

Chapter 9. The continuity of African and Eurasian mythologies

General theoretical models, and detailed comparative discussion of the case of Nkoya mythology from Zambia, South Central Africa¹

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Abstract. This paper looks at mythological continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the Old World – not so much North Africa, but Eurasia. This is a remarkably unusual perspective in the field of comparative mythology: the othering and exclusion of Africa and Africans have been an inveterate though obsolescent feature of North Atlantic scholarship. The approach in this paper is greatly inspired by Michael Witzel's recent work in comparative mythology, but takes exception to his Laurasian / Gondwana distinction, which is predicated on absolute Eurasian / African discontinuity. Instead,

¹ This is a greatly revised version of the paper I presented at the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for Comparative Mythology, Ravenstein, the Netherlands, August 2008. The present argument tries to bring to fruition earlier attempts to deal with the same subject matter, notably van Binsbergen 1998-2006, and my abortive 1998 book draft *Global bee flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World - Beyond the Black Athena thesis*. My extensive work in comparative mythology since the late 1990s has finally enabled me to approach this complex and counter-paradigmatic subject matter with more confidence and, I hope, with greater theoretical and methodological sophistication. I wish to acknowledge the Nkoya people of Zambia, who from the early 1970s have welcomed me in their midst; the African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands for their patience and trust, enabling me to complete this long and arduous trajectory even if it seemed to lead me away from Africa; Michael Witzel as a greatly inspiring and facilitating presence in my work since 2003; Eric Venbrux for amicably sharing with me the task of convening the 2008 Ravenstein conference, editing its scholarly products, and specifically commenting on the present paper; Kirsten Seifikaar for copy-editing under great pressure of time; Steve Farmer for being a critical inspiration to my work from 2004 on, stressing the importance of mythological drift and contamination; and Emily Lyle, Boris Oguibénine, and the conference participants in general, for useful comments on the conference version, and inspiring discussions.

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the present argument seeks to include sub-Saharan Africa in the standard comparative mythology as applied to the rest of the world. For this purpose a two-stage argument is deployed. Since the article is essentially a review of several decades of the author's research, it risks being unusually auto-referential, for which apologies are hereby offered. First, twentieth-century interpretative schemas are discussed that stipulate mythological continuity instead of separation between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa: Frobenius' South Erythraean model; cultural diffusion from Egypt; combined cultural and demic diffusion from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (Afrocentrism, Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis). Then, as background for the latest generation of models, indications for transcontinental continuities are discussed from the fields of long-range linguistics (concentrating on Starostin's *Borean hypothesis, and adducing new material concerning the place of Niger-Congo > Bantu in the *Borean schema), and molecular genetics: the Out-of-Africa hypothesis, and the Back-into-Africa hypothesis. This sets the scene for a discussion of the author's Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology, suggesting that 'Pandora's Box' (the cultural heritage with which Anatomically Modern Humans left Africa from 80 ka BP on) contained a few identifiable basic mythological motifs, which were subsequently developed, transformed and innovated in Asia, after which the results were fed back into Africa in the Back-into-Africa movement – the entire process resulting in considerable African-Eurasian continuity. After a discussion, in regard of the last few millennia, of the author's Pelasgian Model (proposing cultural including mythological transmission from Western Asia / the Mediterranean by the 'cross-model' mechanism, *i.e.* in all four directions – Western Europe; Northern Europe; the Eurasian Steppe to South, East and South Asia; and sub-Saharan Africa – from the Late Bronze Age onward), the transition to the second stage of the argument is formed by an examination of the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa, in the light of the Aarne-Thompson classification; this again yields results suggestive of considerable African-Eurasian continuity. This means that the author's 1992 analysis of Nkoya mythology in terms of local protohistory, may no longer be tenable. Contamination by recent Islamic and Christian proselytisation is discussed and ruled out as a major factor in African-Eurasian mythological continuities. To clinch the argument in favour of massive African-Eurasian mythological continuities, 26 Nkoya mythemes are considered in detail against the fully referenced background of their global correspondences. A high degree of African-Eurasian mythological continuity is the argument's main, theoretically and empirically grounded, conclusion. While this highlights overall African-Eurasian cultural connections, it particularly lends support to the Pelasgian hypothesis, and throws in relief unsuspected but close and multiplex affinities between a South Central African kingship and the Eurasian Steppe.

1. African transcontinental mythological continuities as a problem

In this paper I will look at mythological continuities between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the Old World – not so much North Africa, but especially Eurasia.

This is a remarkably unusual perspective in the field of comparative mythology. While many comparative mythologists wisely concentrate on one geographic region, culture area or language phylum they know well, it is not uncommon to study east-west continuities across Eurasia. Such studies are facilitated by the fact that from North-western Europe to East and South-East Asia there has been a chain of ancient literate civilisations whose mythologies are particularly well studied; the Indo-European languages, the means of expression of many of these civilisations, encompass much of Asia and most of Europe. This is the part of the world, and the cultural and linguistic tradition, to which most comparative mythologists themselves belong

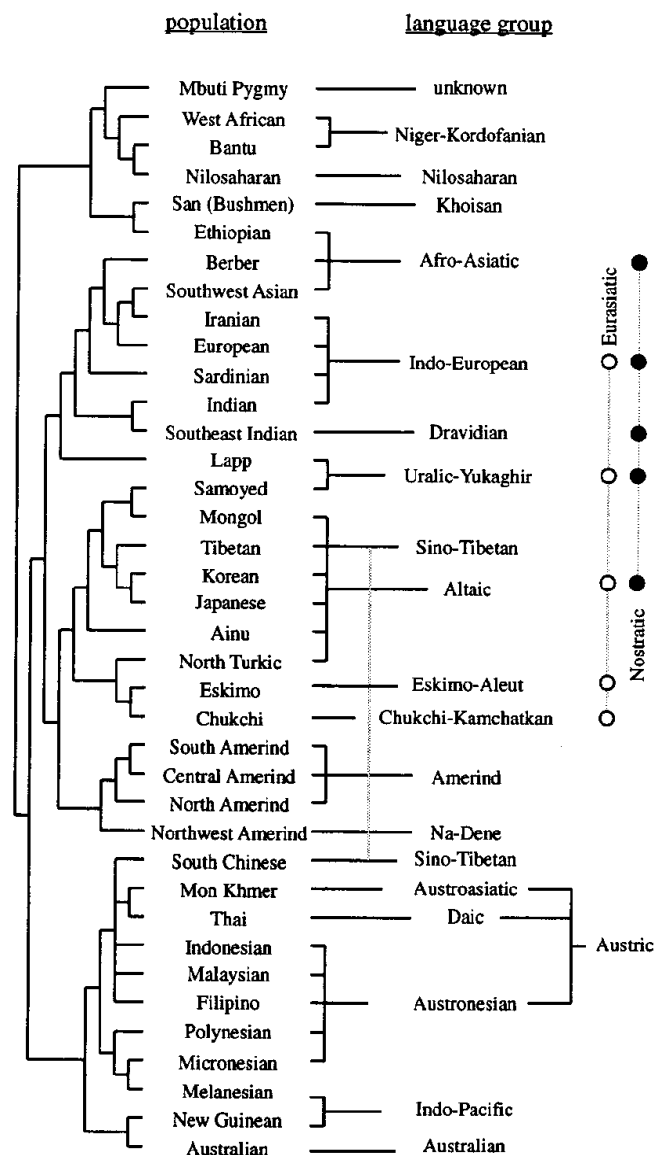
anyway, and with whose mythologies, societies and histories they feel comfortably at home. By contrast, Africa and its inhabitants have, since early modern times (Kant, Hegel), been singled out as proverbial *others*. Although this continent has known some of the oldest literate civilisations in the world (Egypt, Nubia), writing and enduring state organisation have been relatively rare in sub-Saharan Africa until Modern times. While being locked in orality may constitute an ideal breeding ground for story-telling, relatively few of these stories have been recorded – unless very late (mainly in the late 19th and early 20th century CE), mainly by cultural and linguistic strangers, and usually at a rather lower level of scholarship than that informing, for instance, the study of West and South Asian ancient mythologies. African Studies have largely developed in splendid isolation from the mainstream humanities. African linguistics (studying the languages in which most African stories have been told for millennia) have largely enjoyed the same isolation. For, with the exception of Afroasiatic,³ the historic languages of Africa belong to macrophyla which have been exclusive to sub-Saharan Africa in historical times: Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo (with Bantu as a major phylum), and Khoisan. Until quite recently, most linguists would be prepared to take seriously the view of Cavalli-Sforza (leading geneticist of the previous generation and of a previous scientific paradigm in genetics), according to whom African languages represent a particularly peripheral branch of the languages of humankind, as would befit their speakers as, allegedly, constituting a particularly peripheral branch of humanity (Fig. 9.1). Increasing marginalisation and humiliation of sub-Saharan Africa, its cultures and its economies, have been among the major trends of global history since the late 19th century, and the approach to African mythologies has reflected that trend. Africa, in the *utterly mistaken popular perception* of much of the non-African modern world (and of some African elites), is a devastated continent of people who, in cultural, political, nutritional, economic, philosophical and moral respects, are losers, and who would be best served by being liberated from their Afri-canness.

Inevitably, this state of affairs – conducive, as we know, to overt or hidden racism – has generated major redressive responses. Africanist anthropologists in the classic period (mid-20th century) often saw it as their task to vindicate the rationality, effectiveness, complexity and beauty of the African cultures they studied (*e.g.* Evans-Pritchard 1937 / 1972; Frobenius 1954 / 1933; Gluckman 1955a). From the 1960s on (when most African countries regained territorial independence after much less than a century of effective colonial rule) the general tendency among Africanist and African scholars has been to insist that things African would have to be analysed and explained by reference to African conditions (almost as if Africa could only lose from transcontinental comparison, and would necessarily find itself there on the side of indebtedness and deficit). Afrocentrists in the North Atlantic region and (since the

³ Afroasiatic has major branches in sub-Saharan Africa (Cushitic, Omotic and Chadic), but also Berber and Old Egyptian as branches outside sub-Saharan Africa, whilst Semitic – extensively spoken in North Africa and the Middle East – transcends the distinction, both through Ethiopian, and through Arabic as religious, political and mercantile *lingua franca*.

1950s) also in Africa, have adopted an affirmative, counter-hegemonic stance vis-à-vis Africanness, making Afrocentricity (of the stronger or the more moderate varieties) the mainstay of their intellectual life and their personal identity. Their good intentions – often in combination with poor scholarship – make them ideologically sympathetic, but scientifically suspect⁴ – for as we all know, consciousness-raising is only permissible as a major motor of scholarship as long as it remains implicit, and mainstream, which in the world today often means: implicitly hegemonic.

Fig. 9.1. Cavalli-Sforza's well-know array of the populations and language groups of the world (© Cavalli-Sforza 1997: 7722, with thanks)



⁴ Cf. Howe 1999; Fauvelle *et al.* 2000 – however, see my contribution to the same book, and to the *Black Athena* debate (van Binsbergen 2000, 1997b); for a recent, and more critical, assessment of Bernal and his *Black Athena* thesis (Bernal 1987, 1991, 2001, 2006), cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press; van Binsbergen 2010a and in press.

Also my own position in this intellectual and identitary mine-field is, admittedly, very far from neutral.⁵ After finishing my studies as a specialist on the oral history and anthropology of North African popular Islam, in the first half of my career I became, as a professor of anthropology, a mainstream student of African religions and cultures; in the second half, as a protohistorian and a professor of intercultural philosophy, I have been a vocal critic of the implicitly hegemonic epistemological assumptions on which North Atlantic studies of Africa are often based. Between these two phases I allowed the participant observation that has been my standard fieldwork method in various African locations, to go so unprofessionally out of hand, that I ended up as a diviner-priest-healer in the Southern African *sangoma* tradition (practising till this very day), and as the adoptive son of a Zambian king, inheriting his royal bow and arrows and a very large piece of land at his death in 1993 (cf. van Binsbergen 2003a). I speak (rather, have once spoken) five African languages; have a place in Africa I consider home; count myself as an African; let a life-force-affirming and kinship-centred spirituality from Africa diffusely (and, of course, without the celebration of violence from which 20th-century Nkoya kings already radically distanced themselves) inform my personal life; and I deeply regret, resent, and combat, the othering and marginalisation to which sub-Saharan Africa, its cultural forms and its knowledges have been subjected.

It is exclusion, and not difference as such I am objecting to. Quite rightly, it has been a refrain of contemporary philosophy (especially Derrida, *e.g.* 1967 / 1997 and Deleuze, *e.g.* 1968) that difference is the very condition for identity, and the recognition of the other's difference is the ethical condition for equitable relationships and for a sane socio-political system. Difference can still be, and usually is, articulated within the context of an overarching, unifying condition, ultimately that of sharing a common humanity, in the light of which all difference may be taken a relative view of, and may be overcome. Exclusion is when such an overarching unifying con-

⁵ On my intellectual stance as a student of mythology, between rupture and fusion, cf. van Binsbergen 2009a. In the opinion of my dear colleague Steve Farmer 2010, this volume), the best thing that could happen to comparative mythology is that it becomes a 'rigorous science' – a variant on the prescription that Husserl 1911 / 1965) wrote to cure philosophy of its ills, with his plea for '*Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*'. My view is rather different from Farmer's: I see comparative mythology, of all fields of scholarship, as privileged in that it can afford to let its method be informed, in part, by the insight that all scientific endeavour is, among other things, an attempt at creating imaginative myth: *a yarn people tell, sufficiently captivating to produce the impression of being real and true, but meant to be superseded by a better yarn as soon as possible*. Speaking of comparative mythology: perhaps, today, humankind's most dangerous myth is no longer even racism (cf. Montagu 1942 / 1974) or Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, but the naïvely modernist belief – exploited by governments and corporate enterprise – that science produces lasting, unshakable, universal, and redeeming truth; cf. Harding 1997; van Binsbergen 2007b). Yet my view is complementary to, rather than diametrically opposed, to Farmer's. For what, then, constitutes a 'better yarn'? In the short run, one that is performatively more persuasive and seductive, in terms of the ideology and fashion of the day; but in the long run, one that takes into account all available data, all available alternative explanations, and all criticism – while not necessarily true in itself, and inviting what I have called *mythical fusion* on the part of the researcher, truth still constitutes the ultimate boundary condition of science, also in comparative mythology.

dition is denied, or is taken not to apply to certain classes of humans (Blacks, Jews, women, homosexuals, redheads, Basarwa / 'Bushman', Tutsi, Palestinians, *etc.* – a form of violence in thought that often is a stepping-stone to physical violence.⁶ It is impossible to study culture, religion, myth without allowing for the difference that is enshrined in, liberated by, and celebrated by, local and regional cultural specificity. Absolute universalism is not the paroxysm, but the annihilation, of culture; hence a form of violence in its own right. This also helps to define my project with regard to transcontinental continuities in African mythology: not the blindly-ideological denial of difference and the imposition of one unifying formula for mythology all across the Old World – that would be absurd – but the identification of an overarching interpretative framework in which African mythological difference (and European and Asian mythological difference, for that matter) can yet be recognised and integrated as part of a wider system.

Most of my empirical research of the last two decades has been aimed at demonstrating transcontinental continuities involving sub-Saharan Africa. I pursue this line of research, ultimately in a bid to demonstrate – in the face of the traumatic insistence on difference or rather on exclusion that is inherent in all thinking in terms of race, ethnicity, nationalism and continentalism – the fundamental underlying unity of all of us, Anatomically Modern Humans – the sub-species that came into being in Africa c. 200 ka BP, and that spread from Africa all over the world from c. 80 ka BP. Admittedly, with such a big chip on one's shoulders⁷ it is not easy to produce objective and universalising, high-quality scholarship. However, I suspect that the only difference between me and more common comparative mythologists from the North Atlantic region is that the latter have largely gotten away with their reluctance to fathom their own identitary complacency even while engaging in transcontinental encounters and transcultural knowledge production.

Since comparative mythology is essentially an empirical science, its exponents may well consider such meta-argument in the intercultural epistemology and politics of knowledge production a waste of time, and prefer to get down to the data at hand. As a concrete challenge of empirical research, then, and in my personal research practice, broadly two complementary problems converge in the topic of Africa's transcontinental mythological continuities:

- At the theoretical level, there is the recent availability of interpretative schemas that stipulate mythological continuity instead of separation between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- At the descriptive, analytical level: my personal experience to the effect that my earlier, rather standard ethnohistorical reading of the mythology of the Nkoya people of Zambia, South Central Africa, as oblique but decodable statements on regional history over the last half millennium, in my own per-

⁶ Wyschogrod 1989; Schroeder 1996; McKenna 1992; with particular reference to Levinas – *e.g.* 1971 / 1961, 1981 / 1974 – , Girard – *e.g.* 1972 – and Derrida 1997.

⁷ Cf. Amselle 2001 for an attack on my and Coquéry-Vidrovitch's variety of moderate Afrocentrism.

ception collapsed totally as soon as I realised (by the late 1990s) that what resonated in these Nkoya mythologies were echoes of a well-known Eurasian mythological repertoire that could be traced back to the Bronze Age (van Binsbergen 1998-2006, 2009: 10).

Thus the first point in our empirical challenge to explore African-Eurasian mythological continuities, springs from the availability of models, both inside comparative mythology and in its ancillary sciences, that imply and even dictate such continuity, while in our second point we exchange this deductive perspective of theoretical application, for an inductive perspective of empirical exploration. Here African-Eurasian continuity presents itself, not as a theoretically-underpinned research programme, but as the possible, alternative interpretation for a concrete set of empirical mythological data.

2. Recent interpretative schemas that claim mythological continuity instead of separation of Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa

Much of the past and current othering of Africa turns out to be based on obsolescent scholarly paradigms reflecting a colonial, North Atlantic-centred geopolitics of a by-gone period; new paradigms have emerged that persuade us to reconsider the position of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of far greater continuity with Eurasia. Let us first review some of the older transcontinental models foreshadowing this state of affairs, and then turn to the most recent statements of transcontinental mythological continuity.

2.1. A selective⁸ review of older transcontinental hypotheses relevant for comparative mythology

Let us begin our review with a few models that emerged in the course of the twentieth century and that prepared the way for our present analytical tools.

⁸ *Selective*, for I am leaving out here one such transcontinental hypothesis that was very popular in the early 20th century CE: the ‘Hamitic thesis’, which – typical product of the racist and colonialist ideology then prevailing in the North Atlantic region – sought to explain the apparent contradiction between unmistakable sub-Saharan African cultural achievements, and negative stereotypes of Africans among the North Atlantic dominant groups, by assuming that all such achievements were due to the influx, into sub-Saharan Africa, of ‘Hamitic’-speaking (*i.e.* Afroasiatic-speaking) West Asians and North Africans. On the surface, this may look dangerously close to my Pelasgian hypothesis; on closer analysis, it is certainly not, but space is lacking for a further discussion here. I refer the reader to the final chapter of van Binsbergen, *in press*.

2.1.1. Frobenius' (1931) model of the South Erythraean culture extending from the Persian Gulf and the Red ('Erythraean') Sea to East Africa and South West Asia

This model (although somewhat reminiscent of the pan-Babylonism that haunted scholarship in the early 20th century) helped to pinpoint some of the main African-Eurasian parallels that are also brought out by our Nkoya case – in the fields of kingship, female puberty rites, divination, music, and metallurgy; moreover, considering the times, it displayed a refreshing recognition of the value and the power of African cultures. However Frobenius was at a loss as to the identification of the mechanisms that could be held accountable for these parallels. Also did he under-estimate the wider extension of these communalities, beyond the 'South Erythraean complex', both on the African continent and in West Asia, Egypt, Southern Europe and South Asia. In actual fact, there is rather more continuity between Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa, than between the latter and Ancient Mesopotamia. No convincing and lasting explanation is to be expected from Frobenius' approach.

2.1.2. Cultural diffusion from Egypt (the Egyptocentric argument)

Confronting the Egyptocentrism that was in fashion in the early 20th century,⁹ already Frobenius declined the possibility that major traits in sub-Saharan Africa, such as sacred kingship and regicide, could exclusively be due to Ancient Egyptian influence; he stressed that *regicide* (which we will encounter below among Nkoya mythemes, and which Frobenius considered constitutive of the South Erythraean complex) also occurs in South Asia.¹⁰ Yet one can remain critical of the Egyptocentrism displayed till this very day by Martin Bernal (1987, 1991, 2001, 2006), Cheikh Anta Diop (*e.g.* 1954, 1989), Obenga (*e.g.* 1992, 1995) 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 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 progress. Some of the specific Nkoya / Egypt parallels may be explained in this light, but others need to be explained by what is often the more powerful model: an appeal to common origins, in this case the fact 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 same, incidentally, applies to Bernal's insistence on what he takes to be Ancient Greece's almost total dependence

⁹ Smith 1923 / 1970; Seligman 1934; *cf.* Meyerowitz 1960.

¹⁰ Frobenius 1931: 325; 1929: 331-349, where the obvious connection with Frazer's 1911-1915) *Golden Bough* – based on the mytheme of cyclical regicide – is further explored.

upon Egyptian (and, by a later Afrocentrist twist in his argument, African) cultural including mythical materials: such an overstatement does not take into account the fact that both Egypt, and the Aegean, draw from the same West Asian-Mediterranean-Saharan Neolithic or Bronze Age source which I will identify below as Pelasgian. This common source is, incidentally, partly responsible¹¹ 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 reach South Central Africa and inform Nkoya mythology.

2.1.3. Combined cultural and demic diffusion¹² from sub-Saharan Africa shaping Egyptian and subsequently Greek mythology (the Afrocentrist position, and Bernal's Afrocentrist afterthought after his Egyptocentrist Black Athena position)

In the course of his *Black Athena* researches, Martin Bernal found that much of what he was trying to say had already been said by Afrocentrist writers such as Du Bois (1947) and Diop,¹³ and he gradually situated the epicentre of the cultural initiative decisively shaping Greek classical culture (and hence, to a considerable extent, North Atlantic and global world culture), no longer in Egypt, but in sub-Saharan Africa, of which Egypt was considered to be the oldest and most brilliant child. Whatever the deficiencies of Afrocentrist and Bernallian scholarship,¹⁴ the main thrust of such studies has been a most timely counter-hegemonic exercise in the politics of knowledge. This makes them important eye-openers in the global politics of knowledge, yet at the same time unmistakably ideological.

On the basis of a kindred knowledge-political position, I have often been a vocal supporter and defender of the weaker forms of Afrocentrism. However, in my quest for scholarly, methodologically and theoretically underpinned valid knowledge I have repeatedly been compelled to appear disloyal to the counter-hegemonic cause of Afrocentrism, and I reject the wholesale claim that everything of value in global cul-

¹¹ Pace Rice 1990, who insists on a one-way process, from Sumer to Sudan.

¹² For the term *demic diffusion*, cf. Sokal *et al.* 1982, 1991; Barbujani *et al.* 1994.

¹³ Which, by an analogy with the history of pop music (where also Elvis Presley – 1935-1977 – was chided for appropriating Black achievements), earned Bernal the undeservedly disrespectful epithet 'the academic Elvis'; Berlinerblau 1999.

¹⁴ I have suggested (van Binsbergen 2000, 1997b) that these deficiencies have been somewhat exaggerated by critics for reasons of North Atlantic hegemony and mainstream paradigmatic power games. Nonetheless there are major shortcomings, although different ones from ones for which Bernal has been grilled by Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers and their contributors (1996). Bernal's fixation on language as the prime historical source does not permit him to bring major socio-cultural processes to life, and leads to repetitious irrelevance especially in Bernal 2006. And his politically-correct fixation on African origins (while archaeologically underpinned, *e.g.* Hoffman 1991 / 1979; Williams 1986) prevents him from seeing the major West Asian / Mediterranean contribution to the Egyptian culture, society and state – which I have sought to capture by the Pelasgian hypothesis, largely (though reluctantly, given my own Afrocentrist inclinations) reversing the direction of cultural transmission in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, from South-North to North-South.

tural 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 in science), has finally forced me to admit (van Binsbergen 2010b) 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 such famous African systems as Ifa, Sikidy and Hakata; for the belief in an unilateral mythical being (*cf.* von Sicard 1968-1969); and 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.

