresi, Caraja, Angaite, Matabo). 3) When people come from the underworld, the two-headed creature sticks in the opening or is prevented from coming to earth (in New Guinea and Asia: Medjprat, Moi, Ma, Sre, Banhar; in America: Mandan, Angaite). The areas of EP and the Earth-diver myths only slightly overlap along their contact zones in North America and North-East India. The Earth-diver is typical for Northern and Central Eurasia and for North America (mostly northern and central areas of the continent), the American and the Asian versions having the same basic structure. This tale probably emerged in South-Central Asia, elaborated in Southern Siberia and then brought to the New World in Terminal Pleistocene. The differentiation of its American variants took part on the place. In Terminal Pleistocene – Early Holocene the bearers of the Agate Basin tradition were probably familiar with this myth and brought it across American Subarctic.

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The dispersal of modern man and the areal patterns of folklore-mythological motifs

This paper uses as its main source the electronic catalogue of the folklore-mythological motifs which contains information on the world distribution of about 1500 motifs and more than 40,000 Russian abstracts of particular texts.² Our Catalogue is not another general index of tale-types or motifs. It has not been created to register broad narrative units, but with a particular aim to accumulate data relevant to research on early migrations and prehistoric cultural contacts. Initially the problem of the peopling of the New World was the focus of our studies. After 2003 when the folklore and mythological materials from Western Eurasia and Africa were included, even earlier periods of human history could be addressed. The major results of previous research (Berezkin 2002a – 2009b only papers in English cited) are as follows.

In the late 1990s the computing of data on the areal distribution of about 1000 mythological motifs that were checked for the American Indians and the Eskimo demonstrated the existence of two main sets of motifs. One of them was best represented in Amazonia and Guiana and another across the Plains and around the Great Lakes. The mythologies of these regions proved to be the most different from each other. As our database acquired world-wide dimensions, it became clear that these American mythological complexes corresponded to the similar complexes in the Old World. Some tendencies are especially apparent if we minimize the ‘entropic’ effect of the Western Eurasian fairy-tale and compute only cosmological and etiological motifs that are only relatively rarely adopted into the fairy-tale to be introduced with it to the new territories. These other tendencies can be better understood when we look closely at the adventure motifs which have been adapted into the fairy-tale from more archaic Eurasian folklore.

The folklore-mythological traditions that share the least number of motifs are located in continental Eurasia, especially in Southern Siberia, and the other in Melanesia, especially across New Guinea. The sets of motifs in Melanesia and Amazonia are statistically identical. The North American mythologies are more similar to the Southern Siberian ones than the South American mythologies. The traditions of the southeast borderlands of Asia are also intermediate between continental Asian and Melanesian complexes.

The two major sets of motifs of world mythology are referred to as the *Continental Eurasian* and the *Indo-Pacific*. The mythologies of sub-Saharan Africa are

² See: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin> . Information from about 5500 publications in Germanic, Slavic, Romance and Baltic-Finnish languages have been extracted and reorganized. For a list of the motifs with English translations and for maps with the areal distribution of motifs see: <http://starling.rinet.ru/kozmin/tales/index.php?index=berezkin>. The financial support was provided by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (projects 04-06-80238 and 07-06-00441-a), special programs of the Presidium of Russian Academy of Sciences ‘Adaptation of peoples and cultures to environmental changes...’ and ‘Historical-cultural heritage and spiritual values of Russia’ and INTAS project 05-10000008-7922.

relatively poor in cosmological and etiological motifs. Because of this they stand not far from the zero position between the two extremes but still nearer to the Indo-Pacific than to the Continental Eurasian pole.

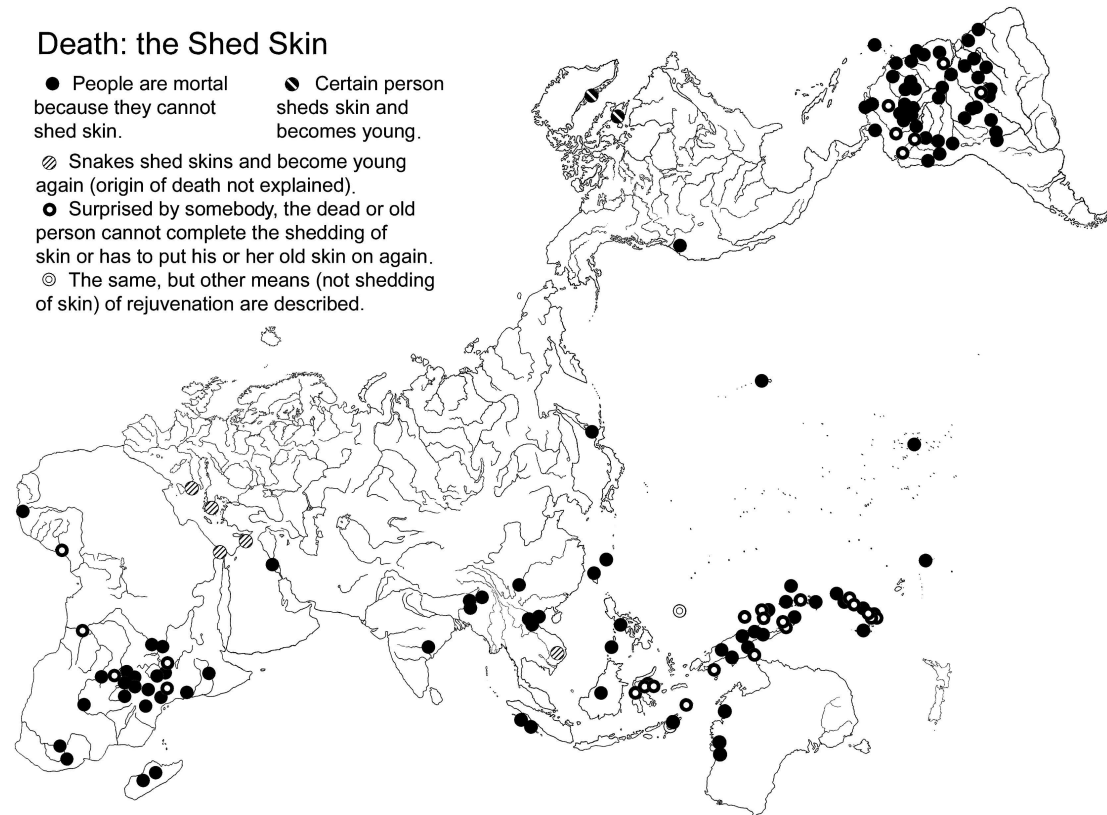


Fig. 7.1. The global distribution of the motif *Shed skin as condition of immortality*

Such a picture fits perfectly the Out-of-Africa scenario of the peopling of the world by modern man suggested by geneticists and increasingly supported by archaeologists. At about 60,000 BP groups of *Homo sapiens*, the so called ‘beachcombers’, began to move along the coast of the Indian Ocean. In the Middle East this stream split. Some groups continued their movement to the east till Australia and East Asia, while others migrated in a northerly direction, eventually occupying the same part of Eurasia where the Neanderthals lived before. There is evidence that Indo-Pacific mythology has preserved its African heritage with the discovery of links between tales recorded in Africa, non-Aryan India, Southeast Asia and Australia. The distribution of motifs *Shed skin as condition of immortality* (Fig. 7.1) and *Sun’s children killed* (Fig. 7.2) provide good illustrations. Texts related to the latter motif can be slightly re-grouped according to different wording of the same theme: *Person is tricked into killing his kin* (Fig. 7.3).