2.2. Linguistic indications for transcontinental continuities

Whereas in the field of *linguistics* the prominent Niger-Congo specialist Roger Blench in a recent paper (Blench 2006) can still insist on the fundamental and primordial difference between Southern (*e.g.* African and Indo-Pacific) languages on the one hand, and Northern (Eurasian) on the other hand, other voices in long-range linguistics have advocated the inclusion of African languages under an extensive linguistic category encompassing much of the Old World (Eurasian / Nostratic), and even most of humankind (*Borean). One of today's primary resources for long-range linguistic research is the *Tower of Babel* etymological database, comprising most of the language phyla spoken in the world today, and supported by major research institutions (two Moscow universities, Leiden university, the Hong Kong City University, and the Santa Fe Institute); while defective on Nilo-Saharan, and truncated on Niger-Congo > Bantu, Khoisan is amply represented here, and features as another macrophylum under *Borean – the highest level reconstructible parent language, supposed to be spoken in Central Asia c. 25 ka BP. When the designation '*Borean' was chosen, Georgiy Starostin already objected¹⁵ that (since it implicitly refers to the Northern, 'boreal', hemisphere) it was based on the prejudgment that Eurasiatic / Nostratic, Afroasiatic, Dene-Caucasian and Austric would be more closely related to one another than to the African macrophyla Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo, and possibly Khoisan.¹⁶ Although I am not a Bantuist by training, this inspired me to investigate

¹⁵ Anonymous, n.d. (a).

¹⁶ Already two decades ago, leading linguists (Kaiser & Shevoroshin 1988) included Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo as branches of 'Super-Nostratic', where Nostratic is more or less synonymous with Eurasiatic. The *Borean nature of Khoisan was accepted, on formal linguistic grounds (*e.g.* its affinities with Northern Caucasian are obvious), but also in the light of Cavalli-Sforza's hypothesis of modern Khoisan speakers being the descendants of a hybrid Asian / African population whose Asian ancestors still lived in the Asian continent 10 ka BP (Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994: 176; *pace* Vigilant 1989, 1991). However, I reject Cavalli-Sforza's view (although shared by many others) of African languages as constituting isolated and archaic branches of the world genealogy of languages.

My statistical outcomes¹⁹ suggest an initial bifurcation of the *Borean-speaking linguistic, cultural and demographic stock, with

1. one, ultimately Peripheral, branch vacating the Central Asian homeland and moving on (being chased? or differentially equipped with the necessary technology to explore new continents and on their own initiative?) to South East Asia, Oceania, the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, and
2. the other, ultimately Central, branch remaining in the Eurasian homeland, gradually expanding westward to finally occupy most of Eurasia, and the Northern half of Africa.

Perhaps there is a very simply explanation for the bifurcation between the peripheral branch (African languages, Amerind and Austric) and the central branch (Eurasian / Nostratic, Afroasiatic, and Sino-Caucasian) that strikingly emerges from Fig. 9.2. When we confront these statistical results with the reconstruction of the global history of mtDNA haplo groups (Forster 2004), the peripheral branch appears to derive from mtDNA haplo type M, the central branch from type N – the bifurcation appears to mainly reflect an initial segmentation, already in the Arabian peninsula some 60 ka BP, of the second sally ‘Out of Africa’.

One of the arguments levelled against long-range linguistic reconstructions such as the Nostratic and the *Borean hypotheses is the point of ‘linguistic drift’: the rate of spontaneous change inherent in cultural phenomena including language (and mythologies for that matter; or genetics, with their characteristically huge error distributions) appears to be so high that any effect of genuine long-range transmission would tend to be obscured, reducing the long-range evidence to wishful thinking. However, this argument is not so devastating as it seems. The evidence of many doz-

¹⁹ Van Binsbergen 2010d. The logarithmic scale was experimentally determined so as to fit an estimated age for *Borean of 25 ka (proposed date of the split separating the African / Amerind / Austric macrophyla from the Eurasian / Afroasiatic / Sino-Caucasian macrophyla), and, as a benchmark, the dissociation between Afroasiatic and Eurasian at 12.5 ka BP (under the Natufian hypothesis – cf. Militarev & Shnirelman 1988; Militarev 1996, 2002; Turner 2008; and references cited there – according to which Afroasiatic emerged in Syro-Palestine in the context of the Mesolithic Natufian culture, c. 14.5 – 11.5 ka BP; and moreover assuming that the middle of the Natufian period marks the dissociation of Eurasian and Afroasiatic). The relative length k of each scale unit of 2.5 ka is given by:

$$k = 1 / (a + b * r \log(c * q + d)) = 1 / 10 \log(0.476 * q),$$

where q is the inversed rank of that scale unit, counting from the origin. Other choices for the parameters (the constants: c , here 0.476; a and d , here 0; b , here 1; and r , here 10) would produce a similar logarithmic scale but with lesser or greater acceleration of rate of change towards more recent millennia. The present parameter choice (scale A) gives a greatly accelerated rate of change from the Mesolithic onward. Stipulating a very high rate of acceleration for the most recent millennia, scale A situates the node splitting Austric from the African / Amerind macrophyla at c. 24 ka BP; the node splitting the Eurasian / Afroasiatic from the Sino-Caucasian macrophyla at c. 23 ka BP; and the node splitting African macrophyla from Amerind at c. 20 ka BP. These are excessively high dates, which can be brought down by assuming the split between Eurasian and Afroasiatic to have occurred several ka later, and adjusting the parameters accordingly – as in scale B, with which I am more comfortable ($c = 0.666$).

ens of near-universals of the culture of Anatomically Modern Humans right into modern times (Brown 1991) could be explained in various ways (innate patterns – Chomsky; a collective unconscious as a palimpsest of a group's deep history – Jung; the constant re-creation of culture as a result of the converging capabilities of human minds – neurobiology), but as compared to these, the hypothesis of long-term conservation and transmission, across tens of thousands of years of culture has certainly the highest explanatory power; such a thesis is also massively supported by specialist studies of lithic industries. The challenge for the sociological imagination is to identify socio-cultural contexts that are so highly controlled and formalised that relatively lossless long-range transmission becomes plausible; initiation rites, and their associated arts and myths constitute a promising case. Moreover, there is the eloquent argument²⁰ of over a thousand *Borean roots that establish continuity across macrophyla, even across tens of thousands of kilometres and tens of thousands of years. Let me present one pet example:

EXAMPLE OF A GLOBAL ETYMOLOGY: THE COMPLEX 'EARTH / BOTTOM / HUMAN'

The root *-ntu*, 'human, person', although only one of many of hundreds of reconstructed proto-Bantu roots (cf. Guthrie 1948, 1967-1971: **nto*, Guthrie no. 1789; Meeussen 1980: **ntu*, found in many or all languages of the large Bantu family (a branch of the Niger-Congo macrophylum), was so conspicuous in the eyes of Bleek (1851) – the first European linguist to subject these languages to thorough comparative study, that he named them 'Bantu languages' after that root (*ba-* being a common form of the plural personal nominal prefix). However, *-ntu* is not exclusive to the Bantu family. This is already clear from proto-Austronesian **taw*, 'human, raw' (Adelaar 1995: 345). Looking for an etymology of the puzzling Greek word *ánthrōpos* 'human', the Dutch linguist Ode (1927) had the felicitous inspiration to see this word as a reflex of what he claims to be proto-Indo-European **nt*, 'under' (cf. the more consensually established proto-Indo-European: **ndho* 'under' cf. Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 323) – thus proposing an underlying semantics of humans as 'ground or underworld dwellers'. This, incidentally, also offered Ode an interesting etymology of the long contested Ancient Greek theonym Athena as an underworld goddess.²¹ Along this line, many more possible (pseudo-?) cognates from many language phyla come into view, against the background of the *Borean hypothesis. Thus, (pseudo-?) cognates of Bantu *-ntu* seem to be proto-Afroasiatic **tV?* 'a kind of soil' (cf. Old Egyptian *t3*, 'earth', with cognates in Central and East Chadic and in Low East Cushitic), from *Borean **TVHV*, 'earth'; a reflex of this root is also found in Sino-Caucasian notably as \pm *tũ* (modern Beijing Chinese), *thā* (Classic Old Chinese), 'land, soil', Karlgren code: 0062 a-c, suggested to be of Austric origin: notably proto-Austronesian **buRtaq* 'earth, soil', proto-Austroasiatic **tɛj* 'earth', Proto-Miao-Yao **Ctau* (cf. Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994: 60, *tak*, however the latter two authors – according to Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 'Long-range etymologies' s.v. **TVHV*, 'earth' – seem to confuse the reflexes of *Borean **TVHV* with those of **TVKV*). Considering the remarkable similarities between Southern and Eastern African Khoisan and North Caucasian,²² one should not be surprised

²⁰ Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008; Bengtson & Ruhlen 1994.

²¹ For alternative etymologies, of the name *Athena*, cf. Hrozný 1951: 228; Fauth 1979a; Bernal 1987 (contested by Jasanoff & Nussbaum 1996, Egberts 1997; van Binsbergen 1997b); Blažek 2010 (this volume).

²² As we have seen, Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994 claim a link between Khoisan speakers and West Asia.

that also some Khoisan language families seem to attach to the very old and very widespread earth / human complex which we have identified here: South Khoisan (Taa): **taʔ*, **tuʔ*, ‘person’; North Khoisan (proto-Zhu) **žu*, ‘person’ – Central Khoisan has **khoe* etc. ‘person’, which might well be a transformation of **žu*. (Note that here, too, like in Bantu, it is the word for ‘human’ that produces the ethnonyms Taa, Zhu and Khoe / Khoi, or Khoekhoe / Khoikhoi!) Further possibilities are contained in the reflexes of another *Borean root **TVHV*, ‘bottom’, which however is both semantically and phonologically so close to **TVHV* ‘earth’ (however, in *Borean reconstructions, the vowels, indicated by **-V-*, had to remain unspecified and therefore could differ) that we may well have to do with one and the same word: proto-Sino-Tibetan **diālH* ‘bottom’ (e.g. Chinese 底 **tējʔ* ‘bottom’ Karlgren code 0590 c; 柢 **tējʔ*, ‘root, base’, Karlgren code 0590 d) from proto-Sino-Caucasian **dVHV*, ‘bottom’; from the same *Borean root **TVHV*, ‘bottom’, also Afroasiatic **duh-*, ‘low’ (e.g. Egyptian: *dh* (21) ‘low’, East Chadic: **dwaHdaH-* ‘down’) as well as proto-Austroasiatic **dʔuj* (also **tuɔj* ‘tail, vagina’), proto-Miao-Yao **tʃ o ji.B* ‘tail’, Proto-Austronesian: **hudi* ‘buttocks’ (not in Proto-Austronesian B) (also **udehi* ‘last, behind’ – the latter, Austric forms being predicated on a semantics of ‘lower part of the rump’, cf. English ‘bottom’) (cf. Peiros 1998: 157, 165; most of these data © Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, with thanks).

In the light of these linguistic considerations, mythological continuity between Africa and Eurasia have become thinkable, even probable, despite the theoretical and methodological difficulties attending such a position.

2.3. Genetic indications for transcontinental continuities, and their elaboration in the field of comparative mythology

For another ancillary science of comparative mythology, *population genetics*, a similar story of previously unsuspected African-Eurasian continuity has emerged in recent years.

2.3.1. Out of Africa

In the first place, the emergence of the Out-of-Africa hypothesis in the 1980s (Cann *et al.* 1987), meanwhile embraced by most specialists, has made it thinkable – by now even: common-place – that Anatomically Modern Humans (people like you and me) emerged in Africa c. 200 ka BP, and only spread to other continents from 80 ka BP on. Archaeology has meanwhile brought to light the sophisticated harpoons, cleverly incised lime-stone blocks, and rock paintings, which our direct ancestors were capable of making around about the time of the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and there is no denial: these were people with mental capabilities essentially identical to our own. The study of cultural (near-)universals (e.g. Brown 1991, who presents a long list) allows us a glimpse of what would have been part of the common heritage (which I have termed ‘Pandora’s Box’ – despite the pejorative connotations this term has had since Hesiod), developed by Anatomically Modern Humans before the Exodus, and subsequently taken to other continents, to be further transmitted, transformed, and innovated.

2.3.2. Towards an Aggregative Diachronic Model of World Mythology

A few years ago my dear colleague Michael Witzel, prompted by my transcontinental analysis of the symbolism of leopard skin and of speckled surface textures in general (van Binsbergen 2004), asked me to look at African cosmogonic myths for one of the Harvard Round Table meetings out of which the International Association for Comparative Mythology was to develop, under his inspiring presidency. I was deeply impressed by his seminal paper on world mythology as a window, in its own right, on humankind's remotest past (Witzel 2001), and I set out to 'do a Michael Witzel' on the African material. Classifying the African cosmogonic myths then at my disposal into some twenty 'Narrative Complexes', I tentatively formulated an Aggregative (because each complex was an analytical construct of high aggregation) Diachronic (because I adopted a time perspective encompassing the entire life span of 200 ka attributed to Anatomically Modern Humans) Model of Global Mythology. The model is based on recent genetic insights (*e.g.* Forster 2004, highlighting the diversification and spread of mitochondrial DNA types) in the emergence and spread of Anatomically Modern Humans, combined with long-range linguistics, archaeology, and comparative ethnography. In terms of this model:

1. a handful of identifiable initial mythological traits in Pandora's Box in sub-Saharan Africa
2. were taken to Asia – and beyond, even ultimately back into Africa – on the wings of the demic diffusion known as the 'Out-of-Africa' migration,
3. and on their way underwent very substantial (and to a certain extent, reconstructible) transformations and innovations,
4. proliferating into a few dozen of Narrative Complexes, 'NarComs', *i.e.* coherent complexes of mythemes that we may define analytically so as to impose some manageable order on the confusion and abundance of the data of comparative mythology, and place them in a hypothetical historical sequence.

Initially, I distinguished twenty NarComs on the basis of a corpus of African cosmogonic myths attested in historical times – which I then projected onto Eurasian (mainly literate) mythologies and their distribution maps, so as to try and identify pre-Out-of-Africa NarComs if any, and to suggest how, from that handful of NarComs in Pandora's Box, the others may have emerged as transformations and innovations, in the course of an extended world history of mythology which largely coincided with the world history of the spread and diversification of Anatomically Modern Humans.²³

²³ Later, when concentrating on the present analysis of a global sample of flood myths (Isaak 2006; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) I had occasion to define nearly the same number of additional NarComs, which had not been conspicuous in the earlier, African sample: 21 The white god; 22 Astronomy pole unilateral being; 23 Trickster Raven Coyote; 24 Raising the corn spirit; 25 Cow of heaven; 26 Earth diver; 27 Music Orpheus flute reed; 28 Games contests combats; 29 The four (elements and / or cardinal direc-

5. such proliferation especially took place in the context of less than a dozen Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation – CITIs, which are in principle identifiable²⁴ in time and space (see Fig. 9.3) although much further linguistic and archaeological work needs to be done on this point, and which largely coincide with the contexts in which new modes of production and new (macro-) linguistic families can be argued to have emerged.

It is the segmented nature of this process that allows us to propose dating for its phases. Traits that tend to universality in the cultures of Anatomically Modern Humans may be surmised to have been part of the original ‘Out-of-Africa’ package, *i.e.* ‘Pandora’s Box’. Two Sallies out of Africa have been reconstructed, of which the first (c. 80 ka BP)²⁵ reached Australia along the Indian Ocean coast, but was further abortive; while the second, c. 20 ka later, populated the other continents; hence traits that are found in Africa, the Andaman Islands, New Guinea and Australia, but nowhere else, could be argued to date from Sally I and possibly from Pandora’s Box. The latter’s further contents may be argued on the basis of calibration against sub-Saharan African traits in historical times – which must be a combination of

(a) (evolved) Pandora-Box materials having remained inside Africa, and

(b) Asia-evolved materials brought to Africa in the context of the Back-into-Africa movement from Asia from c. 15 ka BP on.²⁶

This feedback movement’s importance for comparative mythology cannot be overestimated: bringing back to Africa (and, as a side-effect, to Europe) the complex mythologies that had meanwhile evolved in Asia, the result was an amazing (but little appreciated) continuity of mythologies throughout the three continents of the Old World from the Neolithic onward: emphasis on the separation of Heaven and Earth, the devices to effect their re-connection (demiurge, king, shaman, sacrifice, any vertical nature or man-made object) *etc.*

No doubt my schema (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b) was too grandiose and too audacious to convince in detail, and my initial data were of admittedly poor quality, but I will not budge from the basic point:²⁷ *most if not all mythologies outside Af-*

tions); 30 Blood as poison, menstruation; 31 Tortoise / turtle; 33 Fragmented monster becomes the world or humankind; 34 Vagina dentata; 36 Fire; 37 Earth-dragon mountain volcano. (NarComs nos. 32 and 35 were defined but subsequently discarded as superfluous).

²⁴ I have argued (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b) that CITIs could be identified and dated by a combination of methods, including hermeneutical close reading of mythological material collected in historical times, systematic analysis of the logical relation implied in each NarCom, modes-of-production analysis, and examination of rock art.

²⁵ Population genetics based on multivariate analysis inevitably works with error margins of tens of ka. The date of 80 ka BP reflects Forster’s 2004 high dating which I have so far tried to follow, but there is increasing internal evidence that the lower dating of 60 ka BP gives better results for comparative mythology.

²⁶ Cf. Hammer *et al.* 1998; Cruciani *et al.* 2002; Coia *et al.* 2005; Underhill 2004; Forster 2004.

²⁷ Here formulated by formal analogy with Starostin’s *Borean hypothesis, which could be summarised

rica can be taken to descend, in part, from postulated pre-Exodus mythologies developed in Africa between 200 and 80 ka BP. To support this claim, I drew up a big table (van Binsbergen 2007a) where the 20 Narrative Complexes as attested in African cosmogonic myths, are also explored for Eurasian mythologies, with surprising results suggestive of very considerable continuity. As a basis for thinking about African-Eurasian mythological continuity, this could be a meaningful first step towards formulating the overarching unifying system within which to define Asian, European and African mythological specificities.²⁸

Table 9.1. Narrative Complexes identified in sub-Saharan African cosmogonies as collected in historical times

1 Separation of Heaven and Earth	11 Primal waters and the flood
2 Reconnection of Heaven and Earth	12 From the tree
3 What is in heaven ²⁹	13 Cosmic rainbow snake

in the following terms: *most if not all macrophyla attested in historical times can be taken to descend, in part, from a postulated *Borean parent phylum developed in Central Asia c. 25 ka BP.*

²⁸ My 2006a summary ended thus:

‘While predicated on Witzel’s seminal long-range approach to world mythology, his Laurasian / Gondwana dichotomy is replaced by a systematically argued combination of continuity, transformation, interaction, and feedback.’ (van Binsbergen 2006a: 319; a diagrammatic representation of Witzel’s Laurasian / Gondwana distinction, radically separating Eurasian and African mythologies, appears on my p. 321).

This message has taken a while to register. Although there has been considerable approachment on individual points, *grosso modo* Michael Witzel has continued to rely on his Gondwana / Laurasian dichotomy right up to his contribution in the present volume (Witzel 2010) – in the tradition of African othering and African-Eurasian discontinuity. Michael Witzel’s conceptual apparatus on this point is somewhat unfortunate. Gondwana and Laurasian are geological terms to designate phases and sections of the postulated original land mass from which, ever since Wegener (1912), modern geo-physics has claimed that present-day continents were formed, on a time scale measured, not in tens of millennia like the cultural (including mythological) history of Anatomically Modern Humans, but in hundreds of millions of years! By its play on such utter primordiality, Witzel’s distinction confusingly suggests a fundamental and perennial separation of African / Australian / New Guinean mythologies on the one hand, and Eurasian / Oceanian / American mythologies on the other. Such an approach claims that there are, basically and inevitably, two main branches of mythologising humankind: the primitive southern section with high levels of skin pigmentation, and the more advanced northern one with lesser levels. However, my difference with Michael Witzel (while acknowledging the enormous inspiration which his work and person have been for me in recent years), however, concerns. not in the first place ideology or the transcontinental politics of knowledge, but empirical facts: given the combined, state-of-the-art genetic paradigms of the Out-of-Africa migration and the Back-into-Africa migration, ‘Laurasian’ and ‘Gondwana’ mythologies can only be relative and connected ideal-types, inevitably continuous and interpenetrating – with ‘Laurasian’ mythology developing out of ‘Gondwana’ in Asia during the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic ever after the Second Out-of-Africa Sally (from ca. 60 ka BP; for a provisional reconstruction of the specific steps see Table 9.2), while subsequently ‘Laurasian’-type mythologies percolated into Africa, overlaying and often – like in the Nkoya case – nearly obscuring the Palaeo-African ‘Gondwana’ heritage, as a result, in general, of the Back-into-Africa movement (from ca. 15 ka BP), and more recently, and in particular, the southward expansion, into sub-Saharan Africa, of the ‘Pelagian realm’ from the Late Bronze Age onward.

²⁹ Further analysis suggests this NarCom – an analytical construct, like all other NarComs – to be an

4 Lightning bird and World egg	14 Duality Two children Twins
5 Mantis	15 Spider and feminine arts
6 Rescue from ogre	16 Shamanism / bones
7 From the mouth	17 Speckledness / granulated surface texture / leopard
8 The stones	18 Honey bees, (honey-)beer
9 The moon	19 Cosmogonic virgin and her lover-son
10 The earth	20 Contradictory messengers bring death

Table 9.2. ‘Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation’ (CITIs) in the global history of Anatomically Modern Humans’ mythology

CITI		proposed Narrative Complex (no. and description)	mtDNA type	remarks	linguistic context
in time	in space				
I. Pre-Out-of-Africa Middle Palaeolithic 80 ka BP and earlier	Sub-Saharan Africa	‘Pandora’s Box’: the original mythical package, perhaps containing: 4. The Lightning Bird (and the World Egg) 8. The stones (as earth; under CITI VI revised as the stones as connection between heaven and earth) 9. The Moon 10. The Earth as primary (10 was subsequently revised towards cattle, in the Neolithic) 12. From the Tree (in subsequent CITIs diversified into 12a ‘The world and humanity from the tree’, and 12c ‘the leg-child’) 13. The Cosmic / Rainbow Snake 15. The Spider (subsequent transformed into ‘the feminine arts’ in CITI VI)	L (L1, L2, L3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans as a biological mutation? • Africa’s soil carrying capacity, even for hunting and collecting, is the lowest in the world, mainly due to geological conditions that predate the appearance of humans by hundreds of millions of years, so it is possible that there was a push out of Africa • The emergence of myth as constitutive of a new type of human community: self-reflective, coherent, communicating, engaging in hunting and collecting, and creating coherence, through the narrative and ritual management of symbols, leading to articulate language If this last point is plausible, then the earliest phase in the overall process is in itself myth-driven	Proto-Human
II. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 80 ka BP	West Asia, and from there to Australia and New Guinea	5. The Mantis	N and / or M	Leaving Africa and venturing into West Asia is likely to have produced new challenges and to have given access to new opportunities; possibly Neanderthaloid influence;	
III. Middle Palaeolithic, c. 35 ka BP	West Asia	6. Escape from the Ogre	A and B (out of N)	Neanderthaloid influence?	

unfortunate contamination of nos. 4 (*cf.* Rain), 13, and 19.

IV. Upper Palaeolithic, c. 20 ka BP	Central Asia	11. The Primal Waters and the Flood	B (out of N)	Installation of the cosmogony of the Mother / Mistress of the Primal Waters, and the Land	*Borean
V. Upper Palaeolithic, c. 15 ka BP	Central Asia	1. The separation of Heaven and Earth 16. Shamanism, bones	N (H, A, B)	The separation of Heaven and Earth as central cosmogonic theme; shamanism associated with naked-eye astronomy (for hunters, later agriculturalists). The shaman's (belief of) traveling along the celestial axis to underworld and upper world, created (the idea of) a politico-religious social hierarchy on which more effective forms of socio-political organisation could be based.	Peripheral and Central branches of *Borean have separated
VI. proto-Neolithic c. 12 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	2. The Re-Connection of Heaven and Earth (after separation) 19. The Cosmogonic Virgin and her Son / lover 14. Twins	R and M1	Neolithic food production through agriculture and animal husbandry; Neolithic arts and crafts such as pottery, spinning, weaving; male ascendance; complex society, the emergence of writing, the state, organised religion, and science; incipient metallurgy	Eurasian and Afro-Asiatic separate
VII. Neolithic or Bronze Age c. 5 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	7. From the Mouth	too recent and too limited in scope to be interpreted in terms of mtDNA type	Masculinisation and mythical 'hysterical displacement' of procreative functions, from groin to mouth and head – transcendentalism as triggered by writing, the state, organised priesthood, and science	
VIII. Neolithic to Iron Age c. 3 ka BP	Extended Fertile Crescent	14a. Twins, Two Children, Duality		further reflection needed	

2.3.3. Back into Africa

Nor did this exhaust the inspiration of state-of-the-art population genetics towards the rethinking of African-Eurasian mythological continuities. And that is just as well, because merely invoking a postulated common origin, at a moment in time at least 80 ka BP, risks being as ineffective as a claim of continuity, as the mythical close kinship of Arabs and Jews (propounded or implied by the sacred books of both groups, the *Qur'ān* and the *Tanach* or *Bible*) turns out to be when it comes to resolving the current socio-political tensions in the Middle East... To make the idea of African-Eurasian mythological continuities a tangible reality, we would like to have something a bit more recent than the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and state-of-the-art population genetics has been good enough to oblige: by identifying, as we have seen, from the indirect and complex evidence of molecular genetic analysis, the 'Back-into-Africa'

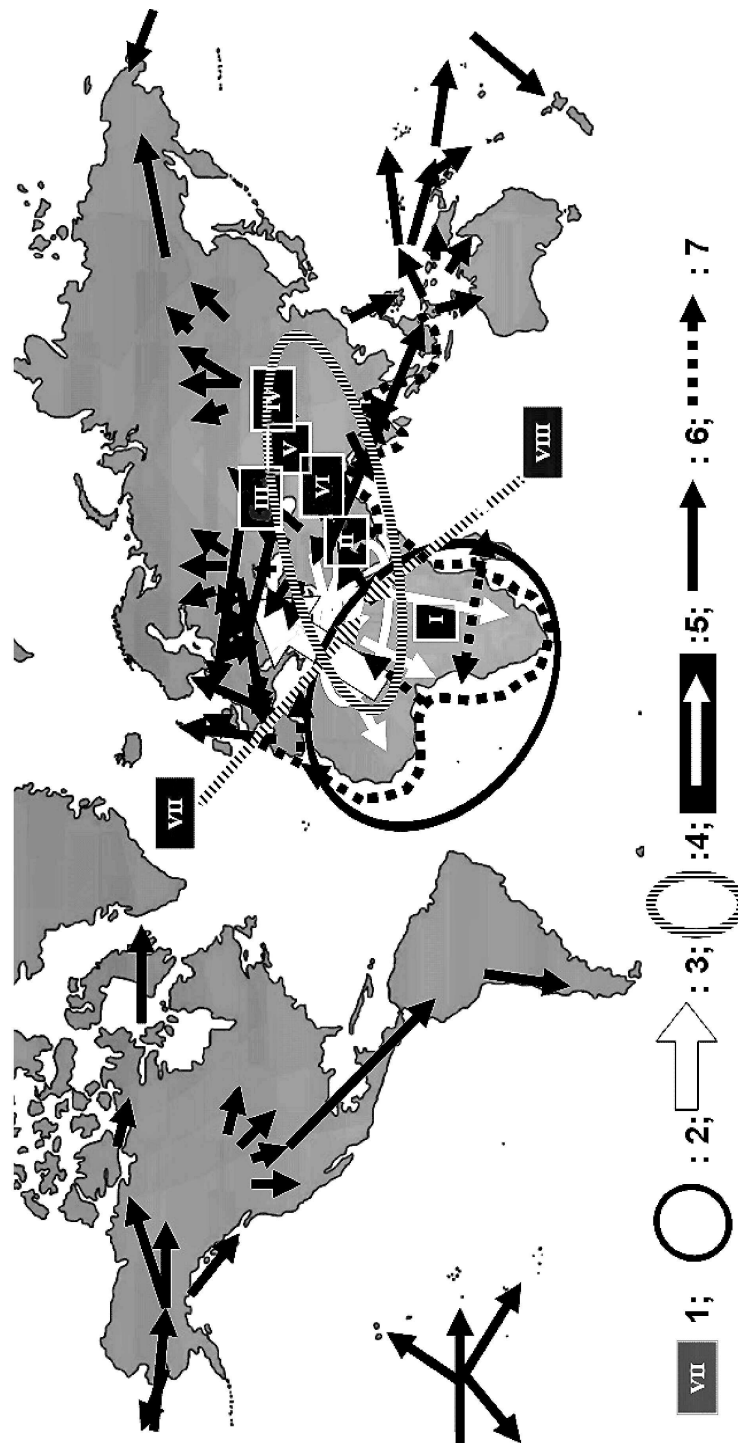
movement, from East and West Asia, from 15 ka BP on. Population movements massive enough to leave detectable traces to be picked up by state-of-the-art molecular biology, and so relatively recent that they can only have involved Anatomically Modern Humans in full command of symbolic thought and articulate language, – such movements must necessarily have involved (as a form of demic diffusion) a measure of cultural, including mythological, transmission from Eurasia, back into Africa, during the same period.

The Back-into-Africa movement makes it understandable, not only that Eurasian and African languages are found to be cognate, but also that African mythologies as recorded in historical times (and with the exception of the iconographic records of rock art and the performative repertoire of ritual and folklore – both of them posing extreme methodological problems of interpretation and periodisation) must be overlaid with, and may even merge with, Eurasian mythologies. And this is precisely what we observe.

I find it illuminating, and in line with the (admittedly very limited, and difficult to decode, available iconographic) data, to see, in the Eurasian Upper Palaeolithic, the succession, c. 5-10 ka apart, of two main cosmogonic schemas:

- a) first the Cosmogony of the Separation of the Waters and the Land (which gave us flood myths – evoking the annihilation of the cosmic order, when that order is based on the separation of the waters), and subsequently
- b) the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (connected with the rise of naked-eye astronomy, detailed time reckoning, and of shamanism as an unprecedented concentration of symbolic power).

Although massive vestiges of (a) survived until historical times (notably in the form of the aquatic and marine connotations of the Mother Goddess and of her son-lover, the Hero), (b) has become absolutely dominant, and as a result the central theme in Eurasian mythologies has now been for three or four millennia at least: how was the Separation of Heaven and Earth effected, how can humankind overcome its traumatic effects (basically, by items coming down from heaven – such as rain, fire, seeds, cattle, humans, angels, God's son – , or rising up to heaven – such as mountains, poles, spires, towers, altars, sacrifices – , or by re-unifying heaven and earth – such as a demiurge, king, priest, shaman, twin) and what eschatological implication does this worldview have. Well, notwithstanding the prevalence of flood myths also in Africa, this same preoccupation with the effects of the Separation of Heaven and Earth is found in sub-Saharan African mythologies, in such a way that I have spoken, in connection with that part of the world, of 'relatively old genes with relatively modern mythologies'.



1: CITI (VII and VIII could not be drawn in location, hence the broken lines connecting object and number); 2: Pandora's Box = CITI I, 200-80 ka BP; 3: direct diffusion of (evolved) Pandora-Box / CITI I motifs into Eurasia and the rest of the world, unaffected by the innovation and transformation in the subsequent succession of CITIs; 4: Extended Fertile Crescent, proto-Neolithic; 5: Back-into-Africa movement, 15 ka BP; 6: Spread and diversification of the mtDNA types of Anatomically Modern Humans (Forster 2004); 7: Extended General Sunda Thesis (Oppenheimer 1998 and van Binsbergen in preparation (b), van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008).

Fig. 9.3. Provisional situation in space and time of 'Contexts of Intensified Transformation and Innovation' (CITIs), as crucial stages in the global history of the mythology of Anatomically Modern Humans

However, 15 ka is still a very long time span, and one in which ‘mythological drift’ is likely to play havoc with any empirical evidence of transcontinental transmission. Therefore we are fortunate that the ‘Back-in-Africa’ mechanism can be narrowed down, in so far as it refers to Western Eurasia (Underhill 2004 however also claims a substantial Eastern Eurasian influx into Africa, *cf.* Oppenheimer 1998),³⁰ to the much more recent Pelasgian hypothesis, which moreover is open to direct study by the examination of ethnographic distributions. In addition to genetics and linguistics, archaeology and comparative mythology, comparative ethnography has been recognised as another venue towards the retrieval of the otherwise undocumented past.³¹ The distribution of ethnographic traits, used with caution, can provide clues as to the extent and boundaries of culture areas in pre- and proto-history, and indicate affinities otherwise overlooked. Although soon my results proved to be supported by genetic distribution patterns as well,³² it was the analysis of a large number of ethnographic trait distributions throughout the Old World, that has recently made me formulate the Pelasgian hypothesis, with, I believe, considerable implications for comparative mythology.

2.4. The Pelasgian hypothesis

The Pelasgian hypothesis is one of the tools promising to create order among, and to make sense of, the unmistakable comparative trends emerging from the huge global mythological corpus.³³ It is an integrative perspective on long-range ethnic, cultural, linguistic and genetic affinities encompassing Africa, Europe, and Asia. This hypothesis proposes an original, primary Pelasgian realm in Neolithic West Central Asia, which due to westbound population movements in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (greatly facilitated by Central Asian pastoralists’ achievements, notably the rise

³⁰ I refrain here from a substantial discussion of Oppenheimer’s (1998) Sunda thesis. It has two aspects: (a) the General Sunda hypothesis, claiming that with the global rise of the sea level at the beginning of the Holocene (10 ka BP) the inundation of the ‘Sunda’ subcontinent (now the Indonesian archipelago) caused a massive population movement into Oceania and to Western Eurasia, triggering the civilisations of the Indus valley and of Mesopotamia, if not further a field; (b) the Special Sunda thesis, claiming that in this process the core mythologies of the Ancient Near East including those of Genesis (*e.g.* the Standard Elaborate Flood myth) were transmitted from a South East Asian origin. A statistically based analysis of Flood myths worldwide brought me to dismiss (b), but, especially for Africa, (a) still has a lot to offer (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen, in preparation (a)). It cannot be ruled out that a Sunda mechanism was behind the introduction, to South Central Africa, of some of the stories recognised to ‘have travelled’ (Werner 1933); but the Sunda hypothesis does not throw much light on the data covered in Section 5, and their distributions. A carefully edited, lavishly annotated and comparatively referenced Indonesian collection like de Vries 1925 shows only a few Ancient Near Eastern themes (*e.g.* the motif of the snake-related Herb of Life) and African themes (which de Vries traces by reference to Frobenius’ story collections); in the Indonesian context, however, these motifs give the distinct impression of distant echoes, not of original prototypes.

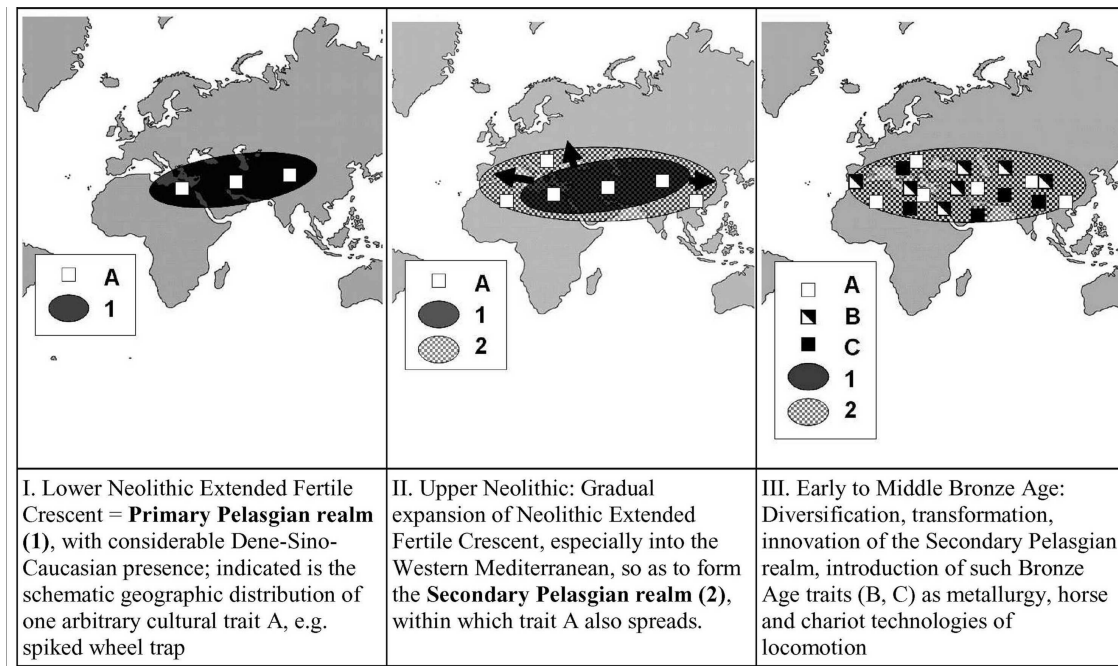
³¹ *Cf.* Vansina 1968, 1981, 1990; van Binsbergen 1981.

³² For these genetic details, see van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press.

³³ van Binsbergen, 2010b, 2010c; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press.

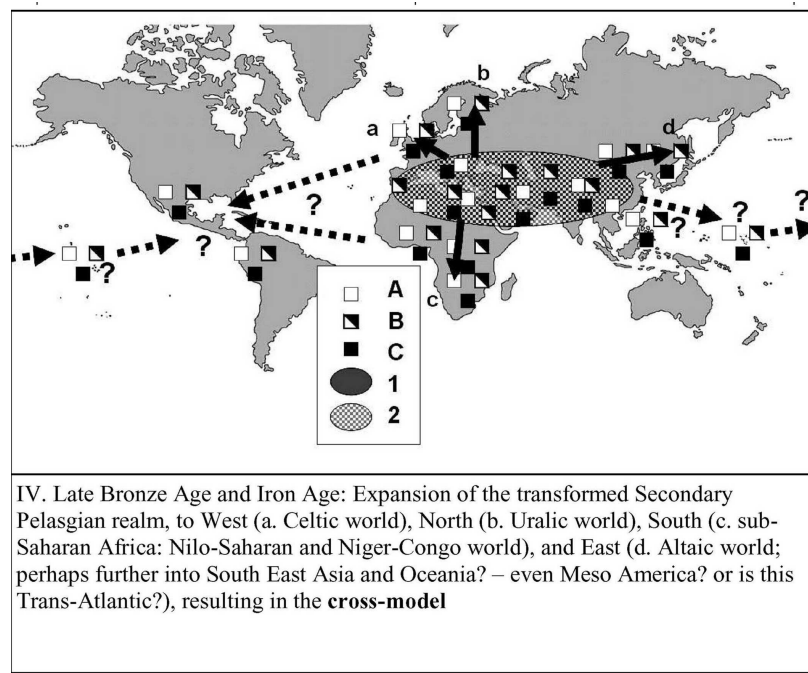
of horse-riding and of chariot technology) led to the establishment of a secondary Mediterranean-Pelasgian realm by the Late Bronze Age. Although linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous,³⁴ the primary and secondary Pelasgian realms stood out by a package of traits; individual ‘Pelasgian’ population groups never displayed the entire package, but selectively adopted a number of them, also a basis for ethno-political identification with other such groups, *e.g.* in the context of the Sea Peoples episode at the very end of the Bronze Age. As many as 80 Pelasgian traits have been identified.³⁵

Fig. 9.4. Diagrammatic representation of the Pelasgian Hypothesis



³⁴ As a result, the term ‘Pelasgian’ can only be employed as an analytical label, without any one-to-one correspondence with the ethnic distinctions the historical actors themselves were making. The latter have been taken up by modern students of ancient languages and ethnicities; for an overview of ancient uses of the terms to which ‘Pelasgian’ refers, see van Binsbergen 2010c.

³⁵ A full list is presented in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press: chapter 28. A selection of proposed Pelasgian traits includes (order is arbitrary): gold mining and metallurgy; relatively early adoption and transmission (if not invention) of iron-working technology; veneration of a Mother goddess associated with bees; male genital mutilation in at least part of the realm; territorial cults centring on earth shrines, often in the form of *herms*, with divination function; a central flood myth and a creation mythology centring on the primal emergence of Land from Water, with the Primal Waters personified as a virgin Creator Goddess; military prowess and pre-marital sexual license of women; veneration of a divine pair of opposite gender (*e.g.* Athena and Poseidon, Athena and Hephaestus, Nü Wa 女媧 and Fu Xi 伏羲 associated with the installation of culture and world order – there are indications that the Graeco-Roman claim of *Lacus Tritonis* / *Šqt al-Jerīd* (modern Southern Tunisia) as birth place of Athena (and Poseidon?) mirrors an earlier, more eastern, Central Asian birthplace by a major inland lake, and such mirroring occurs in other ancient place names including (H)iberia, Libya, and Africa / Ifriqa (Karst 1931); relatively early adoption and transmission of chariot technology; the hunting technology of the spiked wheel trap; veneration of a solar god; headhunting and skull cult; common genetic background in respect of certain genetic markers; boat cult, often associated with the afterlife.



The distribution of these traits brings out one of the essential features of the Pelasgian hypothesis, notably the ‘*cross-model*’: from the Middle Bronze Age on, and largely on the wings of horse-riding and chariot technology, Pelasgian traits have been selectively transmitted in all four directions: west to the Western Mediterranean and the Celtic World; north to the Uralic and Germanic world; East across the Eurasian Steppe to East Asia, with diversions to South and South East Asia; and south across the Sahara into sub-Saharan Africa – notably the area where Niger-Congo (> Bantu) is spoken in historical times.

2.5. Good old Aarne-Thompson

But while these are recently formulated models in full process of testing and refinement, there are also time-honoured approaches to comparative mythology, which are in principle general and universally applicable, and therefore invite specific application to Africa. Ever since the early 20th century CE, the standard tool of comparative mythologists has been the Aarne, subsequently Aarne-Thompson, AT, typological classification of folktales.³⁶ Widely used and highly effective, it was recently updated by Uther (2004). The system has been the basis for much comparative mythological research on a local and regional basis.³⁷ Only rarely has it been applied to Africa.³⁸ One elegant way of demonstrating the continuity of African mythologies and those of

³⁶ Aarne-Thompson 1973, *cf.* Thompson 1955-1958.

³⁷ *Cf.* British Columbia Folklore Society 2000, which provides an impressive bibliography.

³⁸ *E.g.* Clarke 1958 (West Africa), and two collections of Ancient Egyptian material (El-Shamy 1980; Maspero 2002).

Eurasia would therefore be to assess how many of the AT entries apply to one particular African mythology, *e.g.* that of the Nkoya of Zambia, South Central Africa, among whom I have done ethnohistorical and ethnographic research since the early 1970s. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther list is very extensive and therefore difficult to handle. Instead, I have used the selection which Fontenrose (1980) has made out of this list, with specific reference to the combat myth whose analysis is at the heart of Fontenrose's work. Fontenrose's highly selective list (Fontenrose 1980: 583f, 'Themes and motifs part II') still comprises 399 entries. Of these, as much as one-fifth can be argued to apply to Nkoya mythology, as set out in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3. Selected Aarne-Thompson (AT) traits relevant to the combat theme (Fontenrose 1980) in Nkoya mythology and cosmology

AT number	description	Nkoya application
A128	Mutilated god	Mwenda-Njangula is unilateral
A154	Nectar, soma	mead (<i>mbote</i>) has comparable mythical connotations
A162.2-3	Sky-god fights dragon of the waters or evil demon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga
A162.8	Rebellion of gods against their ruler	creation myth as told by the nature prophet and witchfinder Lubumba (interviews September-October 1973)
A255	Contest with drought demon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga ('Snake child / mother of Drought')
A721.1	Theft of sun	Kapesh and subjects attempt theft of moon
A1010	Deluge, inundation of world	Flood myths present although not always in very conspicuous form
A1111	A monster keeps water from mankind until a hero defeats him and releases it	Vrtra-like connotations implied by the name Shihoka Nalinanga 'Snake child / mother of Drought'
B11	Dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga
B11.4.1	Dragon can fly	kings' ambivalent benevolent / malevolent connotations which (<i>cf.</i> Shihoka) approach those of snake or dragon, great powers of <i>malele</i> (wizardry) are attributed, including the powers of bilocation, exceedingly rapid locomotion, shape-shifting and invisibility
B11.5.1	Dragon has power of transforming himself	as previous
B11.9	Dragon as power of evil	as previous
B11.10.3	Fight against dragon	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman versus Shihoka Nalinanga
B11.11.7	Woman as dragon-slayer	as previous
B11.12.3	Fiery dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga 'Snake child / mother of Drought'
B31	Giant bird	the creator god and the latter's son are both [giant] birds
B56	Garuda-bird	as previous
B91, 91.1	Mythical snake, snake-demon	Shihoka Nalinanga
B872	Giant bird	the creator god and the latter's son are both [giant] birds
D152.1-3	Transformation to hawk / eagle / vulture	as previous; two of these species are royal clan names
D161.1, 162	Transformation to swan / crane	<i>kalyange</i> (stork, heron) as implied evocation of creator god
D185.1	Transformation to fly / bee	Nkoya apical ancestress considered queen bee, and so is bride-taking family in wedding song

D 191, 194, 199.2	Transformation to snake / crocodile / dragon	Shihoka Nalinanga
D215	Transformation to tree	Manenga, Shinkisha: kings named after trees
D391	Transformation of snake to man	Shihoka Nalinanga
D399.1	Transformation of dragon to man or other animal	as previous
D429.2.1	Dragon king as wind	Lipepo, 'Royal Person Wind'
D651	Transformation to defeat enemies	kings' <i>malele</i>
D671	Transformation flight	as previous
D950.0.1	Magic tree guarded by snake	tree connotations of Manenga, Shinkisha; <i>cf.</i> Shihoka Nalinanga
D1171.6	Magic cup, Grail	Cauldron of Kingship
D1344.5	Magic ointment renders invulnerable	kings' <i>malele</i>
D1472, 1472.1.9-19	<i>Wunschding</i> , magic cup, Grail	Cauldron of Kingship
D1710	Possession of magic powers	kings' <i>malele</i>
D2141.0.3, 2142.0.1	Evil demon produces storms, controls winds	Lipepo, 'Wind'
E422	Living corpse	Several people within living memory were known as <i>Mufuenda</i> ('Dead Man Walking') since they returned to life after having been declared dead
E481.1	Land of dead in lower world	Mwaat Yaav, 'Lord of Death'
E481.2	Land of dead across water	as previous, north of the Congo / Zambezi watershed
E481.6.2	Land of dead in west	as previous, Nkoya are often called 'Mbwele', 'People of the West'
E485	Land of skulls	Kayambila, 'Thatching with Skulls'
E781	Eyes removed but replaced	obliquely implied in Kapesh's attempted stealing of the moon
F93.1	River as entrance to lower world	streams and ponds (whose fishing rights are jealously guarded, usually by king and headman) are considered to be abodes of the ancestors; a reluctant chosen candidate for name inheritance can escape the elders' ruling if he or she runs away and reaches the valley's central stream before being physically caught by the elders and invested with the vacant name
F141.1	River as barrier to otherworld	as previous; but also in the variants presented by Jacottet (1899-1901)
F302.3.4	Fairy demoness entices men to harm them	Likambi Mange's artificial woman
F420.4.1.1	Protean transformations of water-deity	kings' <i>malele</i> ; the underlying image often appears to be that of a water dragon – either terrestrial (of the deep) or celestial (of the sky)
F432	Spirits of wind, storm, thunder, cold	Lipepo
F512.1	One-eyed person, Cyclops	Mwenda-Njangula
F526.6	Snake-man compound	Shihoka Nalinanga
F771.1.9	House of skulls as murderer's abode	Kayambila
G264	La belle dame	Likambi Mange and her artificial woman
G303.1.1	Evil demon is god's son.	Prophet Lubumba's account of creation
G303.3.3.6.1	Evil demon in form of snake	as previous; and Shihoka Nalinanga
G303.4.1.2.1	Evil demon has one eye in middle of forehead	Mwenda-Njangula
G303.8.1	Evil demon driven from heaven	Lubumba's account
G308	Sea monster	mystical powers and kings often have the connotations

		of (celestial or terrestrial) water snake
G315	Demon cuts off men's heads to build with them	Kayambila
M2	King makes inhuman decisions	Kayambila and several other kings recounted in Likotla Bankoya
Q482	Noble person must do menial service	the Kahare royal ancestors suffering humiliation as swine herds at the Lunda capital of Mwaat Yaav, 'Lord of Death'
R185	Hero fights Death to save somebody	Prince Luhamba's successful war (whose implied purpose was to save his sister Princess Katete) against Mwaat Yaav's ('Lord of Death') Humbu punitive expedition
T173	Murderous bride	Likambi Mange's artificial woman

Although it remains possible to argue about the justification of some of the entries in this Table, the majority of entries are absolutely straight-forward, and they form a nice initial statement on Nkoya-Eurasian mythological continuities. However, the application of this insight in the Nkoya research threatened to be devastating for my earlier research work, as we shall now see.