Sun's children killed

- One person proposes to another that they should eat (kill) their children, mothers, or siblings. S/he hides his or her own while the other one actually kills his. One of the persons and/or the only child to survive is the Sun.
- One animal proposes to another to eat their children (mothers), hides its own.
- ⊕ Sun's people were as numerous as Moon's people (i.e. stars) but died because of Moon (no details).

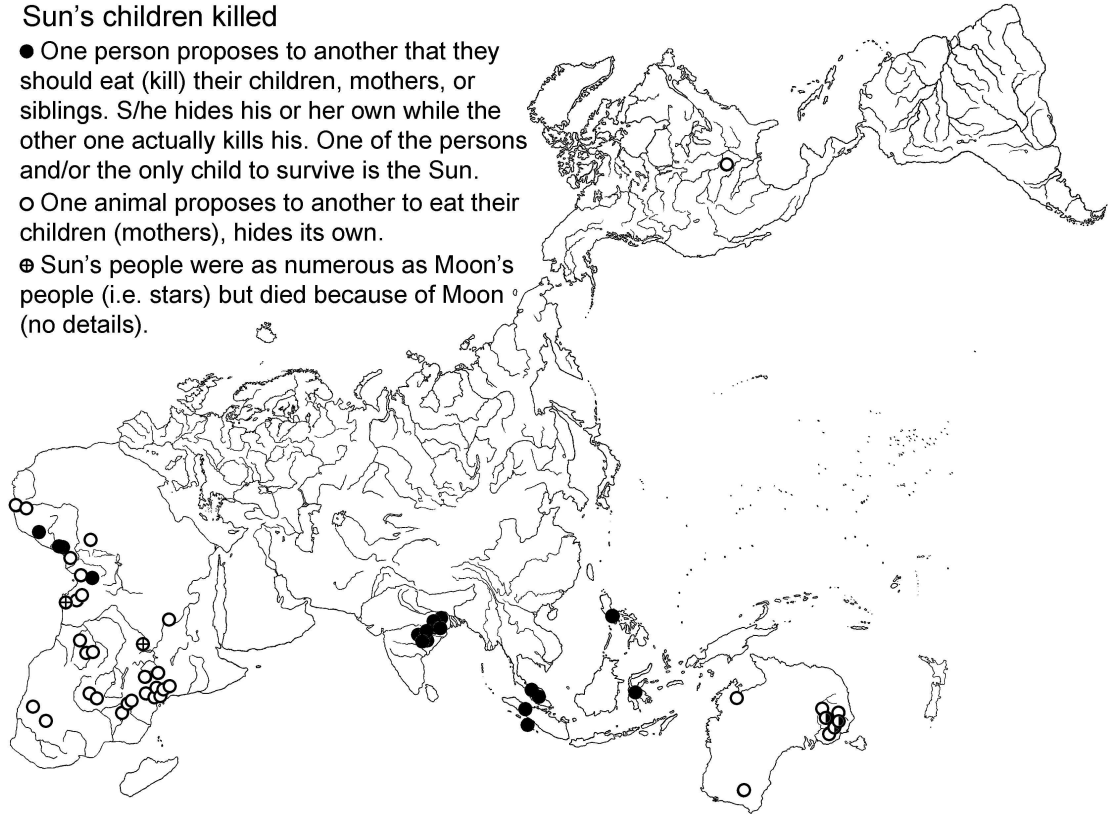


Fig. 7.2. The global distribution of the motif *Sun's children killed*

Person tricked into killing his kin

- One person proposes to another that they should eat (kill) their children. S/he hides his or her own while the other one actually kills his.
- The same but person suggests to kill each other mothers or
- ⊖ wives.

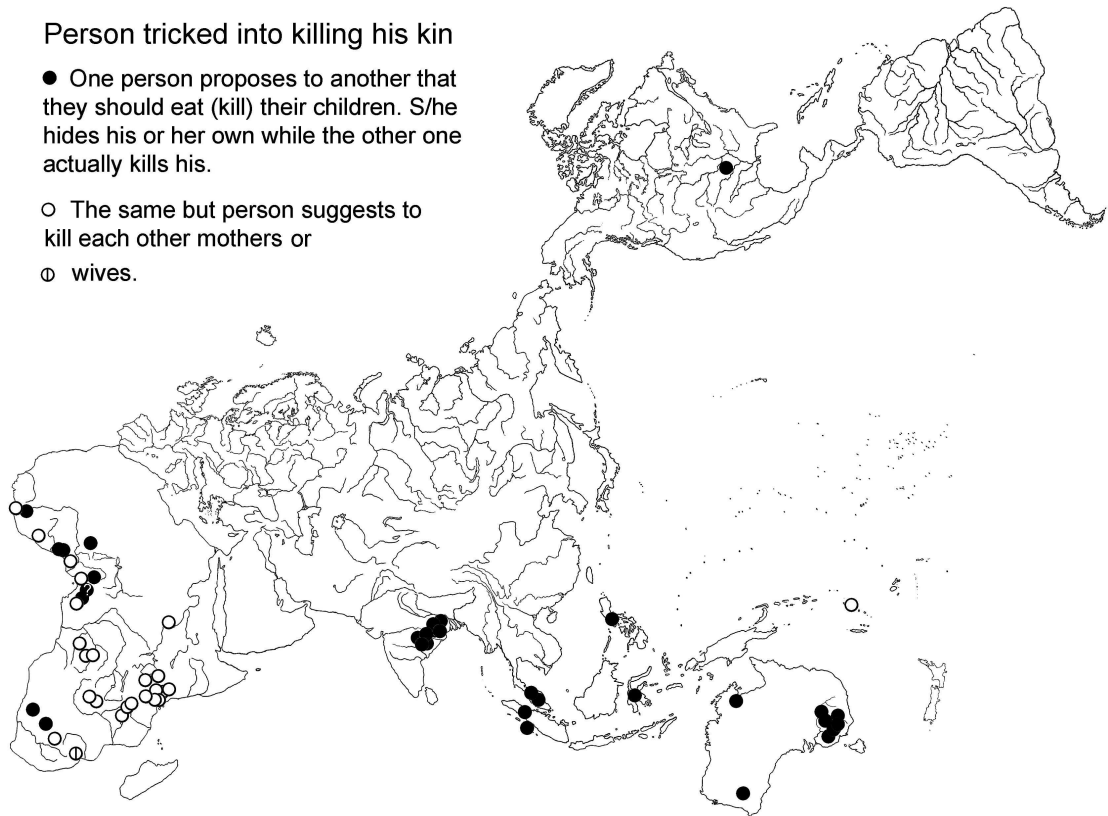


Fig. 7.3. The global distribution of the motif *Person is tricked into killing his kin*