3. From myth to proto-history and back, in tears / Tears

After extensive work on historical reconstruction (largely on the basis of mythical and oral historical materials) in the field of North African popular Islam and of Central African pre-colonial religious forms, and before exploring urban culture and ecstatic cults in Southern Africa, the Nkoya people of Zambia constituted, for decades from 1972 onward, my main research focus in Africa. Speaking a Central Bantu language, the Nkoya (numbering ca. 100,000) emerged (under the effect of the ethnic dynamics of the colonial state as mediated through the indirect rule of Barotseland, with local Christian intellectuals as major ethnic brokers) as a comprehensive self-affirming ethnic identity towards the middle of the 20th century CE. This ethnic label emerged as a bundling of a great many smaller identities each characterised by their own name, clan affiliation, areas of residence, royal and chiefly leaders, dialectical variations, historical traditions *etc.* (van Binsbergen 1992). The Nkoya primarily inhabit the fertile plateau of the Kafue / Zambezi watershed, although smaller branches of this ethnic cluster are found in Western, Central and Southern Zambia, and small minorities of Nkoya urban migrants inhabit all towns of South Central and Southern Africa. In an economy combining highly perfected hunting and fishing techniques with surprisingly complex forms of cultivation (Trapnell & Clothier 1937; Schültz 1976), with an unbroken local pottery tradition going back at least two millennia, and extensive iron metallurgy, the kingship, name inheritance rites (which merge with the kingship in the enthronisation rite), and female initiation rites are among the Nkoya's central institutions. These are largely continuous with those of neighbouring peoples in the wide vicinity. The Nkoya also knew male initiation rites including male genital mutilation,

but these were discontinued as a result of a complex process spanning several centuries (van Binsbergen 1992, 1993), in the course of which Nkoya distinctiveness was asserted vis-à-vis the kingship and culture of the Lunda under the royal title of Mwati Yamvo / Mwaat Yaav in Southern Congo (whose overlordship used to be acknowledged across many hundreds of kilometres into what is today Zambia and Angola), and vis-à-vis the cluster of circumcising peoples in that region: Chokwe, Luvale, Mbunda and Luchazi. The Lozi (Barotse, Luyi) of the Zambezi flood plain³⁹ went through a similar process as the Nkoya, initially parallel with and hardly distinguishable from the ethnic clusters and ruling groups that were to end up under the Nkoya label, subsequently however in an increasingly hegemonic, subordinating relation vis-à-vis the Nkoya groups. The latter development especially took place after the Southern African ethnico-military upheaval known as the *mfecane* (ca. 1820 CE) induced immigration from Southern Africa in the early 19th century. This made a Sotho dialect the language of communication throughout rapidly expanding Barotseland. Nkoya court culture especially its royal orchestra has continued to dominate all royal courts in Western Zambia even to this day (Brown 1984; Kawanga 1978), and the Nkoya-Luyana language has remained the Luyi court language. Early Christian mission in what was to be Western Zambia concentrated on these Barotse / Luyi / Lozi of the Upper Zambezi flood plain, from the 1880s CE on; among the Nkoya, Christian missions only started in the late 1910s CE. To legitimate its control over Western Zambia, the early British colonial administration (from 1900 CE on) had an interest in greatly exaggerating the extent and effectiveness of the Barotse pre-colonial state, which was granted Protectorate status; in the process, Lozi domination over the Nkoya was further enhanced, and for decades, the Nkoya kings (called 'chiefs' since incorporation in the Lozi indigenous administration, and in the colonial state) were forbidden even to have royal drums. Only the Nkoya royal orchestras serving the Lozi royal establishments throughout the region testify to the Nkoya's earlier exalted position. In recent decades, now that Nkoya musical and ritual culture (despite the reinstatement of royal drums) has come to be largely virtualised, it is still through the annual two-day Kazanga festival (a radical transformation of an ancient royal harvest festival, discontinued in the late 19th century CE)⁴⁰ that the Nkoya through a rich repertoire of music and dance present their identity to the wider world at the regional and national level.

Using the Nkoya data first for a theoretical book largely based on the Nkoya data (van Binsbergen 1981) and a series of ethnographic and ethnohistorical articles, I edited (van Binsbergen 1988) *Likota lya Bankoya*, a collection of oral traditions of the Nkoya people of Zambia compiled and synthesised by the first local Christian minister of religion. Soon this was followed (van Binsbergen 1992, incorporating 1988; cf. 1987) 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

³⁹ Cf. Gluckman 1941, 1943, 1949, 1951, 1955b; Mainga 1966, 1972, 1973; Prins 1980; Muuka 1966.

⁴⁰ Van Binsbergen 1993, 1995b, 1999, 2003c.

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 on South Central Africa; and
- (c) my own background as a long-standing observer, and increasingly as much-more-than-scientific 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 no more than a handful older than a century). Given the very recent emergence of the Nkoya ethnic identity, it also had to be 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. The transcontinental mythological links which the present argument will assert for the Nkoya people, cannot claim to apply to the whole of Africa, yet they make us look with a different eye at the isolated position in which African mythologies are so often put by contrast to Eurasian ones (*cf.* Frazer 1918; Witzel 2001, 2010).

Extensive exposure to Assyriology, Egyptology and comparative mythology in the first half of the 1990s, however, made me realise that what I had considered, in my Nkoya history, to be an distorted traditional account of historical events in Iron Age South Central Africa up to half a millennium BP, apparently contained many highly specific parallels with the mythologies attested in the texts of civilisations extremely remote in space and time from Nkoyaland.⁴¹ Below I will offer a detailed dis-

⁴¹ From 1990 on, one of my major research projects has been the comparative study of African divination systems, in an attempt to situate, in space and time, the system I had encountered during fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana, from 1988 on. From this context I derived my first empirically underpinned insight in African-Eurasian continuities (apart from noting the – as I much later was to realise, *Pelasgian* – continuities between Ancient Greece and the highlands of North-western Tunisia, site of my first fieldwork in the late 1960s): the Francistown system turned out to be a form of geomantic divination, closely cognate to those in the rest of Southern Africa, Madagascar and the Comoro Islands, and West Africa; these could all be traced to the system of *‘ilm al-raml* (Arabic ‘Sand Science’) or *ḥaṭṭ al-raml* (Arabic ‘Sand Calligraphy’) – a divination system that surfaces in ‘Abāsīd Iraq by the end of the first millennium CE, probably under influence from both North Africa (the principal author on *‘ilm al-raml* is the Berber sheikh Muḥammad al-Zānātī) and (with the T’ang dynasty having far extended West, a thriving East Asian trade in the harbour of Baṣra, and demonstrable Chinese influence on intellectual life in Iraq) from Chinese divination well-known as 易經 *yì jīng* (*‘I Ching’*; *cf.* van Binsbergen 1995a, 1996, 2005). In view of the recognised continuity between Islamic ‘secret sciences’, those of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, and those of Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Near East (Faḥd 1966; Bottéro 1992; Ray 1981; Borghouts 1995; Bouché-Leclercq 1879; Delatte & Delatte 1936; Ullman 1972), this

cussion of these possible specific mythological correspondences with Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Graeco-Roman Antiquity, South Asia, Central Asia, and even North America. So I had to face the possibility (van Binsbergen 1998-2006) that my historical reconstruction in *Tears of Rain*, however acclaimed by the doyen 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). In other words, I now fear that at the time 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.

Let me give one example of what this concretely means for proto-historical analysis in the South Central African context.

THE NKOYA KING AS DEATH DEMON. The legendary Nkoya king Kayambila's throne name boasts that he thatched his palace with the skulls of his enemies. This cruel practice has, in the first place, local resonances. It is part of a violent skull complex that was quite central to Nkoya culture before modern times, and elements of which have persisted at least in the form of rumours – e.g. the rumour (as late as 1973 leading to a grim court case; van Binsbergen 1975 and 2003b) that the king routinely sends out his henchmen to kill stray children, because his life force – and that of the country – depends on consumption of their brains. Is Kayambila only an a-historical evocation epiphany of an underworld demon? And does the same apply to his overlord the Lunda king Mwaat Yaav, whose name means literally the 'Lord of Death' and whose very real though distant court at Musumba, far north of the Zambezi / Congo watershed, has long been known as the scene of great cruelty (cf. Frazer 1911-1915). Or could Kayambila yet have been historical? The political events in Western Zambia 1820-1950 make us read *as a counter-hegemonic claim, and hence as potentially mythical*, the account of Kayambila graciously extending Nkoya regalia to his alleged poor relative the Barotse king Mulambwa. However, some of the other traditions concerning Kayambila have a remarkable real-life flavour, for instance when he is depicted as naming his new-born grandson in the early morning light.⁴² This grandson was explicitly claimed to be still alive in the early twentieth century CE, when Rev. Shimunika – his close kinsman, who described the birth scene – was in his teens. I was therefore persuaded, in *Tears of Rain*, to consider Kayambila as a historical figure, and to situate his rule shortly after 1800 CE. However, the skull motif makes him more than life-size. He has effectively taken on the features of a king of the underworld. The popu-

project ramified out into Antiquity and the Ancient Near East, in a bid to identify proto-geomancies. In this connection I was fortunate to join the 'Research Group on Magic and Religion in the Ancient Near East', Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS), Wassenaar, 1994-1995, whose stimulating impact I hereby acknowledge. However, the antecedents that I was looking for were only found much later, and scarcely in that context (with the exception of the Pre-Socratics), but in a transcontinental elemental system of transformations ranging – in the recognisable Pelasgian distribution – from the Mediterranean to East Asia and South Central Africa (van Binsbergen 2009b, 2010e).

⁴² Cf. van Binsbergen 1992; Anonymous [J.M. Shimunika], n.d. The same birth custom existed in Ancient Egypt, cf. Stricker 1963-1989.

lar consciousness of common Nkoya villagers has retained this conception of the kingship to a great extent – in this society where sorcery and counter-sorcery constitute the routine imagination and discourse – though very rarely the practice – of the ongoing social process (cf. van Binsbergen 1981, 2001), the king is considered the greatest sorcerer of all. This also casts a different light on the Nkoya tradition according to which the founders of present-day royal dynasties came to their present homeland in western central Zambia in an attempt to escape from the humiliation (pig herding) they were suffering at the court of Mwaat Yaav. Now, when we consider the myth of Nkoya kings leaving Musumba, are we talking about historical migrations of small proto-dynastic groups from Southern Congo (formerly Zaire) in the second half of the second millennium CE? Or about man's eternal struggle with death? (Cf. Fontenrose 1980, who considers this the underlying motif of all combat myths worldwide.) Must we reckon, here and in the other cases of extensive ancient parallels in modern Nkoya traditions and institutions, with the possibility that old mythical themes were deliberately revived and enacted – by what were truly eighteenth and nineteenth century CE political actors in Nkoyaland – in an atavistic bid to create continuity with, and legitimacy in the light of, the very remote past of several millennia ago? (Much like, in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, kings of the late periods claimed legitimacy by reviving the memory of their very distant, legendary predecessors: Sargon II (early 8th century BCE) naming himself after Sargon of Akkad across 16 centuries; and Sargon II's contemporary the 25th-dynasty Nubian pharaoh Shabaka claiming, likewise across one and a half millennium, a 6th-dynasty throne name for himself.) Or does the Nkoya skull complex have genuine Eurasian parallels, to be explained by Nkoya and Western Eurasia sharing a common cultural source? Below, Section 5 will make the plausibility of the latter position abundantly clear, to the detriment of my localised, proto-historical reading of such myths.

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 1960-1980s.⁴³ 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 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.'

Seeking to retrieve the recent proto-historical past of sub-Saharan Africa was very much *en vogue* among historians and anthropologists from the late 1960s onwards (cf. Ranger & Kimambo 1972). Confident in our use of a systematic method to extract fragments of historical fact from local myth,⁴⁴ 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) has

⁴³ Cf. Schoffeleers 1985, 1988, 1992; Wrigley 1988; van Binsbergen 2008a.

⁴⁴ Vansina 1965, 1985; Schoffeleers 1979, 1985; van Binsbergen 1981, 1985.

been the principal exponent – the Bantu world as the *exclusive* realm within which any mythological interpretation of South Central African oral-historical narrative would have to 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. However understandable in the light of the hegemonic modern history of North Atlantic involvement with Africa and of African Studies' need to dissociate from that history, 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.⁴⁵ *African societies and cultures cannot be studied meaningfully 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 Eurasian mythology set the scene for a long 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 struggle has been an attempt, among other motifs,⁴⁶ 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 horizons. However, the same tendency has also been endemic, in varying degrees, in all other area studies of an ethnographic, philologico-linguistic, or archaeological nature. It has likewise been built into the very structure of modern academia in the differentiation and organisation of disciplines, journals, libraries, funding structures etc. – producing such apparent factuality that it is difficult *not* to project it 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 under-

⁴⁵ Cf. Witzel 1989, 1997, 2003.

⁴⁶ The book draft with the working title *Global bee flight* (the most obsolete part of it sought to trace the global ramifications of Ancient Egyptian royal titlature) grew out of a request from Martin Bernal, 1997, to contribute to a collection of papers by scholars sympathetic to his *Black Athena* thesis. However, when I found that the Pelasgian West Asian / Mediterranean contribution to the Ancient Egyptian dynastic state and culture had to be regarded as independent in its own right, and could not be reduced to an Afrocentric South-North model, the text expanded far beyond article length, frictions arose, and I did not make Bernal's deadline. Frustrated, doubting my provisional results but initially lacking the transdisciplinary resources and inspiration to do better, I allowed the draft to be shelved ever since – until I returned to the text with a revised version of the original draft (1998-2006), and the conclusive statement in the present argument.

stood across the 200 millennia of the history of Anatomically Modern Humans, and on a global scale. Modern globalisation studies have taught us that, as one of the salient aspects of the world today; established forms of localising compartmentalisation are today giving way both to the effacing of time-honoured boundaries, and to the rise of new ones. Such studies have led to a spate of neo-diffusionist studies (considering the global transmission, especially in recent decades, of artefacts, identities, innovations, of political, artistic, scientific and religious ideas). This has 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.

However, the plausibility of transcontinental continuity between African and Eurasian mythologies is not only called in question by the bad name that traditional diffusionism has obtained (partly as a result of its own deficiencies, partly as the predictable demonisation resulting from its being supplanted by the classic anthropological paradigm). There is also the very real problem that no long-range implications can be attached to such continuities, even if empirically established, if they could be demonstrated to result from recent, deliberate cultural transmission notably in the context of Christian and Islamic proselytisation, and the diffusion of modern formal education and publishing. This is the problem of contamination.

4. The problem of contamination

From the very beginning of the modern study on African myths, scholars have been conscious of the possibility of transcontinental borrowing. Many of these scholars were Christian missionaries, and they were particularly keen to detect similarities between African myths and those of the Bible. Such correspondences were also spotted with regard to South Central Africa.⁴⁷ Werner, in her valuable and influential collection of myths from the Bantu-speaking peoples, includes an entire chapter on ‘stories which have travelled’, even though she declares herself not to subscribe, in general, to ‘the Diffusionist hypothesis’ (Werner 1933: 307).

But it is not only direct Christian and Islamic proselytisation that might be held responsible for the recent intrusion of Eurasian themes in sub-Saharan Africa, *i.e.* in historical times and especially from the 19th century CE on. Another, though related, cause is the availability and often wide circulation of printed texts in which North Atlantic scholars and missionaries have laid down their researches in the fields of African ethnography, oral history and oral literature, – texts which in many cases are subsequently appropriated by African informants and presented as the unadulter-

⁴⁷ *E.g.* Torrend 1905, 1910, *cf.* 1921; Jacottet 1899-1901.

ated truth of their own, local cultural traditions. Historians and anthropologists working on the Lower Congo region were among the first to note this phenomenon (specifically for the Lower Congo region) and to label it ‘recycling’ (cf. Janzen 1985). In Western Zambia, with its large number of missionary vernacular publications dating from the early 20th century, this effect is inevitable and considerable.

Thus the main Nkoya oral-historical text, *Likota lya Bankoya*, in format (short chapters opened with a large, uncial-like chapter number, and numbered verses) and also in contents (cf. *Kings* 1 and 2) owes a considerable debt to the *Old Testament* (whose principal translator in Nkoya, Rev. Johasaphat Shimunika – note the biblical given name – was also the compiler of *Likota lya Bankoya*); *Likota* also contains elements of recycling, especially of published compilations of Lozi royal traditions concerning king Mulambwa. My own book *Tears of Rain* was published in 1992 in a bound edition, and was issued a few years later in a low-cost Zambian edition; within a few years I could detect traces of its being recycled into Nkoya oral historical accounts pretending to be authentic and unadulterated. The same phenomenon was noted by the oral-historian Robert Papstein among the Luvale of North Western Zambia, where his own texts, and those of his predecessors such as C.N.M. White, were rapidly and constantly recycled (R. Papstein, 1979, personal communication).

Under such circumstances, the present argument’s central claim is far from obvious: that elements of mythology found among the Nkoya in the second half of the 20th century CE, are continuous with Eurasian mythologies, hardly as a result of recent recycling from the Early Modern period on, but mainly because of long-range connections in space and time going back to the Bronze Age or earlier. This is why a detailed, fully referenced examination of the transcontinental evidence is necessary, however great the cost in research time and printing space. These findings, presented in Section 5, will demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that the great majority of the transcontinental correspondences in Nkoya mythology have nothing to do with the spread of Christianity and Islam – neither thematically, nor as far as concerns the mechanisms of their transcontinental transmission.

5. Major mythological themes among the Nkoya, with a discussion of their salient transcontinental correspondences

In this section, 26 mythemes⁴⁸ are considered that circulate in Nkoya mythology (van Binsbergen 1992). Per mytheme, first the *Nkoya* data are summarised, then the *Comparative* data given. In a few cases I found it useful to include distribution maps, but I have not attempted, at this stage, to provide such maps for all mythemes. Throughout

⁴⁸ Conceivably, I could have considered these Nkoya motifs in the light of the Narrative Complexes making up my Aggregative Diachronic Model. That would have nicely closed the circle of the present argument, and remains a task for further elaboration. Here, however, I have refrained from doing so, because the point here is merely to demonstrate the Nkoya mythemes’ continuity with Eurasian motifs, rather than classifying and periodising them within the history of global mythology. The two lines of argument are complementary, not consecutive.

this section I will use a smaller type-face and line spacing, to mark this text as documentary rather than argumentative.

5.1. The reed-and-bee complex



Nkoya: Among the Nkoya the reed-and-bee complex takes a number of different manifestations:

- a. The apical ancestress of the Nkoya, Libupe, as a Queen Bee travelling with her Swarm and landing at the land of Nkoya
- b. The groom's family approaching a bride's village in order to collect her in marriage, in their conventionalised songs still apply the imagery of bees (*mapuka*) to themselves
- c. *Mbote*, 'mead', male Nkoya courtiers' paroxysm of bliss
- d. Primordial mythical twins of complementary gender, Katete ('Reed Person') and Luhamba ('Royal Person Going from Branch to Branch' / 'Beehive') hide from the King of Dead (Mwaat Yaav) in a Reed Mat and a Bee Hive.
- e. A reed mat is the central, eponymical locus of investiture / enthronisation / name inheritance (*ushwana*)
- f. Royal courts, *ushwana* ritual sites, royal dead bodies and royal graves (cf. Cunnison 1968 for an Eastern Lunda parallel) are sheltered by reed mats
- g. Reed mats are the standard bedding
- h. The Eastern Nkoya (Mashasha) consider the reed mat their emblem, probably as a moveable shrine containing royal ancestral relics


Comparative:

Mead: In the Ancient Near East (especially Anatolia and Ancient Egypt), Ancient Europe including classical Greece, Germanic and Celtic Europe, South Asia (cf. *soma*) and in Madagascar, mead was a focal element in cosmology and social interaction (cf. Dickson 1978; Fontenrose 1980: 538; Beaujard 1994; Kerenyi 1976: 35; *Rgveda* V, 43:3-4, VIII, 5:6); theft of mead / soma (Jacobsdóttir 2002; Knipe 1967).

Bee and honey: *Hymenoptera* (including bees) and *Diptera* (including flies and midges) have tended to be associated with the sun, the rainbow, and the Supreme God in Ancient Egypt and throughout the Ancient Near East (air, shimmering; Draffkorn Kilmer 1987). In Ancient Egypt, this link even gave rise to the golden fly as an accolade for military prowess (Houlihan 1996: 192). In the Anatolian Kumarbi epic, a bee saves the world (Güterbock 1948). In Egypt, the bee motif is connected with 'tears of the divinity' motif (see below), since not only humans, but also bees, are reputed to have sprung from such tears. The bee as a ritual focus and symbol was a constant factor in Greek art from Minoan times on, with extensions to the isles of Rhodes and Thera; bees fed the infant Zeus on Crete, hence Melisseus as name of the father of the nymphs who attended – the female priesthood of major goddesses is called Melissae, 'bees'; cf. the motif of bees and kingship (Apollodorus / Frazer 1970: I, 7). In the Celtic world, Ogma Cermait 'of the honeyed mouth' is the Irish equivalent of Arthur / Gvrydion (Cotterell 1989: 62); below we will see several more instances demonstrating the closeness of Nkoya and Celtic mythologies. In Northern Europe, the 15th Canto of the Kalevala (Tamminen 1928) abounds with honey and bee motifs.

Reed: had a central symbolic significance in Ancient Egypt from earliest dynastic times (Emery 1961); there is evidence of mat burial here (Goneim 1956: fig. 19, opposite p. 64). The same reed complex is in evidence in Neolithic Çatal Hüyük and in Ancient Mesopotamia, which is likely to have influenced earliest temple and royal architecture in Egypt (Rice 1990). Reed mats play a conspicuous role in the lives of Central Asian peoples such as Mongols and Kyrgyz (Sommer 1996; Waugh 2002). Prometheus in Ancient Greek myth brought fire from heaven in a *narthex* i.e. a hollow reed; the return of the fire is a much more widespread flood motif. Reed is associated with origin of the world, among the Zulu (Callaway 1870), the Japanese (*Kojiki*, I, cf. Chamberlain 1919 and Philippi 1968), Egypt (Chemmis / Aḥ-bit,   and spelling variants; Helck 1979; also see below, the motif of royal

sibling complementarity / rivalry), and Yoruba (van der Sluijs, n.d.). Werner (1933) records a myth from the Bantu-speaking area where the first couple come forth from an exploding reed stalk; *cf.* Prometheus (fire stolen in reed stalk / narthex), and many North American flood myths and cosmogonies, where reed plays a central role (*e.g.* Navajo, *cf.* Capinera 1993: 226-228, Newcomb 1990; Hopi / Sia, Alexander 1916: 203; Pima, Frazer 1918: 283-287; Hopi, Waters 1963: 12-20; Caddo, *cf.* Erdoes & Ortiz 1984: 120-122). In the Gilgamesh epic, after the gods had decided to destroy humankind, the God Enki went to warn the prospective flood hero Atrahasis using the very words of the Nkoya myth of Katete and Luhamba: 'Do you hear, Reed Person?' (*cf.* Lambert & Millard 1969; Cagni 1975; Frymer-Kensky 1977).

Reed and bee: one of the principal Ancient Egyptian royal titles, *nswt-bit*  'She [the ts ∆ doubly mark the expression as feminine] of the Reed and the Bee', as attested in writing and iconography from earliest dynastic times onward (*cf.* Thierry 1913; Sethe 1930; Müller 1938; Kaplony 1963; Schott 1956; Otto 1960, and numerous more recent general accounts including Edwards 1985; Spencer 1993; Kemp 1995; Gundlach 1997; 1998; Dosrev 1993; Wilkinson 1990; no consensus on explanation of this title (*not* Upper / Lower Egypt!), Probably: cosmogonic evocation of the Primal Hill (reed clump) emerging from the Primal Waters, and touched by the First Sun (bee). The latter is an indication that upon the very ancient, in principle horizontal cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land already a rather newer dispensation had been superimposed, namely the vertical cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (dating from c. 15 ka BP). Lower Egypt has featured, from earliest dynastic times, a Saïs-based cult of a goddess associated with bees and honey. This cult is a variant, no doubt, not so much of Upper Egyptian and ultimately African continuities, but of more general Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age mother goddesses (some of them persisting well into the Iron Age) similarly associated with bees and honey (*cf.* Gimbutas 1982 for the European Neolithic) notably a priesthood designated as bees. The Indian god of love, Kama, seems to have borrowed the reed-and-honey symbolism: he carries a bow made of sugar-cane stalk strung with a line of humming-bees and he shoots arrows tipped with flowers.

5.2. The King of Death

Nkoya: The Lunda king / hereditary royal title Mwati Yamvo / Mwaat Yaav ('Lord of Death'), overlord of the Nkoya kings.

Comparative: Ancient Greek Hades / Pluto, South Asian Yama, Chinese 閻羅 Yanluo and Japanese 閻魔大王 Enma Dai-Ō. Like the Lunda and the Nkoya king (*cf.* Frazer 1911-1915), the Turkish king is strangled at the end of his reign (Los 1969: 260).

5.3. Kings herding pigs

Nkoya: kings when staying with Mwaat Yaav ('Lord of Death').

Comparative: a taboo on pork consumption (which, ironically from a Judaeo-Islamic perspective, could be interpreted as affirmation of belonging to the pig clan) in many parts of Niger-Congo speaking Africa, and moreover among Israelites / Jews and Muslims; pig sacred to Ancient Egyptian Seth and Isis, and to Greek Circe. As a strange combination of solar underworld deity out in the Ocean (retaining, in fragmented and barely recognisable fashion, most crucial aspects of the Mother of the Waters 'Below, Aside and Above'), Circe as host of Odysseus and his companions with Circe, turning them into pigs (*Odyssea* X, 212 f), has striking structural correspondences with this Nkoya motif – while the Circe motif has also been recognised in South Asia (Gerland 1869), and its general Pelasgian nature is further highlighted by the associations between Circe (and Odysseus) with the Tyrrhenian kingship (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 1011 f; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press).

5.4. Stranger hunter seizes the kingship; menstruation considered to be disqualifying

Nkoya: the standard form of this myth in S.C. Africa (cf. Turner 1955; Hoover 1980) is that of Chibinda / Hunter, depriving Luwēji / Moon from her kingship on the pretext of her menstruation; among the Nkoya a version circulates featuring royals from the local tradition. The motif also occurs in the West African Sundjata epic (Innes 1974; Jansen 1995).

Comparative: Medb (cf. Edel 1986), legendary Irish queen who because of her name ('She Who Makes Drunk', cf. 'mead'), her aquatic connotations (her nickname is 'great-bladdered' – she is a 'Mother of the Waters'), her affirmation of menstruation even though it disqualifies her from giving battle (a common motif in the Irish early literature), further confirms our impression of the closeness of the Nkoya and the Celtic mythological worlds. The disqualifying nature of menstruation is central to Bantu-speaking societies; it also surfaces in the Dogon cosmogony (the creator Amma removed the Earth's clitoris in the form of an anthill, and had intercourse with her, but menses began when the offspring of that union committed incest with his mother) but it is also highly elaborated in Judaism, many forms of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Shintoism – transmitting a trait widely circulating in the Pelasgian realm.

5.5. Regicide as socio-political renewal

Nkoya: prominent motif in Nkoya mythology; cf. Mwaat Yaav (item 3 above) and Zimbabwe and N. Nigeria (Smith 1919: 114f). Frobenius (1931) sees this motif as constitutive for the societies of South Central Africa.

Comparative: widespread motif of comparative mythology, cf. *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1911-1915).

5.6. Stealing the moon

Nkoya: King Kapeshe Kamunungampanda, with several South Central African parallels

Comparative: Uralic world: the primordial smith Ilmarinen plucks the moon from a tree in heaven (*Kalevala*, Tamminen 1928: 139). Bringing down the moon is a central motif in Graeco-Roman magic as well as an activity attributed to witches by Russian peasants (Hastings 1908-1921: VIII, 270, 273f, 282, IV: 815). Egypt: Seth steals the Eye of Horus (usually identified with the moon) (Monet, n.d.; de Buck 1935-1961). Korea: a dog is ordered to steal the moon (Grayson 2001: 254f). Burma: a plot to steal the moon (Davison 1994). Highly significant, considering the abundance of Central Asian reminiscences in Nkoya mythology, is that the motif of stealing the moon also occurs in the Kyrgyz Epic *Manas* (Köçümkulkiži 2005, lines 3180f). Among the Dong minority, China: annual festival of 'Stealing Moon Dishes' (Anonymous, Dong minority, n.d.). Stealing the moon (with or without the sun) is a frequent motif in North American mythology, where Raven engages in this act among the North West Coast groups (e.g. Tlingit, Haida, Kwakiutl, Dogrib, Tsimshian) and Coyote and Antelope or Eagle try to outdo each other in this act in the Northern Rockies region and among the Hopi (Jones 1914; Swanton 1909; Clark 1966; Hastings 1908-1921: V: 706). Frazer's *Folk-lore of the Old Testament*⁴⁹ (1918: ch. 2, 'The Fall of Man', § 3. The Story of the Cast Skin) plausibly explains this mytheme by the moon's (not unlike the cauldron's, see below) being as a widespread symbol of death and rebirth. In the background are widespread mythemes of heroic theft (cf. Jakobsdóttir 2002; Knipe 1967): in Nordic mythology, Loki turns into a fly to steal Freya's golden necklace; cf. the theft of soma in Indian mythology, by Garuda, Varuṇa, or some other agent. Whatever botanical or symbolic associations attach to the highly complex concept of Soma, it is essentially the Moon, so at an abstract level the motif of stealing the moon is structurally equivalent to that of stealing soma. But also cf. Prome-

⁴⁹ Responsible, however, for the widespread but utterly wrong notion that flood myths are absent from sub-Saharan Africa.

theus's theft of fire from heaven (see the reed motif, above), for the benefit of humans, allegedly his own creatures. However, from the perspective of flood myth – to which both Prometheus and the Tower / Kapesh motif are intimately related – new fire needs to be brought so as to restore the natural and human order after the Flood. Human's theft of what is jealously guarded in heaven is an act of defiance and hope in the face of death, as essential to the human condition. The heroic theft motif will also appear below, when we discuss the cauldron of kingship.⁵⁰

5.7. A flood and tower complex; 1. the Tower into heaven

Nkoya: The Nkoya, Mbwela, Ila, and Kaonde, of Western Zambia, have the myth that a royal Kapesh⁵¹ Kamunungampanda ('The *Kapesh* – understood to be a vertical structure – Joining Forked Branches', or 'Joining with a Sibling' let the people build a tower to bring the moon down from heaven, so that it could serve as a royal pendant for the royal child; the tower collapsed and the nations were dispersed.⁵² Almost the same story was recorded for Barotseland, Mbunda, Bena-Lulua, Kiokwe, Kanioka and Rozwe of Zimbabwe (cf. Rotse of Zambia?) by Frobenius (1931: 166f – in the Zimbabwe case the emphasis is on immortality through the royal pendant, cf. Frazer 1918 as mentioned above; Jensen 1932: 76). This myth is also told for the Bemba of Zambia (Roberts 1973) and for Mozambique (Feldman 1963); Willis (1994: 273) perceives a belt of tower myths in Africa from Angola via Zimbabwe to Mozambique (e.g. the Tonga or Tsonga, Frobenius 1954: *Märchentext* 1). Among the Nkoya's northern neighbours the Luba, the tower was allegedly built by the Rainbow Serpent, waging war on the sky king (Reefe 1981). This is almost identical to the Pare version from Tanzania (van der Sluijs n.d.). It also comes close to the story told among the Nkoya's close Western neighbours (Luyi / Lozi, Subiya; Jacottet 1899-1901; Jalla 1903), where Nyambi and his wife Nasilele flee from their original dwelling on earth along a spider's web, pursued by humans whom they fear; the humans build a tower to continue their pursuit, trying to kill Nyambi, but in vain because the tower collapsed, followed by the confusion of nations and tongues. Among the Boni or Sania, near Lamu, Kenya, Indian Ocean coast, such confusion is attributed, not to the flood, but to a famine (van der Sluijs n.d.). Among the Chokwe (originally a few hundred kms North-West of the Nkoya, now also in their near vicinity) mention is made of a Kaposhi clan, with owl and nightjar as their totem (both highly speckled birds; see the footnote below on Heracles and Hera), and reputed to have been one of the oldest clans, and one that enslaved others for their ritual building projects (Matthe 2003).

Comparative: Like the stairs and the bridge, the tower is also among the common symbols of

⁵⁰ Cf. Table 9.3, AT mytheme 'stealing the sun', with Nkoya application. It is interesting that the moon, itself only in indirect possession of its light (but that is far from obvious, and in the Western tradition took an exceptional mind like Anaximander's – 5th century BCE – to realise), should inspire so many motifs of stealth and stealing. Cf. Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*:

‘*The moon's an errant thief
and its pale fire it snatches from the sun.*’

This is the central motif of Nabokov's (1962) intertextuality-centred novel *Pale Fire*, where the critic's / editor's treacherous appropriation of text is set off against the poet's original light.

⁵¹ Kapesh has no convincing etymology in Nkoya or other Bantu languages. Considering that the best known flood stories are from the Ancient Near East and especially the *Tanach*, it is relevant that קָפַשׁ *qpš* occurs in Biblical Hebrew as the capering movement of a fleeing deer – semantically unconvincing although a swaggering gait has been associated with kingship (Graves 1988). Semantically and phonologically a perfect fit offers the Indo-Aryan form **-gabhasti-*, 'forked carriage pole, hand' (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Indo-European etymology'; de Vries 1958 s.v. 'gaffel'), which also reminds us of chariot technology as the main mechanism of spread of the Pelasgian package from the Middle to Late Bronze Age on.

⁵² Gender is not expressed by syntactic means; by projection of today's conditions Kapesh's gender is assumed to have been male, perhaps doing violence to the original story (cf. van Binsbergen 1992).

shamanism, with its imagery of the shaman travelling between upper world, ordinary life world and underworld (Eliade 1968). In order to perceive the relation between the Tower myth and the Flood myth (see next mytheme), it is useful to define the widespread model of the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth (*cf.* Smith 1873 (first decipherment of Babylonian flood text); Frazer 1916, 1918; Dundes 1988; Isaak 2006 (hundred of flood stories summarised, with bibliography); Dang Nghiem Van 1993; Lewis 2006; Walker 1976; Marler & Dexter 2003; van Dijk 1983; Witzel 2010; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008):

1. The cosmic order is provisionally established, including humans, but Heaven and Earth still merge, or are at least still connected through a tower, ladder, pole, thongs, ropes, *etc.*
2. humans commit a transgression (sorcery, murder, eating from forbidding fruit, discovery of sexuality in general, more specifically incest, *etc.*)
3. the connection between Heaven and Earth is severed, and humankind is destroyed by a flood
4. usually by the intercession of a (or the) divine being, there are one or more flood survivors, whose main task is to repopulate the earth; a typical mytheme here is that of the twin siblings who survive the flood and repopulate the world incestuously (*cf.* Katete and Luhamba; *cf.* Egyptian Shu and Tefnut, Greek Apollo and Artemis, and Dogon Nommo among the West African Dogon) – note the parallel with the discovery of sexuality, murder and incest (2)
5. renewed humankind attempts to reconnect to Heaven with the various natural, personal and ritual devices listed above – especially a tower
6. in the process the confusion of nations occurs – a multitude of ethnic and language groups emerge.

However, among the twentieth-century Nkoya, the Flood motif appears to be absent and the very central tower mytheme is completely divorced from the Flood motif. In the Nkoya version the defiance of the sky king is strictly speaking absent (although it is also a form of *hubris* to try and bring the moon down), but such defiance is central to the Luba version. The latter is very close to the Nimrod myth (*Genesis* 12). Greek mythology knew the Aloadae, Giant twin brothers who tried to overthrow Zeus, seeking access to heaven by stacking major mountains on top of one another (*Ilias* V, 385, *Odyssey* XI 305; Pindarus, *Pythian Ode* IV, 89; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* I, 7. § 4; Atsma 2000-2010). In Phoenicia, Astarte / Astaroth, was known as ‘Lady Tower’, town goddess of Sidon, Tyre, and Byblos – she wears a tower as a crown (*cf.* Greek / Phrygian / Arabian / Egyptian Rhea, Tyche, Cybele, Allat, Hathor); she is a Mother of the Waters (Athirat). In South China the Flood-associated tower takes the form of a ladder (Willis 1994: 93f); the ladder is also conspicuous in Egyptian (Seth) and Hebrew (Jacob) myth, but without clear Flood connotations. The making of a rope of arrows for going from earth to heaven is called a characteristic [Native] American motif by Fontenrose (1980: 513 n. 40).

5.8. A flood and tower complex 2. the Flood

Nkoya: Again, among the twentieth-century Nkoya, the Flood motif appears to be totally absent and the Tower motif is no longer understood as connected with the Flood. We do not need to accept this lacuna as definitive. Namafe (2006) and Kamuwango (2007), hailing from Western Zambia themselves, claim that there is a Lozi flood myth – which stands to reason, because the annual trans-humance of the royal household in response to the annual Zambezi flooding is a central theme in Lozi society – whose musical and ceremonial life is largely in the hands of Nkoya specialists. Having demonstrably merged with Lozi mythology on other motifs (*e.g.* Mulambwa; the unilateral being), against the background of a shared court language and court culture, one can hardly assume Nkoya mythology to have been impervious to Lozi flood myths, if the Nkoya did not yet have them in the first place. But it is thinkable that the Flood motif was deliberately rejected by the Nkoya in the course of

the last hundred years because it was recognised to be associated, no longer with the remotest past, but with the hated Lozi as dwellers of the Zambezi flood plain. Geographically, culturally and linguistically close to the Nkoya, are also the Luvale and Chokwe; and Mwene (Ruler) Manenga features extensively in Nkoya traditions as in those of Luvale and Chokwe. Among the latter the following localised Flood myth was recorded: 'A Queen named Mwene Manenga sought food and shelter in a village. She was refused, and when she reproached the villagers for their selfishness, they said, in effect, "What can you do about it"? So she began a slow incantation, and on the last long note, the whole village sank into the ground, and water flowed into the depression, forming what is now Lake Dilolo.' When the village's headman returned from the hunt and saw what had happened to his family, he drowned himself in the lake (Vitaliano 1973: 164-165; Kelsen 1988: 136; Isaak 2006 no. 47). Meanwhile, in Jalla's versions collected in Western Zambia at the end of the 19th century (Jalla 1903: Appendix, pp. 319f; 1909; 1921; cf. Bouchet 1922; Rooke 1980) selected elements of the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth are included, still in such a way that at first glance one is not aware that a flood myth is involved:⁵³ Nyambi and his first human creatures (especially the male Kamunu) live in each others' proximity, Kamunu engages in a series of transgressions for which relatively mild punishment is meted out by Nyambi, until the latter finally, after crossing a great river, withdraws to Heaven along a spider's thread, after which humankind each morning humbly greets the rising sun in an attempt at a ritual re-connection of Heaven and Earth.⁵⁴ Deeply implied in the Lozi story seems to be a reference to the discovery of sexuality as a central transgression – in line with the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth, whose other elements we also detect: initial merging, later separation and partial re-connection of Heaven and Earth, the flood (here reduced to a great river, and no longer explicitly destructive, but what could be worse than God's withdrawal from Earth?). Significant other elements however are left out: destruction by flood, and the confusion of nations – which however surfaces in other local accounts.

Comparative: For the global connections of the Flood motif, see under Tower motif, elsewhere in this Section.

5.9. The bird-like nature of gods

Nkoya: the Nkoya (Likota 4:1) equate Nyambi with a bird, and Nyambi's child, the demiurge Mvula / Rain (both of indeterminate gender) is also a bird; the birds are unspecified, but the human clans Hawks and Buzzards are declared to be the relatives of Mvula, so Mvula may be thought of as a large bird of prey. The Nkoya consider their kingship to derive from (the tears of, see below) the demiurge Mvula / Rain, and their kingship has an intimate connection with birds. The two clans contesting the kingship are both named after bird species (Hawks and Buzzards). The major headmanship of

⁵³ In Feldman 1963 this myth is erroneously attributed to Mozambique.

⁵⁴ Nyambi is attended not only by a spider but also by a wagtail bird (*Motacilla capensis*), which opens up an interesting comparative angle. In the main Japanese creation myth virtually the same bird (*Motacilla grandis*) showed the first creatures Izanami and Izanagi how to engage in sexual intercourse by the suggestive, incessant up and down movements of its tail, after which it is named in several linguistic contexts, e.g. in English and Dutch (*Kojiki*, cf. Philippi 1977; van Binsbergen 2009b). It is as if the wagtail in the Western Zambian story signals that, implicitly, we are in the presence of a Flood caused by the invention of sexuality. *We hit here upon a controversial but logical and crucial implication of the idea of transcontinental continuities: if the latter can be taken for a fact, then in principle well-attested, studied and understood symbolic relationships in one location may be used to illuminate less explicit similar relationships in another location belonging to the same complex, even though in another continent – not just on the basis of a formal typological similarity and an appeal to inherent convergent properties of the mind of Anatomically Modern Humans, but on the basis of real historical cognateship between cultural forms with a common origin.* This methodological claim is basic to my work in the field of comparative mythology, geomantic divination, transformative cycles of elements, astronomical nomenclature etc.

Shipungu is also named after a bird species, the fish eagle. There is moreover the cosmogonic symbolism of the *kalyangu* bird, the white heron. Finally, the king's alter-ego, his court jester, has the official title of *Kayoni ka Mwene* ('the king's bird'), and appears in public (notably during the annual Kazanga royal festival) as a large-billed giant bird. These aspects of Nkoya royal symbolism are reminiscent of the giant bird sculptures adorning the famous sanctuary of Great Zimbabwe.

Comparative: The conception of major gods as birds occurs in West Asia (e.g. Egyptian Horus, Mut), Central and East Asia (e.g. Garuda), and may have shamanic connotations. Cf. the white, often aquatic, bird-like connotations of creation gods in the Mediterranean and throughout the Pelasgian realm (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press), but also the Raven and Eagle characters in North American mythology.

5.10. The annual extinction and rekindling of fire

Nkoya: In the Nkoya foundation myth of kingship, a blissful celestial downpour (of Mvula / Rain, Nyambi's Child) follows the successful removal from the fire of the cauldron of kingship by the qualifying clan, follows by the adage 'Our kingship is from the Drops / Tears of Mvula / Rain'. I propose this implies an aetiological myth of the annual extinction and rekindling from a unique royal source, of all humanly used fire. Among the twentieth-century Nkoya this custom is no longer found. However, it has been recorded for the Bantu-speaking groups of Central Zambia (Sala, Soli, Nsenga; cf. Apthorpe 1959, 1960; Argyle 1959; Brelsford 1935, 1965); these groups are closely connected with the Nkoya by language, custom, historical traditions, migrations and diplomatic relations (van Binsbergen 1992). In Swaziland (Kuper 1968), once a year 'the dirt of the past year' is burnt on a sacrificial fire, and rain, again, is supposed to extinguish the fire at the cattle byre. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa fires are extinguished at the king's death and rekindled at the enthronisation of the successor; van der Sluijs (n.d.) attributes this custom to the following peoples: Mundang, Hausa, Gwari, Nupe, Mossi, Yoruba, Ruanda, Wasegue, Wadoe, Wawemba, Walumbwe, Wahemba, Mambwe, Lunda, Kanioka, Bangala, Bihe.

Van der Sluijs cites a gruesome African accession rite that brings out how much the fire extinguishing custom may re-enact creation, or second creation of the Flood: 'Upon the accession of the new king, a pubescent boy and virgin appeared naked before the king, rekindled the fire with their fire-sticks, performed their first act of love, and were buried alive'. Unfortunately, no source accompanies this account; and although it is reminiscent of the ethnographic vignettes out of which James Frazer's work was built up, I have been unable to find it there. The sexual element is reminiscent of the Moatsü Mong agricultural festival of the Ao people of Nagaland, India, however, the latter does not feature human sacrifice.