In Continental Eurasia, the African mythology was largely lost. This might have occurred soon after the peopling of the sub-glacial zone with its very different environment when compared with their more tropical homeland and certainly during the Late Glacial Maximum (LGM) when population density in Northern Eurasia decreased and those groups that successfully adapted themselves to the changed climatic conditions underwent deep cultural transformation. All this contributed to the idiosyncratic deviations from former tradition. This founder effect created a new mythology that was very different from Indo-Pacific mythology. The population survived during the LGM in the periglacial forest steppes of the southern half of Siberia including the Angara and the Aldan basins, while the more northern tundra areas were empty (Kuzmin & Keates 2005). Since about 18-19,000 BP when the acme of the LGM was over, the Continental Eurasian set of motifs probably began to disseminate thanks to the progressive expansion of surviving population. The approximate date of 18-19,000 BP as the beginning of the recovery in population growth from LGM minimum population is based on the dating of the Dyuktai culture in Eastern and Northeastern Siberia (Yi & Clark 1985: 10) and on the assessment of time for the re-peopling of the Northeast Europe by human groups of probable Southern Siberian origin (Pavlov 2009).

Mythology of Southeast Asia and its adjacent areas preserved its African roots though it also went through a process of change during the Upper Pleistocene. In comparison with African mythologies, the mythologies of the Indo-Pacific borderlands of Asia are much richer and this enrichment had to take place between the initial peopling of these territories by *Homo sapiens* and the beginning of the peopling of the New World. During the Late Pleistocene era, the difference between the Indo-Pacific and the Continental Eurasian complexes increased. At about 15,000-12,000 BP both sets of motifs were brought to the New World and mixed there. The Indo-Pacific complex became predominant in South and Central America while the Continental Eurasian complex was mainly found in North America, especially to the east of the Rockies. The mixing of the two complexes might have initially begun in Siberia since groups from East Asia probably took part in its peopling after the LGM.

The sound part of our hypothesis is the assumption that 60,000 BP, *i.e.* before the modern humans migrated to Asia, language had developed enough to retell stories about mythical beings and primeval ancestors. The global patterns in the distribution of the motifs provide strong evidence in favor of such a conclusion. The mythology of the first out-of-Africa migrants was not especially developed: *e.g.* seven to nine different explanations of the mortal nature of man, some tales about the Sun and the Moon, possibly some simple ideas about the Milky Way, the Pleiades and the Belt of Orion, and animal stories. The core of all adventure stories which are now widespread in Africa were probably brought there later from Asia.

I did not initially consider the cosmogonic tale of the emergence of the first people from the underworld as having an African origin. It seemed that the plot of this tale was too simple to exclude its independent formation. However, the mapping of the tale makes the hypothesis of its multiple origin unlikely (Fig. 7.4).

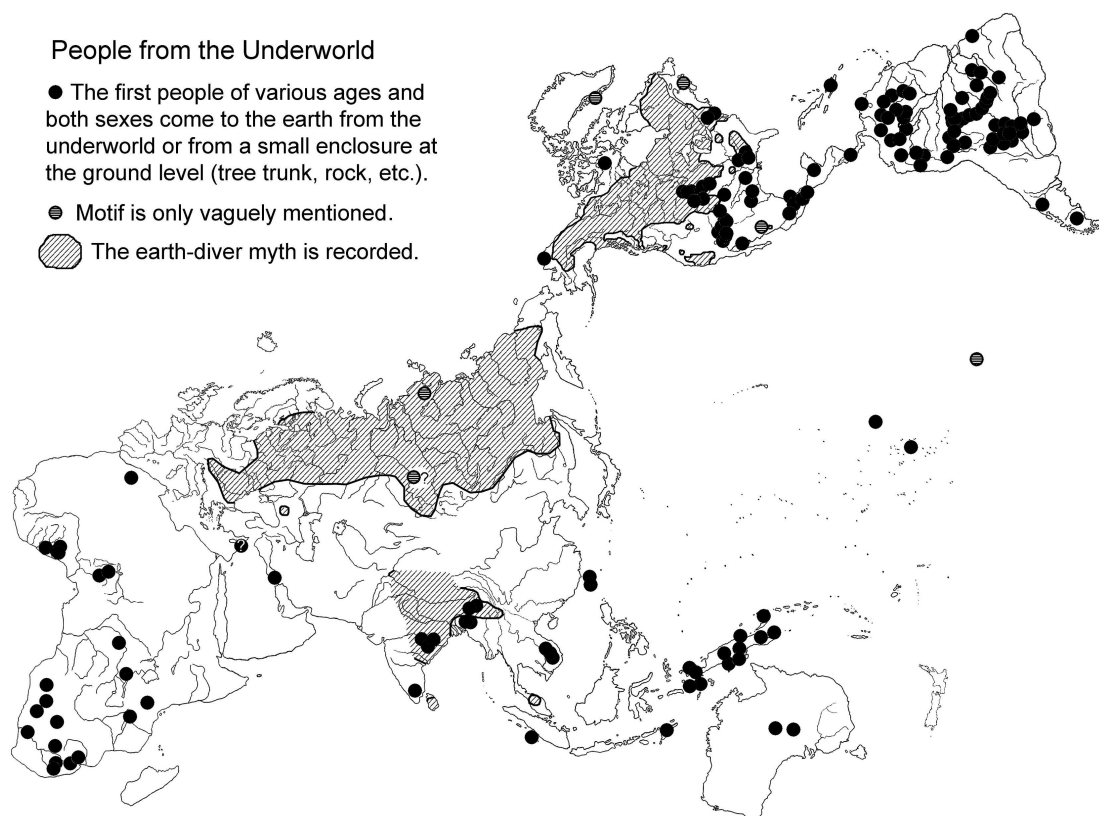


Fig. 7.4. The global distribution of the motif *People from the Underworld*.

Negative correlation between the Emergence myth and the Earth-diver myth

In order to demonstrate this, I will begin with another cosmogonic myth, the Earth-diver, which is definitely considered as a major (if not the major) tale of the Continental Eurasian complex. The Earth-diver is known in Northern Eurasia, North America and South Asia. All South Asian traditions are different from the others because they describe the adventures of the personages in the Lower world while the descent there is only briefly mentioned. In Eurasian and American traditions the position of the storyteller is always in the Middle world and no adventures in the Lower world are described. What is crucial for the plot in Northern Eurasian, America and selects variants recorded there are other factors including who, how many times, and on whose initiative do they dive into the water to bring mud up from the bottom. We can conclude, therefore, that the American versions are derived from the Siberian ones and not directly from the South Asian variants.