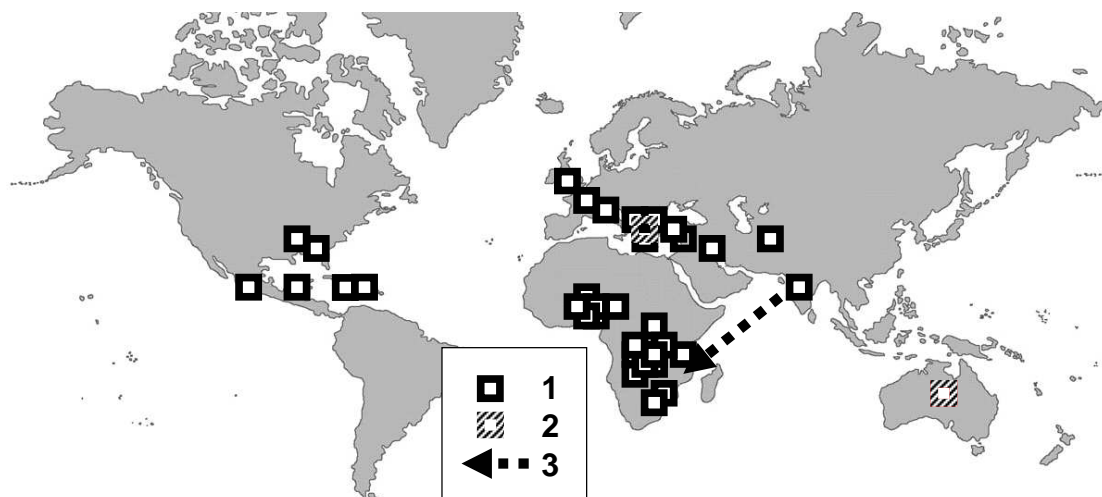
Comparative: Annual communal renewal of the fire was a widespread phenomenon in pre-modern Europe. This custom has been recorded for the remarkable Aegean island of Lemnos, which moreover stands out for such (presumably Pelasgian) traits as a fire cult dedicated to the god Hephaestus, and a mythical tradition of (temporary) female rule and female sexual revolt (Burkert 1970; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*). The *badnjak* Christmas log of the Serbs and other Balkan populations clearly marks a cognate custom (Evans 1876-1877). Annual extinction and rekindling of the fire is also found in Bulgaria (Conrad 1987) and Anatolian Turkey (And 1980). Annual extinction and rekindling of fire was part of Jewish ritual of the Karaites during the Middle Ages (Frank 2001). A similar rite has been part of Christianity especially in connection with Easter (Idinopulos 1982; MacGregor 1992). The custom was given much attention in the English Christian annual ritual and festive cycle during the Medieval and Early Modern periods (Hutton 1994); it was closely related with the folklore institution known as the Needfire ritual (Davidson 1955). The same custom was also reported in the *Perlesvaus*, a medieval French version of the Arthurian narratives (Williams 1937). At least partially informed by Christianity, the same custom is part of carnival celebrations in the Caribbean (Liverpool 1998) and in the Santería rituals in the same region (Wirtz 2005). A similar annual rite has been recorded for India (Jurewicz 2004; Mookerjee 1998) and among the Hindu immigrants that settled in Africa from the 19th century CE onward (Murray 1956; broken arrows in Fig. 9.5). Similar customs exist among Native Americans of the Southeast (cf. Johnson & Hook 1995: 5) but explicitly not among the Powhatan Indi-

ans of Virginia (*cf.* Rountree 1992); and in Meso America among the Aztecs (Elson & Smith 2001) and the Mayas (Long 1923). A limiting case is the Israelites' temple fire, which could not be lit from an external source (*Leviticus* 10: 2). Apparently, this temple fire was of a different, transformed and more transcendent class than the fires evoked in the narrative of the Cauldron of Kingship and its parallels, for it is a widely held Rabbinical contention that throughout the history of the Israelite temples, the fire was never extinguished by rain – it belongs to a godhead who (contrary to the Nkoya one) is not in the first place a god of rain.

In Fig. 9.6, not only the typical Pelasgian distribution is shown, but also the attestations in Northern Africa, in continuous lines along the Nile valley and across the Sahara, hint at probable North-South transmission routes – of which the Sahara one abounds with protohistoric rock art depicting chariots.

Looking at this distribution map, the obvious question is: why not take the region with the greatest incidence (sub-Saharan Africa) as the origin, and postulate historical transmission to other continents from there – or multilocal independent invention, for that matter. In fact, my answer to this question informs much of the analysis in the present paper, and of my second thoughts about Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis. The challenge of this kind of geographic distributions of traits (high African incidence, sporadic Eurasian incidence, yet a probable origin in Eurasia) is one of the reasons why I formulated the Pelasgian hypothesis. I consider the *spiked wheel trap*, a simple hunting device (Fig. 9.6), as the 'index fossil' for this kind of distributions, *cf.* the very similar distributions of the mankala board game, of geomantic divination, and (also see below, Fig. 9.10) that of the belief in a unilateral mythical being (van Binsbergen 1997c, 2010b, 2010c). In some cases it is possible to argue the greater Eurasian antiquity on archaeological grounds. My general argument is that, by the Late Bronze Age in the Mediterranean / West Asia, sub-Saharan Africa constituted a relatively vacant, defenceless cultural niche, into which relatively archaic Pelasgian traits (including Niger-Congo > Bantu?) could be diffused and where they could continue to thrive while in the Pelasgian core land (West Asia, the Mediterranean) they were already being superseded by local cultural innovations.

Fig. 9.5. Major attestations of the annual communal extinction and rekindling of fire



LEGEND: 1. trait attested; 2. cognate trait attested; 3. limited transmission of trait (accounting for only two African data points) through Indian indentured labour and other migration, 19th-20th c. CE; full references in: van Binsbergen, in preparation (b), but most already appear above.

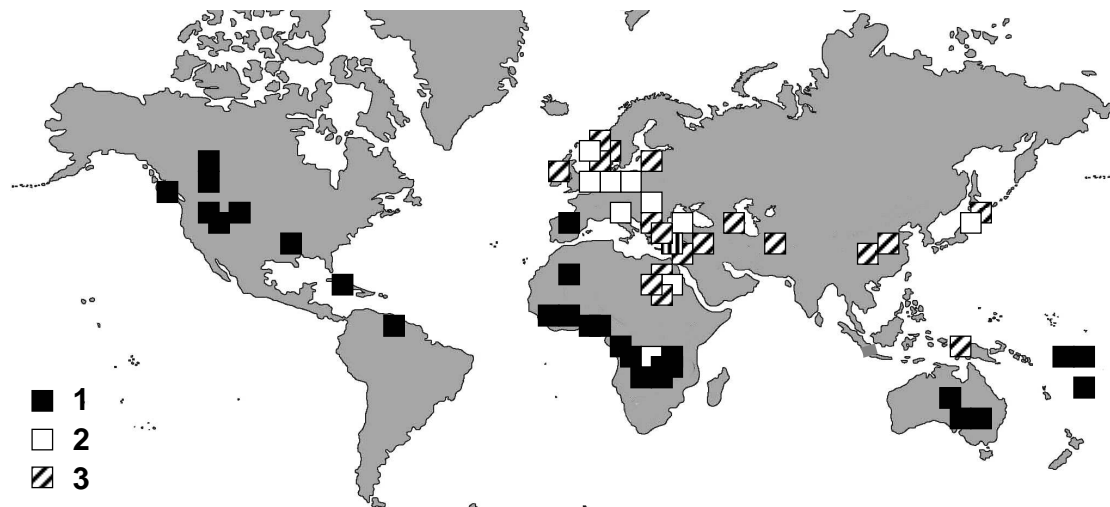
Fig. 9.6. Global distribution of the spiked wheel trap (as typical of Pelasgian distributions)



for sources: see van Binsbergen 2010b and Lindblom 1935

inset (obscuring a part of the world map where there are no attestations): modern spiked wheel from the Acholi people, Southern Sudan (Sparks 2006).


Fig. 9.7. Attestations of spider-related mythemes



1. Spider Supreme god; 2. oblique references to spider in folklore *etc.*, not mythical; 3. spinning and weaving goddesses, with spider connotations; full references in: van Binsbergen, in preparation (b).

5.11. Spider-like elements of the creator god

Nkoya: Nyambi as spider: not directly stated in Nkoya context today; but it is a spider that helps Nyambi escape from humans by climbing to heaven; thus also among neighbouring Zambian groups, where the creator god is called Leza (Cotterell 1989: 89). It is not sure whether we can consider Nyambi in the Nkoya conception a High God – he / she appears as immanent, earth-dweller, and intimidated by the ever more demanding humans, and the retreat to heaven is a flight. Some of the missionary accounts of Nyambi collected around 1900 suggest that Nyambi in fact is not God in his / her own right, but God's child: Jacottet (1899-1901) has a story where Nyambi has fallen from the sky, like

the Greek fire-god Hephaestus (*Ilias*, I, 568 f, etc.), Egyptian Min (whose belemnite symbol  equates him with lightning), or any demiurge. This makes it conceivable that Nyambi's shift to transcendent High God status is a result of the introduction of Christianity in the early 20th century. The missionary Smith (1907: 300f), who had a special comparative interest in African ideas of God (Smith 1950) notes a similar indeterminacy in the conception of god of the Ila, the Nkoya's eastern neighbours.

Comparative (on Spider-like elements of the creator god): Nyambi (with variants) carries spider-like connotations in West and Central African cultures (where there is a link with the trickster figure Anansi, considered a son of Nyambi carrying, probably, another variant of the Nyambi name). The comparative mythology of the Creator / Creatrix as Spider is very rich and reaches from West Africa (besides Nyambi / Anansi also the Yoruba war god Ogun – Cotterell 1989: 143), via Egypt (Neith), the Middle East and Ancient Greece (with the semantically and phonologically closely related cluster of Neith / Athena / Anahita / Anath / Inanna / Uttu, goddesses of weaving and warfare and perhaps to be understood as domesticated demoted Creation Goddesses demoted and supplanted under a later masculine cosmology), to surface also throughout Oceania (Cotterell 1989: 151, 133f, 219, 224, 240f; Willis 1994: 294). The spider-like equation of weaving and the sun is manifest also in the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu. Also the Tiwi of Northern Australia have a Spider Woman myth (Venbrux 2003). Apparently the circum-Pacific line is continued in North America among the Navajo (the benevolent Spider Woman Naste Etsan facilitating twin culture heroes' access to the sun god), and in the North American Prairie the culture hero and trickster Inktoni (Cotterell 1989: 240; Willis 1994: 227). More isolated, the spider appears as an ancient Australian icon (Stubbs 1978; Cotterell 1989: 58). Almost as if to encapsulate the vanquished goddess of an earlier dispensation, the spider is one of the Egyptian shaman's spirit familiars (Helck 1984; along with the midge and the mantis; the mantis would then be another old god, cf. Khoisan Heitsi-Eibib, with probably a West Asian prototype in view of that regional original of the Khoisan speakers, cf. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994).

5.12. The creator god associated with speaking

Nkoya: implied in the Nkoya theonym Nyambi (found, with variations, throughout West and Central Africa) is perhaps the proto-Bantu root *gamb-* 'to speak' (Guthrie no. 770), but this may be a popular etymology which I have not myself heard among the Nkoya (cf. their *Ngambela* = 'Speaker', Prime Minister). Baumann (1936; also Pettersson 1973: 144) claims that no etymology for the name Nyambi can be found; this amounts to the claim that the origin of that name lies outside the Bantu-speaking region – a claim I am inclined to support in the light of the proposed continuity with West African, Mediterranean and West Asian theonyms **[n][a][t][n][a][t]*, such as Neith, Athena, Anat *etc.*, cf. Ghanaian Nyame. The bird-like connotations of Nyambi are found also in Northern Angola (Capello & Ivens 1886; Wastiau 1997). Nyambi abounds in Dennett's (1906: 166f and *passim*) intriguing discussion of West African kingship, and his explanation, although with the appearances of another popular etymology, is worth quoting:

'The name for God is NZAMBI and its literal meaning is the personal essence (IMBI) of the fours (ZIA or ZA = four). What then are the fours? They are the groups each of four powers called BAKICI BACI [*i.e.* 'representatives of all the different families owning sacred ground within his kingdom']' (Dennett 1906: 13, 166f).

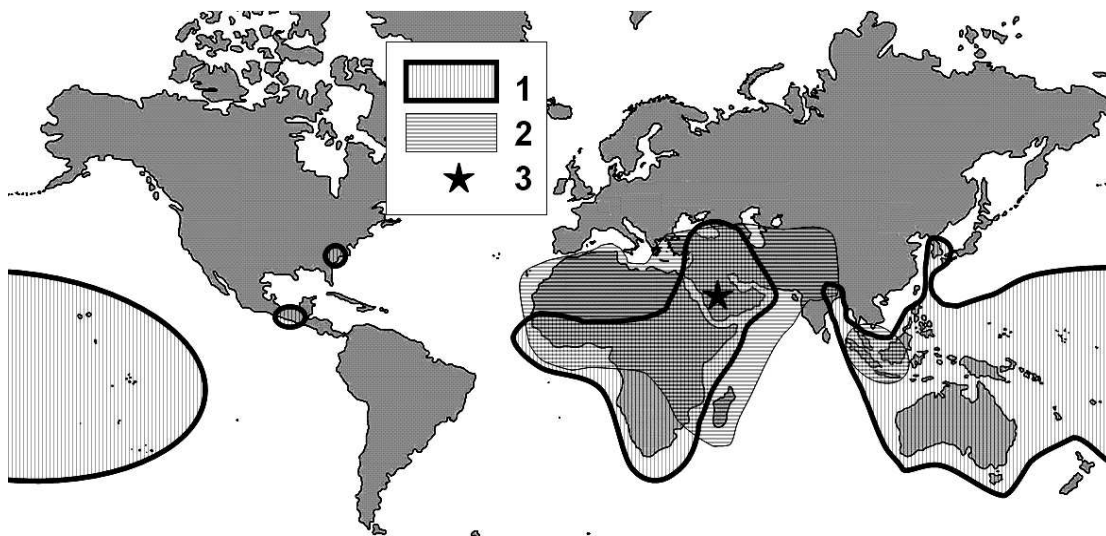
Comparative: the idea of the Creator / Creatrix who through an utterance brings the world into being has many Eurasian parallels *e.g.* *Genesis* 1: 3; Babylonian Marduk in *Enuma Elish*, see: King 1999 / 1902). This brings to mind two animals with widespread Eurasian connotations of speaking: (a) the bee (both in Eurasiatic / Nostratic and in Afroasiatic) because (*e.g.* Budge 1898; *Judges* 4: 4f) of its humming noise and as a divine epiphany (also see the reed and bee complex discussed above) (b) white aquatic birds, especially the swan, which are symbolic of, or identical with, the Mother of the Primal Waters and hence an ancient creator goddess, all over Eurasia from the Celtic and Uralic realms all the way to East Asia (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, *in press*).

5.13. Aetiological myths of circumcision

Nkoya: According to Nkoya traditions, their kingships were established when they fled from a tyrannical king (Mwaat Yaav, see elsewhere in this Section) seeking to impose the circumcision rites that he controlled. The Nkoya claim that circumcision was instituted when a female royal allowed her son to play in the grass, where his foreskin was accidentally cut by a sharp blade of grass.

Comparative: male genital mutilation is widespread globally (see Fig. 9.8) and its origins are lost in the mists of time. The *Tanach* contains one of the few aetiological myths known to me on this topic (*Genesis* 17:10-14, cf. *Joshua* 5: 4-7). For the Dogon, whose recorded elaborate mythology however has been called to question, circumcision originates in the desire to remove primordial reproductive organs of the opposite gender (Bonnefoy 2002 / 1991: 125f). The Tsonga of South East Africa attribute (Junod 1962: I, 72f) the institution to the Lemba people, conspicuous for their apparent remnants of West Semitic culture (Parfitt 1992; van Warmelo 1966; von Sicard 1952: 140 ff). Among the Tañala of Madagascar (linguistically, at least, more cognate to South East Asia than to Africa) circumcision appears in several myth but more as a taken-for-granted background than as an *explicandum* (Beaujard 2004). The Nkoya account is reminiscent of *Exodus* 4: 24-26: ‘And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. 25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. 26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.’

Fig. 9.8. Global distribution of male genital mutilation



1. Regions where male genital mutilation has been practiced ‘traditionally’ since pre-modern times; 2. Diffusion in context of Islam from 7th century CE from 3; 3. Mecca; from: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press, where full references are given.

The Central and South African connotations of the Nkoya kingship make it possible to connect the motif of fleeing from a tyrannical king who seeks to impose circumcision, (a) to the advent of Islam in Northern India c. 1000 CE – groups fleeing such imposition fled to West Asia, Europe and East Africa as ‘Gypsies’, Tzigane, Roma people; the alternative name for one of the two major Nkoya royal titles, Kahare, is Kale (Smith & Dale 1920), which in five continents, including Africa, is a Gypsy name meaning ‘Black’; (b) to the Islamisation of Central Asia around the same time.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For a background on Roma / Gypsies, cf. Turner 1926; Kenrick 1993; Marushiakova & Popov 2001; Guy 2001; Fonseca 1996; Hancock 1987.

5.14. The cauldron of kingship

Nkoya: In the Nkoya myth of the institution of kingship (in their own perception one of their two central institutions, the other being female puberty rites⁵⁶) the Cauldon of Kingship,⁵⁷ full of meat, is cooking on an enormous fire, and the challenge is: which of the clans can lift it off the fire? Only one princess / clan leader succeeds, and takes the kingship. (The episode concludes (see above) with a blissful downpour of Rain / Mvula, and the royal adage linking Nkoya kingship with the Tears / Drops of Mvula / Rain.) An illuminating variant was published by Jacottet 1899-1901 (*cf.* Jalla 1903): here it is the superior resourcefulness of humans over animals / clans which decides the outcome – the humans pour water on the fire; of course, the animals in Jacottet are identical with the clans (named after animals) in the Nkoya version – the same kind of transformation is standard in North American flood myths, which are typically set in a primordial time when society still consisted of speaking and acting animals, *i.e.* clan totems.

Meanwhile, in historical times the central symbol of royal office has been, not a cauldron, but a *Conus*-shell white disc to be worn as a pendant (*mpande*, with equivalents all over Southern Africa, where also the term *ndoro* is used), and the royal drums,⁵⁸ to which human sacrifices were customarily made comparable to the foundation sacrifices for the royal palace, fence, and tomb. Also in South East and East Asia, a typological convergence can be noted in recent millennia, from bronze vessels symbolising high status, to bronze drums and bells for royal orchestras (*cf.* Han Xiaorong 1998). To further complicate matters, von Sicard (1952), in an intriguing and well documented study that however (like most of his work) has been radically dismissed by classic anthropologists of South Central Africa, sees the royal drums of that region as equivalents, even transformations, of the Ark of the Covenant of the ancient Israelites. Such drums are certainly, as ultimate group symbols, comparable to the aniconic *palladia* of West Asia and the Aegean (Gardiner 1893; Pötscher 1979b) – including those associated with Hermes and with Athena. At the same time they carry implied associations with the vessel in which the Flood hero made his escape – not without significance, for throughout the Pelasgian realm (which includes Ancient Egypt) boats are venerated as ritual objects, and part of royal ritual throughout the Pelasgian realm (including the motif of royal twins, possibly flood survivors) can be understood as a re-enactment of the Flood and second creation, the retrieval of fire, the repopulation of the earth, etc.

Comparative: This motif confirms once more the closeness between Nkoya and Celtic mythology – I submit: because of the Pelasgian / West to Central Asian origin of both. Cauldrons of kingship abound in the Celtic world (the cauldron of the Tuatha Dé Danann; the cauldron of the Dagda; the cauldron of Dymwach the Giant – which was one of the 13 treasures of the Island of Britain (Brom-

⁵⁶ Among the twentieth-century Nkoya no aetiological myth of female puberty rites could be collected, even though these rites featured prominently in my decades of fieldwork, and I was granted access to secret string figures and songs texts. My student Thera Rasing (2002) had the same experience, working on female puberty rites of the Zambian Bemba.

⁵⁷ Probably there never were any cast-iron cauldrons made on African soil. The Nkoya story of the Cauldron of Kingship, set in a context of hunting-gathering as still the sole mode of production, would have to refer to an earthenware pot if historical logic were to be strictly applied; however, I am confident that latter-day Nkoya implicitly take the Cauldron of Kingship to have been of cast iron. Portuguese-made iron cooking-pots have been part of Nkoya court life ever since the penetration of eastbound long-distance trade beyond the Zambezi, in the 17th century CE. At the height of the slave trade (which was only effectively suppressed in the 1900s, whilst slavery as an institution lasted till 1930), cooking-pots were only second to guns as major articles of wealth and exchange against slaves. As late as 1919, Barotse *indunas* (royal representatives) still exacted a tribute in pots (as, most probably, slaves) from the Kahare area (Zambia Archives, file ZA 1 / 13). The surprising but multiple Eurasian Steppe connotations of the Nkoya kingship lend another dimension to this problem: Hunnic cauldrons of typical design specific of the invading Steppe pastoralists were found all over Europe for the middle of the first millennium CE (*cf.* Maenchen-Helfen & Knight 1973).

⁵⁸ These are kettle drums, *cf.* below, Cauldron of kingship.

wich 1991; Rhys 1891; Squire 1905, 1906; MacCulloch 1908-1920; Macalister 1941). A magic cauldron played a major part in the story of the birth of the great Welsh bard Taliesin, as recounted in the last of the *Mabinogion* stories (Quest 1849; Clouston 1887); however, even though the cauldron and fluid of inspiration have correspondences in the Nordic and Sanskrit Asian world, I am inclined to consider this story part of the legitimization of the bardic profession, and of relatively late and secondary nature. Arthur acquired his cauldron of kingship through theft. Cú Chulainn, himself a divine hero, steals his royal kettle from a god. A similarly stolen kettle appears, as Aegir's, in Nordic mythology. Also in Baltic mythology there is a very close parallel with the Nkoya narrative of the cauldron of kingship (Meistere 1997-2002, based on the Early Modern author Fabricius). 'They pay homage to Perkons by first pouring him beer, which is then brought around the fire, and at last pour it in this fire, asking Perkons to give them rain.' Celtic kings at enthronisation are reported to be symbolically cooked in a cooking-pot full of horse meat (Graves 1988: 384; a more extensive and scholarly source is McCormick 2007: 91; O'Meara 1982: 110; Squire 1905: 73f. For a wider Early Indo-European perspective on this cf. Puhvel 1970; this includes (Puhvel 1970: 161f) the Indian *ásvamedha* ritual mating of queen and stallion.)⁵⁹ Various properties were attributed to these cauldrons (e.g. as symbols of rebirth and of the Goddess's womb, as granting of longevity, rejuvenation of slain bodies, Holy Grail, torture instrument, divination instrument (with a Japanese temple / tea counterpart, Hastings 1908-1921, Index volume, s.v. 'cauldron') and evocation of the leader's largesse, cornucopia-like; the latter is certainly compatible with a pre-food production, hunting-gathering mode of production, cf. Sahlins 1965). Many of these elements survive in modern Wicca cults. Such features are not limited to ancient Ireland but extend all over Iron-Age Europe, from Gaul (where a famous cauldron, that of Gundestrup was crafted c. 100 BCE) to Denmark (where that cauldron ended up in a peat bog) and Thrace (which has been claimed to be the home of the narrative themes displayed on that cauldron (Klindt-Jensen 1959; Olmsted 1976; Kaul & Martens 1995; Kaul *et al.* 1991); another comparable cauldron, from the Bronze Age, was found at Hassle, Sweden, in 1936. Also the Graeco-Roman war god Ares / Mars is reputed to rejuvenate himself by bathing in a kettle of boiling water, cf. the above royal enthronisation rites (Anonymous, 'Early Roman Religion', 1955: 28). The mytheme of the cauldron of kingship is also related to the struggle over sacred tripods, such as mark the mythical encounter between Apollo and Heracles in the context of the Delphi temple precinct (Fontenrose 1980: 401f). The tripod at Delphi was not only seized by Heracles but also by Lykos (Lykors) / Pyrrhos / Deukalion (Fontenrose 1980: 422f). Ino (Leukothea / White Goddess, the mother's sister of Dionysus) was stricken with madness by Hera and put her infant Melicartes (< Melqart, 'Lord of the Town', major Phoenician god equated with Heracles) into a seething cauldron (Euripides *Medea* 1284f; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1,9,1f. 3,4,3; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4, 506-542; Farnell 1916; Meyer 1884). Cochrane (n.d.: 130) claims worldwide cognates for this story. This does not exhaust the motif of the cauldron of kingship. Also in the *Tanach* is the flesh pot (*Exodus* 16: 3) a symbol of abundance. The motif also surfaces in the Egyptian Pyramid texts, when the megalomaniac utterances of King Unas (c. 2400 BCE) in his so-called 'Cannibal Hymn' boasts about the cannibalistic contents of his cauldron (Mercer 1952: utterances 402a ff; Faulkner 1924). The motif also surfaces in Indian mythology in a myth about the cosmic god Vishnu (Keith 1917: 78f):

'The sound *ghrm*, with which Visnu's head fell, became the *gharma*, or sacrificial kettle; and

⁵⁹ Cf. in Greek mythology the mating of Pasiphae – Cretan Minos' spouse and as 'All-Shining' an evocation of sun or moon; but also, in Nkoya enthronisation ritual, the transgressive incestuous mating of the prospective king with his – nowadays classificatory – sister; is this another displaced Central Asian Steppe / South Asian motif, along with the ghabasti-carriage pole? 'Classificatory kinship' is a technical term forged by the early American anthropologist Morgan (1871), to denote a system where members of society are subsumed under a small number of very broad categories, whose nature and implied relationships are nonetheless modelled after primary relations existing between close biological kin. E.g. among the Nkoya, every person has a considerable number of 'fathers', 'mothers', 'brothers', 'sisters', 'children' – including distant, putative and fictive kinsmen, and their spouses, in addition to close biological kin.

as his strength dwindled away, the *mahdvira*, or ‘pot of great strength,’ acquired its name.’