In Europe to the west of Middle Volga area the Earth-diver is probably of recent origin. It was influenced by the Manichean ideology in Southern Siberia and brought to the northern Balkans by nomads. The local Manicheans, *i.e.* the Bogomils, incorporated the Earth-diver into their thinking and due to this the plot reached as far as the Alps and the Baltic. In the Volga – Ural area and across most of Siberia the

original pre-Manichean and the Manichean-influenced traditions coexist (Napolskih 2008).

The Earth-diver is absent in Northeast Asia and among the Aleuts and the Eskimo, the Eyak and those Athabaskans who live in western and southwestern Alaska. Therefore, it could hardly have been spread to the New World during the recent millennia and must have been brought there when the ice-sheets still existed. Across the American Subarctic it spread from the south with the groups who had been pioneering this areas after the melting of the ice-sheets, which explains the uniformity of all local versions, both the Athabascan and the Algonkian ones. The closest parallels to the Siberian versions are found among the Californian Penuti and the Middle Missouri Sioux groups. There are only small ‘drops’ of Earth-diver in Latin America, the southern most being the Siona and Secoya version in Columbian Amazonia (Berezkin 2007a).

Even though the Earth-diver and the Emergence myth are the most widespread cosmogonic tales in the world, it is remarkable that they are not shared by most traditions and never incorporated into the same stories although logically they do not exclude each other. These myths slightly overlap only along the frontier zones of their areal distribution in South Asia and in eastern North America. I could find but two or three cases of the Emergence myth in continental Eurasia and even these are vague and either reduced to a phrase about people who ‘grew from the earth like grass’ or unclear concerning the very existence of the motif (as in Iranian tradition reflected in ‘Zend-Avesta’).

Specific links between the American and the Asian and Melanesian cases of the Emergence myth

When I speak about the Emergence myth, I am not referring to the simple motif of the primeval couple who came to earth to generate the first humans, but the more peculiar stories which tell how people of both sexes and all ages emerged from the ground, rock, tree trunk, bamboo stem, etc. and spread across the earth. Stories about the emergence of a human couple who comes out of a primeval enclosure together with different species of animals can also be included since here the primeval underworld dwellers are not clearly differentiated between real people and real animals and the important point is the multitude of the beings who ascend to the earth. The ‘primeval couple’ motif itself is also predominantly characteristic of the Indo-Pacific world but is less specific. Stories which describe how people descend from the sky or how game animals (not in company with the people) ascend from out of the earth should be treated separately, but some of them share specific details with the real *Emergence from the underworld* tales (see below Warao and Angaite stories).

The Emergence myth is especially popular in New Guinea and western Melanesia. A Highland Papuan version serves as an example.

Dugum Dani. Ancestors of all the kin groups as well as all animals, birds and invertebrates came out of the cave Huwainmo. After that most of the living creatures decided to acquire their zoomorphic appearance but people remained anthropomorphic (Heider 1970: 141).

The hypothesis of the common origin of all circum-Pacific versions both in Asia and in America is confirmed by the existence of additional peculiar details linked to the main plot. These details are not known either in Africa, or in Australia. Consequently they had to appear after the peopling of Australia (45-40,000 BP), but before the beginning of the peopling of America (ca. 15,000 b.p). The details in question (Fig. 7.5) are as follows: 1) people who come out of their original enclosure are menaced by a monster (in Asia: Lushei, Wa, Kond; in America: Seneca, Arikara, Lipan, Murato, Witoto, Wanka, Yurakare, Yabuti, Kamaiura, Toba, Kaduveo); 2) the way from one part of the universe into another leads through a narrow opening; a certain person or creature blocks forever the communication between the worlds (in Asia: Kond, Moi, Ma, Sre, Banhar, Visaya, Paivan; in America: Kiowa, Caddo, Seminole, Yaruro, Warao, Kariña, Shuar, Mai Huna, Witoto, Surui, Gavião, Zoro, Paresi, Caraja, Angaite, Mataco); 3) when people come from the underworld, the two-headed creature gets stuck in the opening or is prevented from coming to earth (in New Guinea and Asia: Medjprat, Moi, Ma, Sre, Banhar; in America: Mandan, Angaite).

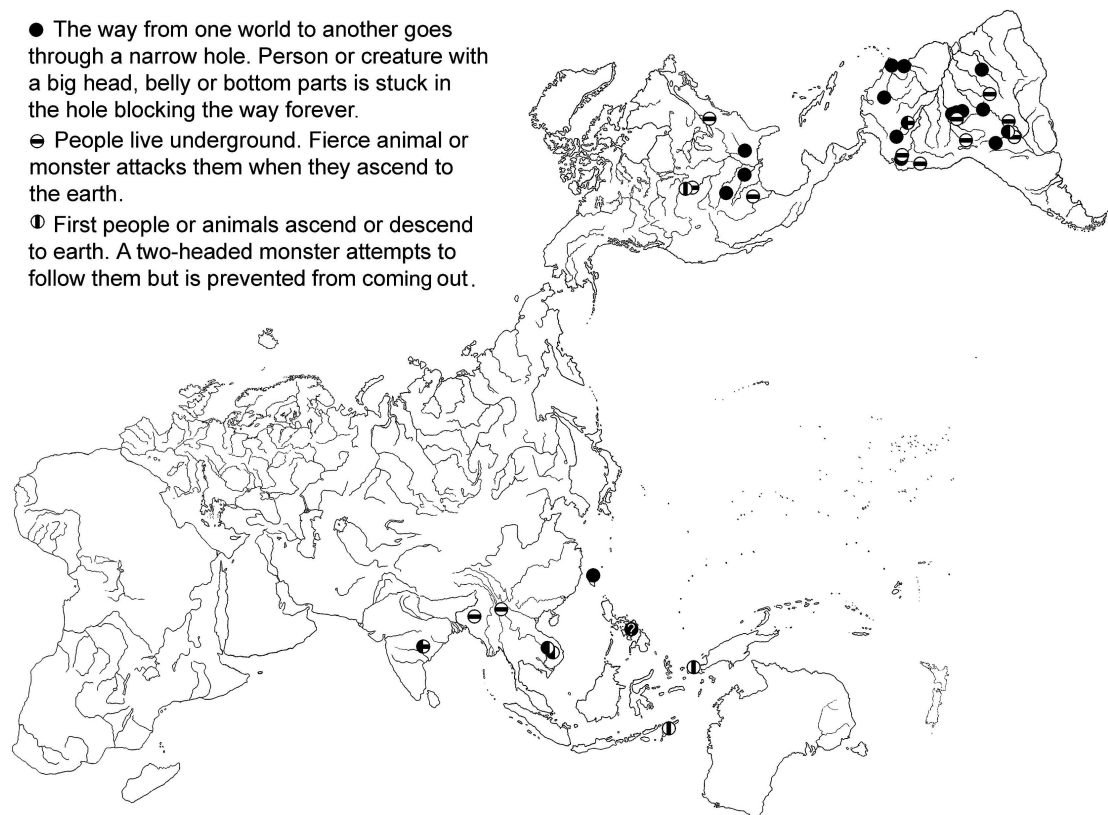


Fig. 7.5. The global distribution of the motif *The Way from One World to Another Goes through a Narrow Opening*.

Here are several short abstracts of such texts.

Mejprat (New Guinea Papuans). Two hunters pursued an opossum and heard some noise from trunk of a mango. They cut the trunk open and people began to climb out. The last to appear was the two-headed man but the hunters pushed him back (Elmberg 1968, no. 30: 269, 274-275).

Lushais (Northeast India). People lived in the underworld. The king's brother following his hunting dog entered a cavern and ascended to the earth. He returned to call other people but when they arrived near the surface a large serpent stopped their progress and they saw a great stone kept up merely by a bird. The king's brother killed the serpent and the people emerged into the light. The king discovered that he forgot magic objects and returned to fetch them. Before he got back the bird let the stone fall and the king with his wife remained underground. The king's wife decided that the king's brother was responsible for the misfortune and cursed him and all the people to suffer diseases (Shakespeare 1909: 392-393).

Kond (Middle India). From the very place where Nirantali goddess herself and human beings were born emerged a man-eating bullock. When it charged Nirantali, she hit it on the head with the wood and the bullock fell back into the pit. The door broke and the bullock stuck in the opening, so the other half of mankind had to be born elsewhere. Parts of the bullock's body Nirantali transformed into luminaries, plants and other objects (Elwin 1954, no. 12: 432).

Moi (border of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) Ancestors of the Moi lived in the underworld and decided to ascend to the earth through an opening. The prettiest women remained behind. Monstrous two-headed bullock stuck in the opening and died there blocking the exit. That's because there are few pretty women among the Moi (Besnard 1907: 87).

Seneca (New York State). The first people came forth from the crest of a mountain. The base of the mountain was surrounded by a huge serpent and it consumed all the people except two children. They made a bow and arrow dipped in poison by which they were able to kill the serpent who in its agony threw up the skeletal remains of the devoured people. These bones turned into stones. From the two children the new race descended (Stone 1841: 8-10 in Archambault 2006: 6).

Mandan (Middle Missouri, North Dakota). Hero's mother-in-law who had buffalo nature opened a hole in the ground and the buffalo came out of it. The hero pushed back those of them who had two heads (Beckwith 1938, no. 4: 76).

Arikara (Middle Missouri, South Dakota; many versions). Buffalo looked like humans with horns. They struck a hollow cotton wood tree with a pole, multitude of people who lived underground came out. Buffalo killed and ate them. The first to come was Cut-Nose who returned into the hollow and again helped the buffalo to lure the people out of the ground. Once a youth escaped, met the wife of the buffalo's chief. She fell in love with him, told him to make bows and arrows and give them to people when they would come out. The buffalo-people ran away, turned into real buffaloes. They had with them pieces of human meat that turned into part of their own flesh. This is the reason why hunting buffalo the Arikara do not eat the meat under the shoulder (Dorsey 1904, no. 13: 40-44).

Warao (Orinoco Delta; many versions). People lived in the sky. Hunter's arrow fell to the ground, made an opening, and through it the earth below was seen. People began to descend from the sky by a rope. A pregnant woman was stuck in the opening blocking it forever. She turned into the Morning Star (Wilbert 1970, no. 101, 102, 103, 141, 145, 146: 216-220, 293-294, 307-311).

Yabuti (Rondonia, Brazil). People lived underground and began to come out through an opening. Cannibal bat killed and ate them. Kabebé discovered the hole, descended into it, found

there a stone enclosure with people inside it. He broke the enclosure, people emerged to the earth and became to speak different languages (Maldi 1991: 256-257).

Surui (Rondonia, Brazil). Palop in guise of a wretched old man visited the hut of Surui ancestors, a girl rejected him. He came again as a handsome youth, transformed the house into the rock, people inside it called for help. Different birds tried to open a hole but broke their axes (*i.e.* their beaks). The woodpecker succeeded. People came out but a pregnant woman with an immense belly was stuck in the hole. She turned into bee, the ancestors who remained behind her could not come out and died (Mindlin 1995, no. 7: 62-65).

Caduveo (Mato Grosso, Brazil). Somebody was stealing fish from the God's trap. His dogs could not find the beast. He sent some birds after it, one of them directed him to the hole in the ground. The God pulled out the people and animals but the beast devoured them. God killed the beast and divided its fat between different animal species (Wilbert & Simoneau 1990, no. 2: 21-22).

Angaité (Chaco). People lived in the sky and decided to climb down to earth by a rope. A two-headed man stuck in the opening and blocked it forever (Cordeu 1973, no. 2: 201).

The Emergence myth in Africa

In Africa, the Emergence myth is the most widespread story which explains how the earth became peopled by human beings. The motif of the first people living in the sky is also widely known but the descent from the sky is rarely described in any detail.

Here are some examples of the typical African variants of the *Emergence from the underworld*.

Bushmen. The depression of Lööwe goes down to the bottom of the world. All people and animals lived there and the space was scarce. First people pushed out to earth the animals who dispersed across the country. Then they began to quarrel and pushed out each other. Living inside the hole people were immortal but began to die after coming to earth (Dornan 1925: 171).

Sandawe. Natunda emerged from a crack in the trunk of a big baobab. He widened the opening and out came first a hyena, then a brebis antilope, then a woman with children, then a man, then animals of all kind, then many different people (Millroth 1965: 43-44).

Owambo. People lived inside trunk of a tree. They called woodpecker for help, it pecked open a hole, people came out to live on earth (Kuusi 1969, no. 1: 67, 73).

Herrero. The ancestors of the Herrero together with their cattle came out of the trunk of the Combretaceae tree. The bushmen, goats and sheep came out of a hole in the ground (Baumann 1936: 225; Parrinder 1967: 39).

Santrokofî. The ancestors ascended from the Underworld through a hole at Nkonya mountain. The first to appear was a priest with his drum, then a warrior with his shield and sword, then different men and women, When the priest saw his wife with another man, he struck him and threw his drum back into the hole. Those who still were underground could not ascend anymore (Debrunner 1969: 554-555).

There is also a Berber version from Maghreb. Although North African folklore is largely similar to Western Eurasian folklore, some etiological myths from this region demonstrate sub-Saharan connections.