Highly significant, considering the abundance of Central Asian reminiscences in Nkoya mythology, is that the cauldron of leadership also occurs in the Kyrgyz Epic *Manas* (Köçümkulkiži 2005, lines 2970f). Bronze vessels were the major regalia in Shang 商朝 China, and foretold the end of that dynasty; the fact that the Chinese emperor had no monopoly of the vessels but merely was allowed to have a larger number of them than other nobles, suggests this to be a pre-imperial trait marking leadership. Still further Eurasian parallels can be found (e.g. Zournatzi 2000). Even from North America, references to a ritual apparently similar to that described in the Nkoya myth can be found in the Heyoka Society’s ritual of pulling off the boiling kettle (Swann 1994: 437f).

5.15. Female royal prowess

Nkoya: Legendary Queen Shikanda of the Nkoya, whose epithet is Shikanda bakandile baKaonde ‘Shikanda who destroyed / circumcised the Kaonde [the Nkoya’s northern neighbours]’, is a formidable mythical female warrior – true to a model of female military prowess (combined with total sexual liberty) ranging from the Queen Nzingha / Jinga c. 1600 CE of the Mbundu people of Angola (cf. Fraser 1988), Queen Naumba of the Sala (a Zambian people closely related to the Nkoya; cf. Brelsford 1935), to West African female warriors in Benin (formerly Dahomey; cf. Law 1993; Alpern 1998 however considers the Benin women regiments as an Early Modern phenomenon).


Comparative: Female prowess is found in the warrior connotations of North African women in Antiquity (Lhote 1959), and the West Asian Amazons. The latter have been habitually dismissed as a mere myth of male altering self-construction (Blok 1995), yet were in the recent decade to a considerable extent confirmed by sound archaeological research (cf. Davis-Kimball 2002; Guliaev 2003). In perfect accordance with the Pelasgian cross-model, we also find warrior women in Celtic Europe e.g. Queen Boadicea, ancient Nordic Europe (Saxo Grammaticus 1979), and in the extreme East Japan’s women *samurai*. Moreover there is the series of warrior goddesses discussed elsewhere in this Section, from Neith / Athena / Anahita etc. Shikanda’s name may be indicative of a further South Asian connection, cf. the war god Skanda who defeats the demon Taraka and thus saves the world (Willis 1994: 84); pronounced by Nkoya-speaking mouths, Skanda would sound as ‘Shikanda’.

5.16. Royal sibling complementarity / rivalry

Nkoya: In Nkoya mythology, Katete and Luhamba are a royal sibling pair; so are Shihoka Nalinanga and his (classificatory) sister Likambi Mange / ‘Sorceress’, but the latter are locked in mortal rivalry and envy. Shihoka lived at Lukolwe near the Kabombo / Zambezi confluence, while Likambi lived on the Zambezi, in the flood plain. Shihoka’s people produced boats and wooden dishes, and when Likambi sent messengers requesting her rightful share of these products, her envoys were chased. This made Likambi resort to sorcery, she had a diviner-priest produce a beautiful artificial woman full of poison; when this object was sent to Lukolwe, she proved irresistible, and – as a murderous bride of the AT category – the cause of Shihoka’s death. In general it appears (van Binsbergen 1992) as if the Nkoya male king (and his counterparts among neighbouring groups) only rules in the name of his sister – and this is a widespread pattern among Niger-Congo-speaking peoples (Claessen 1981, 1984).⁶⁰

Comparative: Many Flood stories following the Standard Elaborate format (see above) have primordial twins as flood survivors, who incestuously repopulate the world, and who thus at Second Creation may emulate the First Creation. Cf. Genesis 1 f (Adam and Hava / Eve). In Ancient Egyptian mythology the first two creatures, Shu and Tefnut, are raised in the very swamp at Aḥ-bit (‘The Horizon of the Bee [Ruler]’) / Chemmis (they are called ‘the two royal children of Chemmis’ (Helck 1979), where also Horus (formally their grandchild, but clearly belonging to a different tradition) was

⁶⁰ Underneath the Shihoka-Likambi rivalry we could also suspect that between Nkoya and Lozi, but since *open* expressions of animosity *vis-à-vis* the Lozi are common-place in 20th-century Nkoyaland, it seems less likely that such animosity would have to be concealed in myth.

to be hidden by Isis. For a possible link with the Nkoya kingship, see above, the ‘reed and bee complex’. In Celtic mythology the royal twins, with the rivalry element, appear as Arthur and his sisters Morgause and Morgan le Fay / Sorceress (who possibly feature among the Nkoya as ‘the two royal ladies’ – which incidentally is also an Egyptian throne title,  *nbty*. As a result of this rivalry, Arthur dies at the hands of a freak (his son by his sister Morgause, at least in Sir Thomas Malory’s version of *Le Morte d’Arthur* – 1978 / 1485) created and sent by one of his sister’s sorcery acts. Also in Uralic mythology: in the *Kalevala*, Vaeinaemoeinen and Joukahainen struggle over bows, boats, horses and gold in a way reminiscent of Shihoka and Likambi (Tamminen 1928: 90).⁶¹

5.17. Serpent, child [or mother] of Drought

Nkoya: In Nkoya mythology, a prominent character is king Shihoka Nalinanga: ‘Snake, Child [or Mother] of Drought’, known as a cattle raider and locked in deadly rivalry with his royal sister. Here we may perceive a link between Nkoya mythology and that of neighbouring Eastern Angola, whose cultures and languages are continuous with those of Western Zambia. One of the major Angolan tales (Chatelain 1894) deals with the descent of the male Sudika-Mbambi into the underworld. Sudika is in love with the daughter of the underworld king Kalunga-Ngombe [‘Grave-Cattle’], but she has been kidnapped by Kinioka kia Tumba [‘Snake of Tumba / Skin’? – worldwide, the association of skin and dryness is a common one], apparently a cognate character to Shihoka Nalinanga. In the underworld, Sudika is swallowed by a monster, Kimbiji [‘Two-Persons’ ?] kia Malenda a Ngandu [With Crocodile Scales’]; however, Sudika’s brother Kabundungulu catches the monster and cuts it open, after which he magically restores his brother to life from the bones, in shamanic fashion. A great water serpent is also very conspicuous in the stories which Jacottet collected in Western Zambia at the end of the 19th century (e.g. Jacottet 1899-1901: III, 71f, 136f narrative XXV and LVII.); under the Luyi name Lingongole, this mythical character is reminiscent of the Rainbow Snake. It should be distinguished from the Great Forest Snake (Jacottet 1899-1901: iii, 138), who in the modern Nkoya consciousness has become indistinguishable from Mwenda-Njangula.

Comparative: The snake / serpent is a feature of mythology everywhere and of all times. I felt justified to claim the presence of a snake Narrative Complex already in the very oldest mythology, that is, included in Pandora’s Box. The primordial snake often appears in the form of the Rainbow Serpent (in Australia and archaic Africa; Buchler & Maddock 1978), but this celestial form often has a complement in a terrestrial or aquatic serpent; the celestial and terrestrial / aquatic forms may also coincide, which stands to reason since in many archaic cosmologies there is considerable equivalence between ‘the Waters Above’ (the sky), ‘the Waters Below’ (the underworld, Apsu *etc.*), and the Waters ‘Aside’ of the ordinary life-world, the seas and rivers. The rainbow appears when rain is over (cf. *Genesis* 9: 13, after Nūah’s Flood) and therefore is the adversary of rain, the harbinger of drought. Cf. the Australian notion of drought as the son of Rain, the former seeking to prevent the latter, his father, from falling (Andrews 2000). However, Rain, as Demiurge, in Nkoya cosmology and myth appears, not in a paternal but in a filial role, as bird-like child of a bird-like High God which in recent centuries has been known under the name of Nyambi. I prefer to interpret Shihoka’s mythical character not by reference to Pandora’s Box, but to much more recent mythical connotations. Shihoka’s symbolism is somewhat reminiscent of the West Asian snake symbolism informing such biblical passages as *Genesis* 3 (temptation by and cursing of the snake, causing humans to be evicted from Paradise into the wilderness which

⁶¹ The transition from paradisiacal sibling complementarity to deadly sibling rivalry is not obvious, and suggests that two mythemes of widely different background and origin have been combined here: (a) the motif of the paradisiacal siblings, at first or second creation (in other words, after the Flood), and (b) a masculinising telescoping of generations and authorities, that transforms (under the impact of the new cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth) the Virgin Mother of the Waters with her Only Son and Lover, into an uneasy dyadic union, in which the male partner, with celestial connotations, claims equality and usurps the female partner’s seniority, both in generation and in prerogatives of ruling.

by implication is drought-stricken) and *Numbers* 21: 8 (the raising of the brazen snake in the desert). The association of the underworld with cattle is common-place in European mythology (*cf.* Hercules with the cattle of Geryon and of Cacus, but also Pluto's / Hades' association with cattle as the most obvious form of wealth in Indo-European contexts; the association also surfaces in several of Grimm's *Hausmärchen*; Grimm & Grimm 1812-1815 / 1996) – and Shihoka is, among other things, a cattle raider (also see Unilateral being, below). Not only as a conflict between royal siblings of opposite gender, but also in terms of the dry / wet opposition, this conflict is reminiscent of that of Arthur and Morgan. Morgan's name means 'sea-born' (Rhys 1891: 22f, *cf.* 324f), and she, again, is an epiphany of the Mother of the Waters – hence the rightful Lady of Avalon (Rhys 1891: 348), whose position is usurped by male ascendancy. According to one version Morgan, too, resorts to the production of an artificial human being to inflict fatal harm upon Arthur. In Shihoka Nalinanga, a specific parallel with Ancient Egypt may be pointed out: the fact that there we have the First-Dynasty King Snake (*W3ḏ*) whose name may also be translated as Green. Moreover Shu, the ancient Egyptian air-god whose name means Emptiness or Dryness, has a son Geb, the earth god, – the latter is not himself represented as a snake but displays the chthonic connotations of the snake which are virtually universal; for the Geb motif in sub-Saharan Africa (*cf.* Ndigi 1996). Also *cf.* Zmey Gorynych, the dragon of the Slavic mythology; its name is translated as 'Snake son-of-mountain', *cf.* earth / drought; and in Indian mythology: *Vṛtra*, the drought-causing serpent (Mackenzie 1913). In many mythologies, the opposition wet / dry creates a central dynamism. It is this opposition, in fact, that informs the old Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land. Here the senior position is accorded to the aquatic side, 'the Mother of the Waters', who gives birth to the land as the junior component of reality, and who had to do this from a virginal state because there was no other being to impregnate her. In the Nkoya narrative the dry / wet opposition is applied in several ways. 'Snake Child or Parent of Drought', although producing boats, lives in the forest, while his counterpart lives in the flood plain, as the structural exponent of the Mother of the Waters, who in vain claims her privilege of supremacy, after her position has already been redefined from intergeneration (Virgin Mother and Only Child, who becomes her lover) to Elder Sister / Younger Brother – with further humiliation in stock for the Elder Sister. The opposition between Rain and Drought is, however, not just a binary cosmological opposition, but may be interpreted as part of a transformational cycle involving not only fire and water, but also earth, air, metal, and possibly other elements such as aether (*cf.* van Binsbergen 2009, where the implied presence of this cycle among the Nkoya is discussed). The suggestion of cyclical transformation around Shihoka Nalinanga has a parallel in Nordic mythology: the rain god Freyr on the day of Ragnarok (the Nordic Apocalypse) will battle without weapons (for he gave his sword away to Skirnir), and will be the first to be killed by the fire giant Surt [a Fire Giant] – again enacting the same scheme of Water being destroyed by Fire. In the present volume, Nick Allen (2010) treats the same essentially cyclical and elemental opposition for Hephaestus (Fire) versus Scamander (Water), and *Vṛtra* (Drought Serpent) versus Indra (Rain). So at one level the conflict between the siblings is to be explained as the antagonistic interaction between elements within a transformative cycle: 'Water destroys Fire', 'Fire destroys Wood', etc.

5.18. Artificial woman wreaks doom

Nkoya: When Shihoka Nalinanga does not meet her demands, Likambi Mange has a diviner-priest construct an artificial woman, who is sent to Shihoka and causes his death.

Comparative: The motif of artificially constructed human beings is so central in today's popular culture (cyborgs *etc.*), that we are inclined to consider it the expression of highly developed technological culture, in which electronic and digital advances have brought about the situation where man-machine communication is increasingly supplanting the interaction between humans. However, the same motif is prominent in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (*cf.* Higley 1997a, 1997b), where the artificial beings are studied rumoured to have been created by some of the finest male minds in European cultural history: Virgil, Simon Magus, Pope Sylvester II, Albertus Magnus, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Paracelsus, Rabbi Loew of Prague, René Descartes, Thomas Edison and on into the twentieth century – with such parallels as Daedalus, Hephaestus, Talus and Pygmalion in the imagination of the Ancient World. The related motif of the cyborg has so proliferated in recent years

that we cannot begin to indicate the relevant literature. A major early study in this field was: Haraway (1991). Meanwhile the most famous example in this category is Mary Shelley's literary creation, *Frankenstein*, cf. Shelley 1831; Heideman 2001). Artificial humans are a feature of the imagination worldwide – combining the appropriation of divine creative power, with the evil connotations that such hubris predictably has. The artificial creation of humans, especially from earth or mud, is a widespread motif: Chinese Nü Wa 女媧 (Willis 1994: 91), Oceanian gods, the biblical god (*Genesis* 1-2; alternatively from Adam's rib, and anyway the perpetrator of the Fall of Man), and, by Hephaestus from the earth / Earth / Gaia, Greek Pandora is created as punishment for humans' acquisition of fire from Prometheus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X; Willis 1994: 131). Cf. Penglas (1997) on the Near Eastern antecedents of the Pandora myth (as distinct from Egyptian antecedents of Pandora, as in Bernal 2001: 25f after Walcot 1966). Greek shape-shifting sea god Proteus substituted Helen by a dummy to be sent to Troy to be the doom of her times, keeping the original at his island Pharos before the Egyptian coast, where innocently she was later reunited with Menelaus (Cotterell 1989: 232). Bata, Anubis' brother, flees after a Potiphar-like incident (cf. *Genesis* 39: 1 f), to Syria, where the Ennead has a wife for him made by Chnum. This wife is almost violated by personified Sea. Bata has emasculated himself and has hidden his heart in a pine tree, etc. Bata becomes a bull, then an avocado tree, then a piece of furniture, whose splinter kills the bad woman. Bata ends up as king (Willis 1994: 53). This does not exhaust the mythical motif of an artificial woman wreaking doom. Its further manifestations include: continental European Melusine, an evil shape-shifting mermaid who – with all her snake connotations – appears to be essentially a domesticated transformation of the prehistoric 'Mother of the Primal Waters' (cf. Couldrette 1866; Higley 1999); the Lilith of Hebrew tradition (cf. Koltuv 1986 and references cited there); Roman Fama, 'Rumour'; and Blodeuwedd, the artificial woman created out of flowers so as to marry a man whose mother (Aranrhod) has cursed him never to marry a mortal (*Mabinogion*, IV; Jones & Jones 1949). Melusine and Blodeuwedd spring from the Celtic world and reinforce the Celtic dimension of such Eurasian continuities as surface repeatedly in the Nkoya case. In a way, Graeco-Roman Aphrodite / Venus (born not from a womb but from sea foam / from Uranus' severed genitals (Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 176f), and the cause of incessant mischief in the world of gods and men) is quite a home in this company. Widespread in medieval European literature is the myth of the poison girl (Hertz 1905), featuring Aristotle of all people, and with reminiscences also of Medea, who however was of normal though divine birth, granddaughter of the Sun, daughter of Jason's adversary Aeëtes of Colchis, and niece of Circe. The motif is also sporadically found in North America: in a Tlingit myth, Raven made a woman under the earth (Swanton 1909: 32). Usually, then, the evil artificial human is female, but also male examples may be found, e.g. the 9-mile-long Mokerkialfi ('Mist Wader') created out of clay by the evil Jotun giants for their battle with the Germanic gods (Guerber 1909: 74f); or the golem of medieval and Early-Modern Jewish tradition, again out of clay, usually male, and whose evil deeds are scarcely compensated by the fact that he was intended to protect the Jews from accusations of ritual human sacrifice (Cf. Idel 1990; Looby n.d.).

5.19. Building with skulls

Nkoya: The legendary Nkoya king Kayambila's throne name boasts that he thatched his house with the skulls of his enemies. This cruel practice has, in the first place, regional resonances. It is part of a violent skull complex that was quite central to Nkoya culture before modern times. Still in the late 19th century CE, the Nkoya courtiers are reported to drink their mead and sorghum beer from the skulls (in fact, occiputs) of their slain enemies. It is to the hunter and explorer George Copp Westbeech (*apud* Tabler 1963; Sampson 1972) that we owe a description of Nkoya use of the occiput. The Nkoya's eastern neighbours, the Ila, kept piles of skulls in memory of the Barotse (*cum* Nkoya!) attack upon their cattle in the 1880s, despite Ila defeat (Smith & Dale 1920: I, 44). For parallels to the Nkoya skull cup among the Nkoya's northern neighbours the Kaonde, cf. Jaeger 1974; for Zimbabwean parallels, cf. the numerous references to smashed skulls in Selous 1893, 1896. Among the Ila, whose culture and language overlaps with that of the Nkoya, still in the early 20th century the practice prevailed that a suitor was only eligible for marriage if he brought his prospective affines the skull of a slain enemy (Smith & Dale 1920: I, 44, 77; Muntamba 1973). Moreover, especially at the annual royal Kazanga

harvest festival the king would conclude his royal dance pouring a libation (nowadays of village-brewn beer, originally probably of slave blood; in the latter case the episode would be strikingly similar to early-dynastic Egyptian rites, *cf.* Wilkinson 2001) for his royal ancestors at an arboreal shrine, and drinking part of the liquid – slaves would be immolated for the occasion, and the occiput of a slain slave buried to the rim into the ground in front of the shrine would serve as a drinking vessel (Mayowe 1994).

Comparative: The skull cult is likely to go back, ultimately, to Palaeolithic times. Admittedly, Binford (1981) has argued that what has been construed as evidence of cultic and cannibalistic practices of Palaeolithic Man (*e.g.* the *Sinanthropus*, 500 ka BP) may very well be attributed to the known actions of predatory animals. Yet the cult of the cave-bear and the practice of skull offerings continue to be more or less accepted themes in the study of prehistoric religion (Maringer 1952: 75-82 and *passim*, which contains a wealth of information of skull cults, see index of that book, s. v. ‘schedel’ / ‘skull’; Gahs 1928). A general study of the place of the human skull in cultural history was made by Henschen (1966). Skull cults are a widespread feature of Neolithic cultures in the Near East (Mellaart 1967; Edwards *et al.* 1986: index, s.v. skulls (painted, plastered, on floors, skull-burials and cult, Jericho), pp. 505-506). Like heads conserved in honey, human skulls were widely used in divination (Betz 1986: 75: PGM IV.2125-39; Montgomery 1911), which may have extended to libation or drinking from such skulls.

Building with skulls. Before we discuss this gruesome form of architecture, let us consider the more positive case, when the building-with-skulls mytheme has associations not only with extreme violence and destruction, but also with cosmogony: in Ancient Nordic mythology, the gods fashioned the sky out of the skull of the giant Ymir, and used his eyebrows as a protective barrier (Rosenberg 1994). However, as we have seen in Table 9.3, the Kayambila motif reflects two AT motifs that have a wide global distribution: F771.1.9 – house of skulls as murderer’s abode; and G315 – demon cuts off men’s heads to build with them. The parallels to the Kayambila motif in Greek mythology are unmistakable. Cynus / Swan (Fontenrose 1980: 29) was reported to be in the habit of ambushing travellers and piling up their skulls, from which he intended to build a temple for the god whose son he was reputed to be: Ares, Apollo, or Phobos (Apollodorus *Bibliotheca*, 2.114; Stesichorus, Fragment 207); only Heracles’ victory over Cynus prevented this architectural feat. Fontenrose argues that Cynus is primarily a manifestation of the underworld god Hades; the association with the sun is no longer puzzling once we realise that – as highlighted in Egyptian belief – the sun passes through the underworld during the night; an ulterior explanation would be that the swan is an evocation of the Mother of the Primary Waters under the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land, and that later this creator deity was fragmented into sky god, sea god and underworld god, and masculinated. Nor was the possession of a mound of skulls limited to Cynus: Diomedes son of Ares was reputed to possess a mound of skulls, apparently a rudimentary shrine in the nature of a *herm*, an earth shrine found all over the Old World from Khoisan speaking Namibia (where it is sacred to the trickster god Heitsi-Eibib) to Mongolia, Tibet and even North America, typically located at through-roads and at crossroads and to which individual travellers are supposed to add a stone. Antaeus son of Poseidon boasted a similar collection of skulls (Fontenrose 1980: 330). Like Cynus, Antaeus was reputedly killed by Heracles,⁶² notably in

⁶² The question as to why Heracles / ‘Glory of Hera’, should have the task of clearing the world from monsters is a challenge in its own right for comparative mythology. As long as we stick to the naïve etymology of Hera as ‘heroine’, we will not make much progress towards answering this question. Nor should we take Heracles as one, monolithic and integrated character – a great diversity of characters hide under this designation (Gruppe 1964; Pötscher 1979a; Brundage 1958; Levy 1934; Graves 1988). Burkert (1979) sees Heracles as originating in Palaeolithic hunter culture and traditions of shamanistic crossings into the netherworld; that is less revealing than it sounds, since we have reason to presume (van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, and above) that *all* mythology has that kind of background. As one of the possible readings of the Heracles character I submit the following. Typical of mythological complexes is their layeredness (*cf.* Farmer *et al.* 2002). Often, older dispensations of a worldview and the attending mythology are not downright supplanted by later, dominant ones, but forced into an uneasy, twisted, compromised relationship with them. Hera is, from one point of view, a transformation of the

Libya, which in classical Antiquity referred to Africa, but not to Africa alone – there also being vast stretches of Asia designated by that name (Karst 1931). Whereas in the Cynus myth the skulls serve as building bricks rather than as roofing-tiles, Antaeus corresponds even more closely with Kayambila in that it was his specific intention to use the collected skulls for roofing, in his case roofing a temple for his father Poseidon. Antaeus's link with the underworld is further accentuated by the fact that his mother was Gaia / Earth, so that whenever he was exhausted from combat, he would only have to lie down in order to have his strength replenished. Heracles could only overcome him by preventing this contact with Earth – lifting him up in Heracles' capacity of the celestial axis. Nor was this the end of the sinister skull collection in the Greek myths. According to Fontenrose (1980: 333): '...Oinomaos, Euenos, and Atalanta's father. Of all these kings it is said that they heaped up or hung up the skulls of those suitors [of their daughter] who lost the race; and the first two are linked with Phorbas, Kyknos, and Antaeus.' Oenomaus tragic strategy concerning his daughter Hippodameia formed the motif of the great temple sculptures at the Parthenon and Olympia. Even the name of Geryon, whom Heracles relieved of his cattle, may be etymologically linked to *karanos*, 'cranium, skull' (Fontenrose 1980: 333, where also other etymological associations are cited, with ample bibliography). Also Hercules's enemy Cacus, another death demon and cattle rustler (*cf.* the Nkoya tradition on Shihoka Nalinanga as cattle rustler, above), had hung the entrance to his cave with the skulls of his slain victims. Finally, the state-house of the mythical Phlegyan nation was a skull-hung oak tree (Fontenrose 1980: 54). If that name can be considered to derive from Indo-European *bh[e]leg-*, 'to burn black with smoke' and hence as a cognate of our word 'black' (Partridge 1979, *s.v.* 'black') then we might suggest that the Phlegyans, though mythical, were at one stage thought of as Black people, and perhaps were among the pre- or