Berber. A man and a woman lived in the Underworld. They met each other, begot four boys and four girls who also intermarried and multiplied. Boys and girls separately found openings

that lead to the earth and ascended, met each other and intermarried. One couple was wild, the woman became *teriel* (witch) and the man a lion (Frobenius & Fox 1937: 49-57).

For comparison I will also add two Australian stories.

Dieri. Ground split open and the totem ancestors of the matrilineages came to the earth. For some time they were lying under the sun, then turned into real people and dispersed across the country (Berndt & Berndt 1964: 205).

Aranda. First women and after them men came out of the crack in a rock. The first man was a favorite of the women, others killed him. He tried to ascend from the grave but they pierced him with a spear and trampled the ground. That's because the dead never revive (Strehlow 1947: 44-45).

Adventure tales of Continental Eurasian origin subsequently disseminated into Africa, but not into Australia

The abundance of Melanesian versions and the existence of Australian versions are crucial arguments in favor of the African origin of the Emergence myth. As it was told above, after (probably long after) the migration out-of-Africa there was an extensive infiltration of Eurasian narratives into this continent. However, Australia since its initial peopling was much more consistently isolated than Africa from Eurasia, especially after it was cut off from New Guinea by sea transgression in the Early Holocene period. Should we have in the Old World only African and Asian cases of the Emergence myth, the probability of the Asian origin of this motif would be about the same as of its African origin. But the distribution of the motif all along the African – Australian arch (besides the Arabian – Iranian gap for which data are scarce or completely absent) makes it more probable that it spread with the first groups of *Homo sapiens*.

To illustrate the opposite areal pattern of the motifs' distribution in the Asian core (Australia being empty), I suggest several maps. They show the distribution of adventure stories widely known across the world but not in Australia, with Africa and South America also poorly represented. I guess that these stories emerged as part of the Continental Eurasian complex and spread across the world after the LGM.

The first one is the False wife (Fig. 7.6). In Eurasia and North America this is the most popular tale-producing motif represented by numerous regional variants. All the variants, however, share the basic core. According to it a bad (ugly, of low descent, etc.) woman or female demonic creature disguised as a woman takes the place of the man's wife or bride (rare: female relation). In some of the South American versions the imposter is a male trickster. Several gaps in Eurasian distribution of the motif are probably due to the shortcomings of my database and will be addressed in the future but the absence of the *False wife* across extensive areas of Central and South America is certain. Moreover, even though some sources on Australian folklore have still also not been processed, the motif is definitely absent in the Australian tale-type index (Waterman 1987). In Africa the motif is less popular than in Eurasia and the

existing versions have detailed Asian and European parallels.

False wife

An imposter (ugly, lazy, old, of low descent, etc. woman or male trickster) comes to man disguised as his wife or bride who is driven out, confined to the underworld, killed, etc.

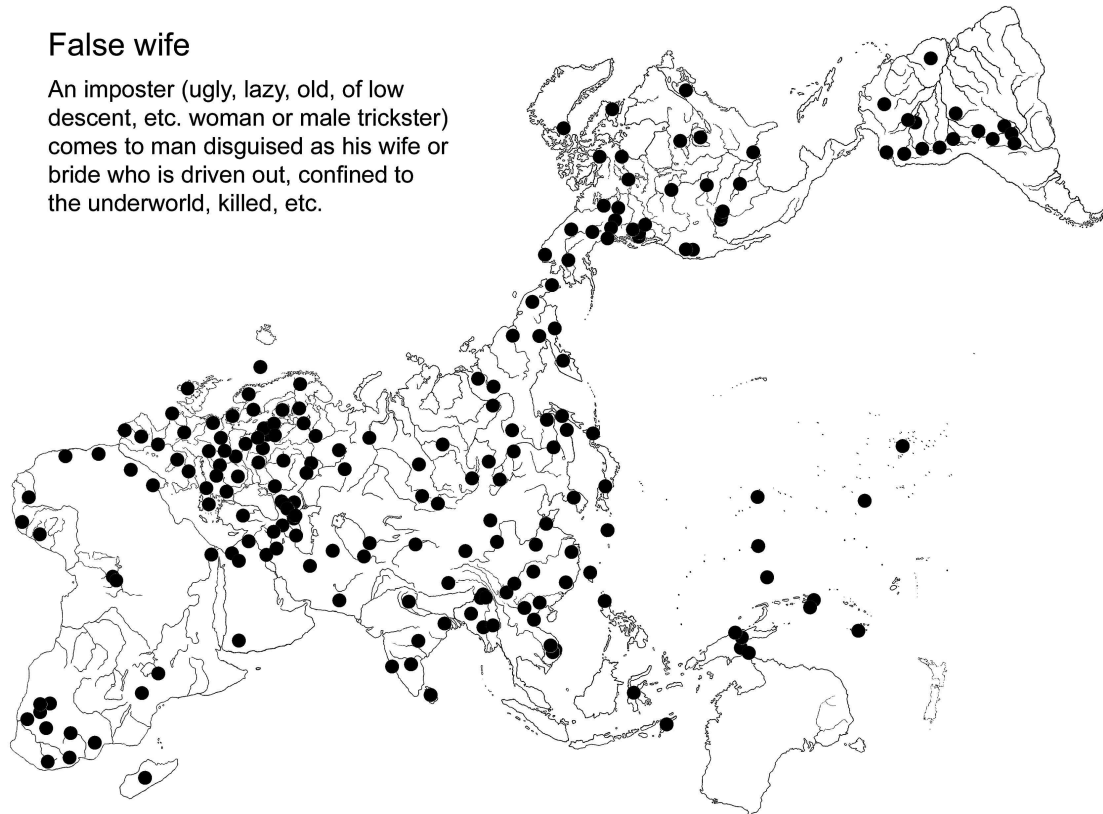


Fig. 7.6. The global distribution of the motif *The False Wife*.

Another motif is *Kind and unkind girls* (Fig. 7.7). The Northern Eurasian and extremely rare American versions are the most diversified and incorporated into the actual mythological beliefs. All other versions are more standard and incorporated into the fairy-tale, while no versions at all are recorded in Australia.

Siberian and North American folklore contains the most elaborated cases of the *Magic flight* motif with the standard selection of objects thrown behind by the fugitives and transformed into mighty obstacles before the pursuer (Fig. 7.8). These objects are whetstone which turns into a mountain or rock and a comb which turns into a thicket. The farther we go from Siberia, the less standard and logical becomes the choice of the objects and the rarer the motif itself. The *Atalanta* type version of *Magic flight* (Fig. 7.9) looks like an early and amorphous initial variant, a prototype of the more elaborated versions which eventually emerged in Northern Eurasia. The *Atalanta* type is used in the *flight from pursuer* episodes on different continents but least of all in Northern Eurasia where it could be pushed out by the more developed motif of objects transformed into mighty obstacles. The selection of the whetstone and comb as the preferable objects to be thrown is the last step in this development.

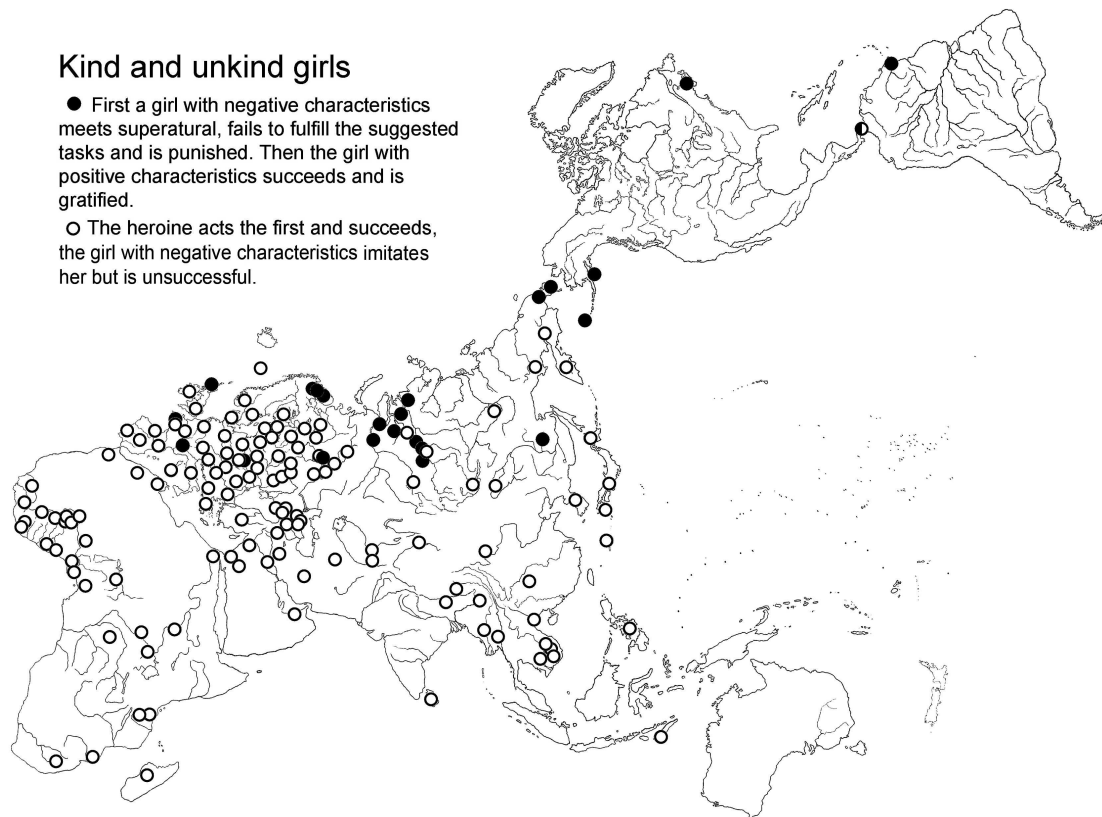


Fig. 7.7. The global distribution of the motif *Kind and unkind girls*.

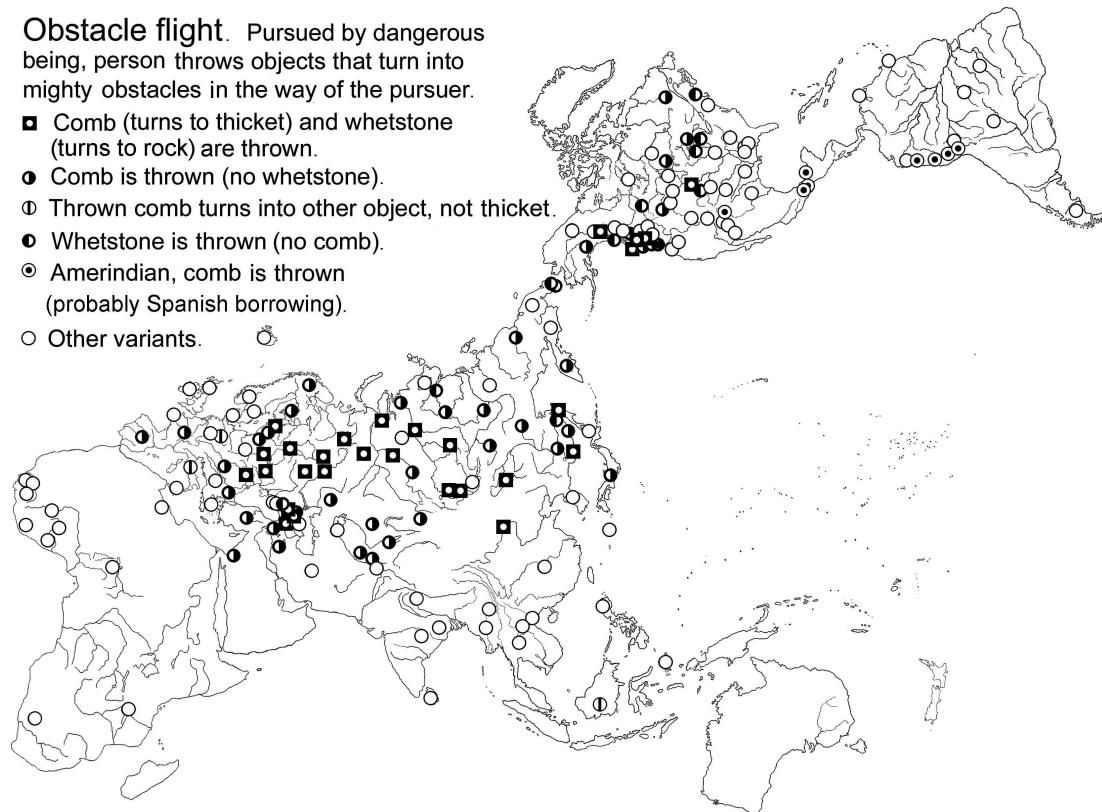


Fig. 7.8. The global distribution of the motif *Magic flight*.

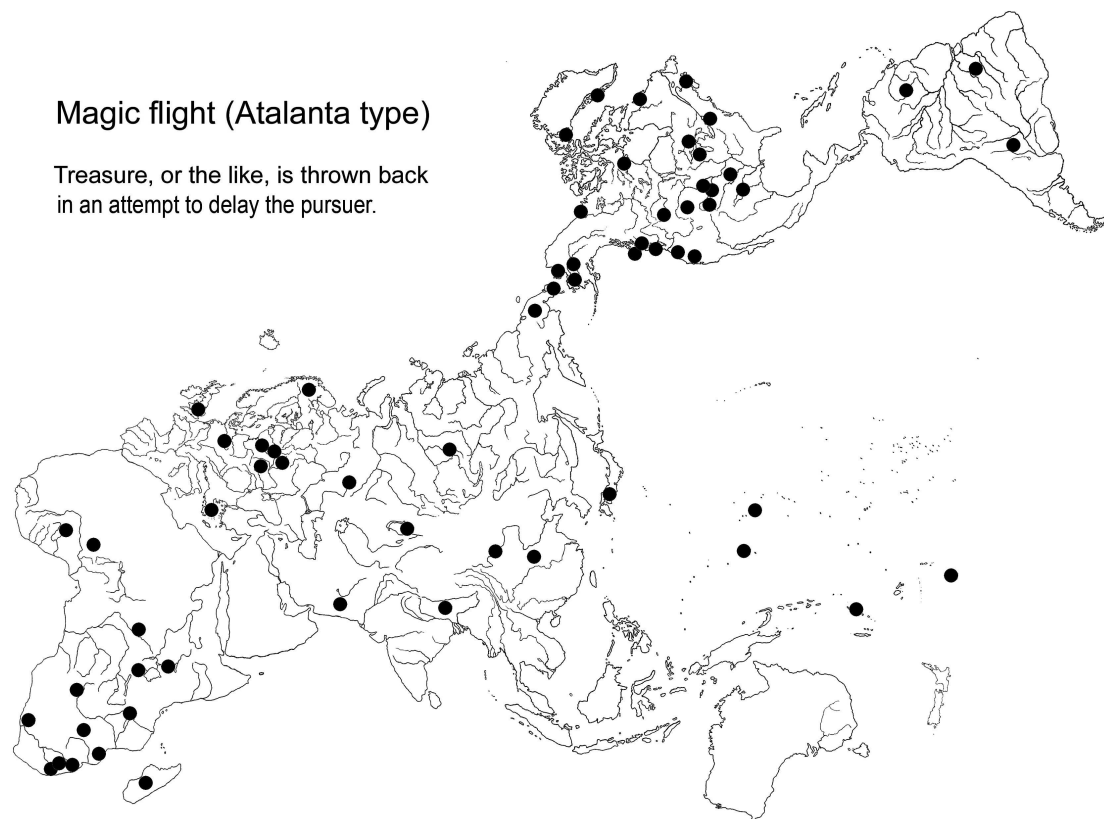


Fig. 7.9. The global distribution of the *Atalanta* type version of *Magic flight*.

Research perspectives

All the research realized during the last decade demonstrated that the mapping of the motifs is a powerful tool for reconstructing the distant past and that the world distribution of folklore-mythological motifs fits almost perfectly major patterns of migrations in deep prehistory which have been reconstructed by populational genetics and archaeology. Are there any cases of motifs' distribution which still cannot be explained?

There is one case for which no particular historic scenario could still be found. A half a dozen rather enigmatic links exist between sub-Saharan African and North American mythologies. One of them is related to the distribution of motifs which explain the origin of death (most of the non-African cases of the *Originator of death the first sufferer* are recorded in North America and only one in South America, Fig. 7.10). Another link is the motif of *Waters give way* (when person comes to the water body, waters give way in front of him or her and he or she reaches the other bank walking along the dry ground; Fig. 7.11). The major area where this motif is found includes Africa and adjacent part of Asia from Near East to India but a separate zone of its distribution is in North America. The most interesting parallels, however, are connected with trickster stories. The two regions where the trickster stories are the most popular and elaborated are sub-Saharan Africa and North America with an adja

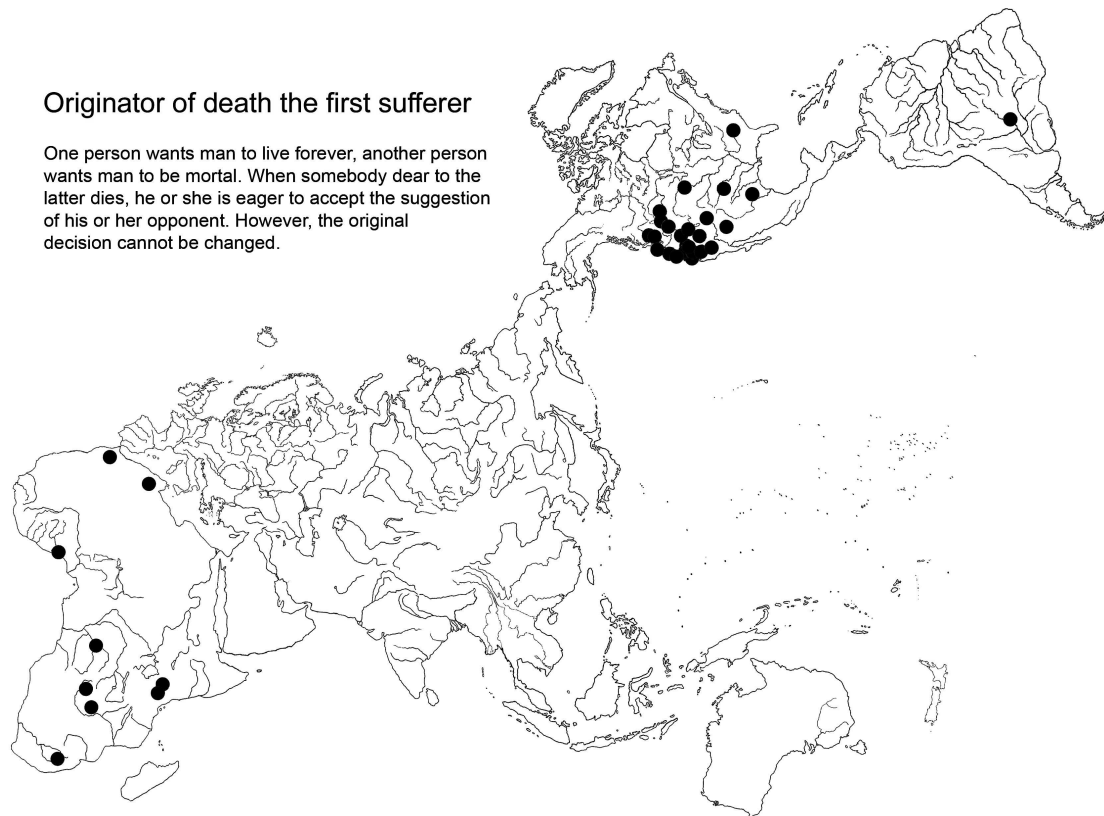


Fig. 7.10. The global distribution of the motif *Originator of death the first sufferer*.



Fig. 7.11. The global distribution of the motif *Waters give way*.

cent part in Northeast Asia, and these share some relatively rare (especially in comparison with half a Globe wide distribution of Jackal / Fox / Coyote) zoomorphic forms of the Trickster (Spider and Hare / Rabbit) and some particular plots (*e.g.* the Bungling host). The number of such parallels is not so great to exclude independent invention, but the topic deserves further investigation.

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