Mother of the Primal Waters under the Cosmogony of the Separation of Water and Land. But at the same time she is an exponent of the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, which seems to have largely supplanted the earlier cosmogony. Under the new dispensation, Hera appears as a sky goddess – her association with speckled or striped animals (cuckoo, peacock; *cf.* van Binsbergen 2004), her enmity of the solar complex of Colchian Aeëtes and his sisters Circe and Pasiphae, the plausible Kartvelian etymology of Hera's name 'setting sun' (proto-Kartvelian **čwer-* (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'Kartvelian etymology'; Klimov 1998: 525), and her complementarity with the sky god Zeus, all make that at least one aspect of her is that of a goddess of the sky at night, when the revolution of the heavens around the celestial pole and axis is most conspicuous. The militant Heracles, with his star-spangled association with the brightly speckled quail, his lion-skin and his club evocative of the celestial axis, rounding up the mythical cattle regardless of whether it belongs to the heavens (as in Egypt and the Ancient Near East; Hera is *boöpis*, 'cow-eyed' and *europia*, 'broadly seeing'; Heracles is *bouphagos*, 'cow-eating', *ouranios*, 'celestial') or to the underworld, *primarily represents the aggressive subjugation of the older cosmogony (and its human adherents) by the newer cosmogony*. Heracles is in the first place the celestial axis – the great discovery of naked-eye astronomy by the outgoing Upper Paleolithic (*cf.* Rappenglück 1999); hence Herodotus, (*Historiae*, II), is found by commentators – notably Lloyd 1988: 29 – to have equated Heracles with Egyptian Shu, who holds up the heavens. In so far as the recognition of the celestial axis is shamanic (it is the shaman's privilege to move up and down the axis into heaven and underworld), Burkert is right that Heracles has shamanic aspects. Heracles' works (typically organised as a dozen, according to the zodiac) summarise the overthrow of the demonised protagonists of the older cosmogonic dispensation. Hence even Heracles as *ipoktonos* 'grub-eater': if we may appeal to Egyptian-Aegean mythological continuity, in so far as Neith / Bee Ruler as Mother of the Waters represents the older disposition and was replaced by the solar god Rē^c, Heracles as championing the new disposition kills the bee's offspring, the grub; just like Aristaeus (as a god an evocation of the prototypical Pelasgian rustic) in conflict with Orpheus but a son of the Neith-like goddess Cyrene, saw his bees killed but restored from cattle. This approach also throws some light on nocturnal Hera's otherwise unexplained enmity vis-à-vis the solar / diurnal Aeëtes *c.s.* and on Jason's rival Pelias' emphasis on Aphrodite, and refusal to include Hera, in the annual festival at Iolcus. The heroes associated with Hera (besides Jason apparently also Menelaus, Antenor, and Orpheus) are donning leopard / panther skins as befits a goddess of the star-spangled night-sky, and it is her hatred that brings Jason to adventure into Colchis (Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*).

proto-Bantu presences in the Eastern Mediterranean and West Asia (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press); however, more authoritative is Starostin & Starostin (1998-2008: 'Indo-European etymology') Proto-Indo-European: **bhleig* - 'shining bright'. Skull-decorated temples are characteristic of Kali in Hinduism, and are also found in other South Asian contexts. The human skull is also a favourite decorative motif found in the dwellings of leading men in South East Asia, and for some Meso American temples – e.g. the walls of the Maya centre of Chichen Itza are adorned with numerous sculptural representations of skulls. Skulls also used to abound in European Christian churches, when still in regular use as burial sites. In South Asia it is not necessarily an act of cruelty to use a deceased's skull as a drinking vessel – it may even be an act of mourning (Eliseev *et al.* 1994: 459, 180).

Drinking from skulls: In comparative mythology, the *locus classicus* for drinking from the skulls of slain enemies is Herodotus' accounts of the Scythians (*Historiae* IV, 64). A related example from Eastern Europe is the drinking vessel which the Pecheneg Khan Kurya made out of Svyatoslav's skull (Schreiber n.d.: 304). This Kiev practice combines Steppe with Viking antecedents, and we are not surprised that there is disagreement as to whether the Vikings of Northwestern Europe did or did not drink from skull cups. At any rate, centuries later the skull of Blackbeard the Pirate (c. 1680 – 1718), whose original name was Edward Teach, Thatch or Thache, was turned into a cup – so that his fate appears to be one that Kayambila 'the Thatcher' could have predicted. A clear-cut parallel with the Nkoya case comes from the European Iron Age: In 216 BCE, the Boii Gauls in Gallia Cisalpina (modern North Italy) killed the consul Lucius Postumius Albino and used his skull as a sacrificial vessel (Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, XXIII 23.4; Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, XV, 3.2). Nor does this exhaust the evidence for an Eurasian skull complex. The Scythian and Celtic habit of drinking from enemy skulls as recorded in Antiquity, seems to form the Western end of a skull complex that extends across the steppe belt of Eurasia all the way to the Pacific coast. Los (1969: 58, 116) sees the use of the skull cups in the first place as a Turkish-Mongolian custom, later also among the Bulgars, and during the Migrations of the Nations also occasionally among Germanic kings in Europe (e.g. Alboin had the skull guilded of the Gepid king Kunimond (Los 1969: 244 n. 209; Thierry 1856: 112f). Laoshang Chanyu 老上單于 defeated the Yueh-chi 月支 (probably a branch of Tocharians) in 170 BCE and made their king's skull into a drinking vessel, after which his people fled westward (Los 1969: 116). Glimpses of the Inner Eurasian skull cult can be found with Herodotus (on the Issedones, Herodotus, *Historiae*, 1, 201; 4: 13, 16, 15f. cf. Baldick 2000: 17; also the Herodotus commentator Corcella elaborates on this point, cf. Corcella 1984; Asheri & Corcella 2007), and by the 10th-century Iranian geographer Ibn Rusta (Baldick 2000: 29). General ownership of enemy skulls is reported for the Avars (Baldick 2000: 36). Drinking from enemy skulls has been reported from the Bulghars of the Danube (Baldick 2000: 31) and the Mongols (the king of the Hsiung-nu / 匈奴 / Huns in 202 BCE – Baldick 2000: 23; such drinking vessels are indispensable for Hsiung-nu when sealing a treaty, Baldick 2000: 36; interestingly, Nkoya in the 19th century had the same war tactics as the Hsiung-nu: luring the enemy to distant places. The skull-cup practice was also found in Korea (Hulbert 1905; Serruys 1958; Yetts 1926 as a practice associated with Chinese in Korea). Head-hunting practices in Taiwan are well attested (Watson Andaya 2004; Shepherd 1993). In Japan the custom appears to be transformed into drinking from an animal skull (Blacker 1967; Seki 1966), while the skull is reported as a witchcraft item there (Casal 1959). Throughout Central and East Asia, the ancestral practice of drinking from a human skull appears to have been incorporated, transformed and sanctioned in Buddhist ritual (Park & Song 2005); highly decorated, such skull cups are conspicuous especially in Tibetan Buddhism. The practice of skull drinking is also reported from Native (North) Americans (Chacon & Dye 2007).



So here a number of greatly different themes need to be distinguished: the skull as a memento of human mortality on the one hand evokes violence and unrestricted power – the realm of the gods of war and death – but on the other hand resignation with the finitude of human life, of continued commitment after the death of a loved one, and even of liberation of life's woes, or eternal salvation. In the Nkoya case, however, the emphasis is clearly on violence and unrestricted power, in amazing continuity with the Eurasian skull complex, especially with the Turks of the Eurasian Steppe (cf. Los 1969: 51f).

Kazanga festival: as already noted, in its original form the Kazanga festival had considerable parallels with the Egyptian king's heb sed festival: although this would ideally only be held at 30 years

intervals it also involved the erection of royal pavilions and the immolation of captives (*cf.* Wilkinson 2001).

5.20. Creation from tears of the divinity

Nkoya: The Nkoya myth of kingship concludes with the adage ‘Our kingship is from the Tears / Drops of Rain’.

Comparative: In Ancient Egypt, the ‘tears of the divinity’ image first emerge with the Coffin Texts, after the Old Kingdom (Anthes 1961: 30; de Buck 1935-1961: VII, 465 a. ‘Mankind arose from the tears of the sun’s / Ra’s eye’. In another version humankind did not directly issue from Rē’s tears, but Rē’s tears fertilised the earth so that it could bring forth mankind: ‘the sun-god wept and from the tear (*remy* ) that fell on earth, there sprang man (*remet* )’ Hart 1993: 181; hieroglyphic text added; in van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press, an argument is presented to link Egyptian *remet* and the Etruscan / Latin place name *Roma*, to proto-Bantu *-*dómÈ* (Guthrie no. 697), ‘husband, man’, *cf.* Roma as a ‘Gypsy’ ethnonym, against the background of other indications of proto-Bantu in the Bronze Age Mediterranean). By a very close parallel with the Egyptian case, the Nordic sun-god Balder was called ‘God of Tears’, not only because he was accidentally killed by his blind twin brother Hod, but particularly because humankind emerged from his tears. In Indian myth, the motif of a god’s creative tears (Prajāpati, notably) comes very close to that of the Egyptian case (Mackenzie 1913: vi). Japanese mythology also knew the creative tears, notably those that were shed by the god Izanagi, out of grief over his sister-wife Izanami; these turned into ‘a beauteous babe, the goddess Nakisawame-no-Mikoto’ (*Kojiki*), the goddess of wells and clear water.

But not all divine tears coagulate into humans. In Babylonian mythology (*Enuma Elish*) the tears of the female chaos and water goddess Tīāmat became the source of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Here it is the blood of Kingu, Tiamat’s consort, from which their adversary Marduk created the first humans; *cf.* Aphrodite *apud* Hesiod. According to the Ancient Greeks, the inundation of the Nile was due to the tears of Isis (Hopfner 1940-1941: II, 1041, p. 175), which fell into the water when she was violated by her son Horus (*Papyrus Harris*, VII, 10) – another case of a mythical virgin mother (she was only posthumously impregnated) and her only son being transformed in the direction of masculine dominance, and turning sour. In Graeco-Roman mythology, morning dew is said to spring from the tears the goddess Eōs spilled over the loss of her lover (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII, 842f); likewise, in Oceanian mythology (which shows many unexplained parallels with that of Western Eurasia) dew is interpreted as the tears of the celestial god Rangi over the terrestrial goddess Papa (Best 1922: 14). Back in Greece, also the river Kokytus, identical to or closely related to the better known river Styx, is made up of tears – but tears of humans, not of gods. The Achelous river in Asia Minor sprung from Niobe’s tears when, in retaliation for her idle boasting, the two divine children Apollo and Artemis had killed Niobe’s children (*Iliad* XXIV 602). Other rivers and lakes were supposed to originate from the tears shed by nymphs; in Germanic mythology, nixies / stream maiden were depicted in the same manner. Among such nymphs is, in Italy, the otherwise unknown ‘Nestis, who with her tears feeds the life stream of beings’ and thus represents water among the four elements (Empedocles, *Fragments*, 6, Leonard 1908; my translation); this comes close again to tears creating humans. In Judaism, God is claimed to weep over the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, and out of pity with his creatures, thus bringing about a silent stream (Schwartz 2004: 37f; Fishbane 2003: 167).

Nor are all divine tears benevolent and creative. Relatively close to Egypt, among the Nilotic Dinka people venerating the demiurge Deng, the adage exists ‘Deng’s Tears are Blood’ (Scheub 2000). And at the other end of Asia, the tears of the storm god Susanowo also carried violent associations: ‘Susanowo’s tears, which caused the rain, were tears of destruction. Like the tears of the Egyptian Seth and of angry gods in other lands, they dried up the oceans and withered the forests’ (Andrews 2000: 196). In the New World, the Inca creator god Viracocha, having completed his creative activities, often takes trips to Earth disguised as a beggar to check up on the state of the world, which usually causes him to cry (Urton 1999: 64; Salomon & Urioste 1991); note the parallel with Mwene Manenga above. In Mi’kmaq mythology (South Eastern Canada, with optimal opportunities for trans-Atlantic influences

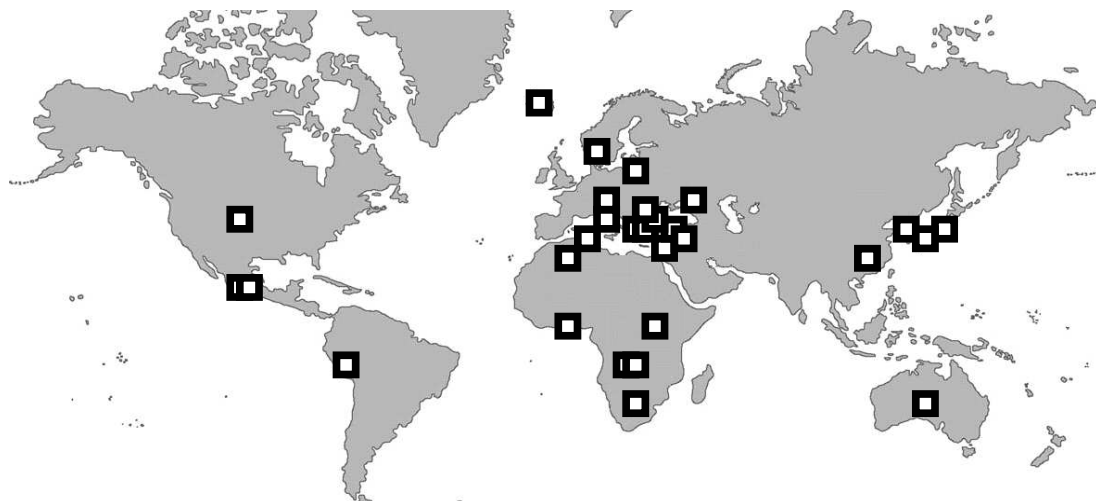
from Africa and Europe) tears shed by the creator sungod brought about a Flood (Whitehead 1991). Similar instances of crying gods in the New World causing a Flood are given in Andrews 2000: 35. In a Kathlamet myth from the North Western USA, it is tears shed by a rejected lover that bring about the Flood (Frazer 1918: 325-326; Kelsen 1988: 148).

5.21. The rain god has junior / filial status in the pantheon

Nkoya: Mvula / Rain, child of Nyambi.

Comparative: Junior pantheon status of the rain god (in terms, not so much of power, but of formal genealogical position; e.g. Zeus in the Greek pantheon, as son of Kronos and grandson of Uranus, although the king of heaven is yet junior) is widely attested in Western and Eastern Eurasia. This fits in with the Cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth, where Rain, as a principal connection between Heaven and Earth in societies based on rain-fed agriculture, tends to be regarded as the child of the supreme celestial god.

Fig. 9.9. Global distribution of rain gods with junior status in the pantheon



From: van Binsbergen, in preparation (b), where full references will be given

5.22. The unilateral mythical being

Nkoya: Among the Nkoya, Mwenda-Njangula ('Walker of the Height') is a mythical being with only one side to his / her body. One meets Mwenda-Njangula in the forest, and if one is the first to extend a greeting, one will gain great knowledge and riches, but in the alternative case, misfortune, even death. In the narratives which the missionary Jacottet (1899-1901: III, *passim*, and II, 122f) collected in Barotseland by the end of the 19th century, Mwenda-Njangula (and various alternative names), appears as a cattle herder who, every morning, crosses a boundary consisting of a river, where his mother makes a fordable passage.

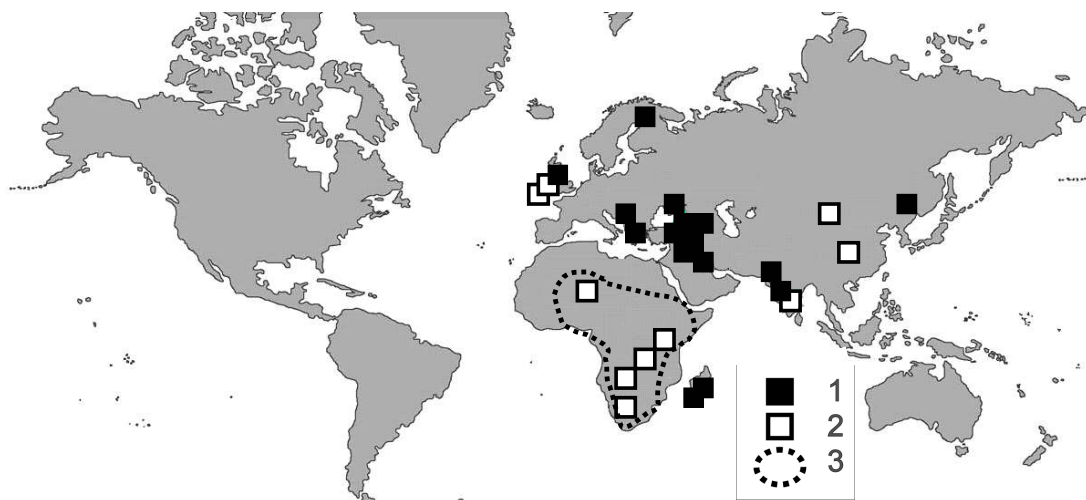
Comparative: Werner (1933: ch. XIII) has recognised the prominence of this motif in the mythology of Bantu speaking peoples and devotes nearly an entire chapter to it. The mytheme of the unilateral mythical being, whose standard discussion is in von Sicard (1968-1969), has a global distribution of typical Pelasgian shape (cf. van Binsbergen, 2010b, 2010c).

Jacottet (1899-1901) suspected direct Judaeo-Christian influence in Mwenda-Njangula's daily river crossing (cf. Moses' Red Sea crossing, *Exodus* 14: 16) but a more convincing reading of this story is to consider the boundary the one between the underworld and the upper world – such as is also found

in Japanese mythology regarding Izanagi's return from the underworld (the Land of Yomi) where, with relief and relish, he leaves his wretched sister-wife Izanami. Throughout the Old World, rivers constitute the abode of the ancestors, in other words, the underworld.

This motif is akin to that of Mwene Manenga testing generosity (elsewhere in this Section), and of Jacob wrestling with an unspecified being at the ford of the Jabbok (*Genesis* 32:24); without satisfactory etymology in Afroasiatic including Semitic, this hydronym has a transparent etymology in proto-Bantu *-jàbok-* (Guthrie no. 916), 'to cross river', and is one of the indications of a Niger-Congo presence in the Bronze Age Mediterranean (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press). We are in the presence of transformation of the postulated 'Mother of the Waters' here, who especially appears in her capacity of ruler of the underworld – the stream, among other mythical references, marks the boundary between life and death.

Fig. 9.10. Global distribution of the mytheme of the unilateral mythical being (van Binsbergen 2010b)



1. von Sicard's (1968-1969) attestations of the unilateral figure outside Africa; 2. attestation of the unilateral figure from other sources than von Sicard; 3. generalised extent of von Sicard's numerous African attestations of the unilateral figure; from: van Binsbergen 2010b, with full references.

5.23. The king 'with only one hair'

Nkoya: King Kahare 'With One Hair'; I have usually interpreted this as a reference to the very tall conical hairdress of the Ila, with which people especially the Kahare kingship has great affinities.

Comparative: This mytheme is complementary to the skull complex. There is the Nordic case of princess Syrith, daughter of king Syvaldus; she had been abducted by a giant, who 'had twisted and pressed her locks together so that they formed on her head one hard mass which hardly could be combed out except with the aid of an iron tool' (Rydberg 1906: III, 774). Greek mythology knows a King Nisus of Megara with one crucial hair (Parada & Förlag 1997). The unshaven magical hair in the *Tanach* (Shimshon, *Judges* 13: 24f) is reminiscent of Greek mythology rather than of the Biblical milieu (Apollo 'never shorn'; King Nisus, and king Pterelaos; Margalith 1986). However, for this mytheme the Eurasian Steppe connections seem to be most to the point here, and they seem to confirm the Scythian / Pelasgian continuities in the *Nkoya* kingship. Several Central Asian peoples (Warangs, following the Agrippaeans and Turks; Svyatoslav of Kiev adopted the same custom) had as the standard coiffure of adult men: a clean-shaven head with only one tuft of hair left (Los 1969: 267 n 290). This is also the standard hairdo of mythical and royal children in the Ancient Egyptian tradition – another indication of the latter's possible Steppe connotations, along with artefacts such as spoke-wheeled chariots and the royal diadem, and elements of Uralic in Egyptian theonyms (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen, in press). The infant Horus, with the unique tuft of hair, was impersonated by an adult

priest on the 16th of the month Kojahk (Stricker 1963-1989 IV: 492f). Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV, 23) describes the Agrippaeans ('Scythian in dress but with their own language') as a group of pacifist and mediators, comparable to North African saints (Gellner 1969), the Sudan leopard-skin chiefs (Evans-Pritchard 1967 / 1940), and the mediators that established themselves in the middle of the second millennium around the Congo-Zambezi watershed (White 1962; Vansina 1966; van Binsbergen 1981) – with whom they have, in my opinion, not just a formal but also a historical connection, besides all displaying the tendency of wearing a leopard-skin (van Binsbergen 2004). The mytheme of one hair also has attestations in the New World: World Buffalo, also a symbol of humankind, loses one hair every year (Leeming & Page 2000: 37); bridges of only one hair width occur in a Meso American myth of the hero Nakal who is engaged in a Orpheus-like descent into the underworld in order to retrieve his wife (Seal 2001). Although North Atlantic Modern popular culture has associated scalping primarily with Native Americans, Scythians, and probably also Sarmatians, also scalped their enemies and attached the scalps to their horses' bridles (Los 1969: 78). In North America, deceased Pawnee who have been scalped are supposed to name each other after the few patches of hair still left on their heads: 'One-Hair, Forehead-Hair, Hair-Back-of-the-Head, all of you come!' (Anonymous, The mystery of death, n.d.). Among the Omaha Native Americans, one strand of hair is dedicated to the thunder (Anonymous, The gods of the elements, n.d.).

5.24. The frog as a cosmogonic evocation

Nkoya: One of the principal mythical Nkoya kings has the title of Kambotwe ('Person Frog').

Comparative: cf. the widespread cosmogonic connotations of reed and swamp as discussed under reed and bee; in Egypt (Hermopolitan cosmogony) the primal gods are represented as pairs of frogs. However, an Australian myth (with a strange parallel in Grimm's *Hausmärchen*) sees the frog as the origin both of the Flood, and of the Drought that preceded it (Thomas 1923).

5.25. The goddess as a crone testing generosity and punishing with the Flood

Nkoya: Among the Nkoya's neighbours, the legendary Queen Manenga (who also features prominently among the Nkoya) presents herself in the form of an old woman asking favours, and when these are refused, she brings down a Flood.

Comparative: In Apollonius Rhodius' Greek *Argonauts* story, in order to test Jason before entrusting her mission to Colchis to him, Hera appears to him as an old woman and asks him to carry her across a river. Such generosity tests are common worldwide. A similar story to Manenga's is told about the Hawai'ian goddess of fire, Pele (Monaghan 2010: 262); and for the Spanish male mythical figure Nuberu. Elsewhere in this Section we have seen how also the Inca creator god Viracocha goes around disguised (Urton 1999: 64; Salomon & Urioste 1991). So does Nordic Odinn. Also the Christian Christophorus motif is related.

5.26. The mytheme of matriarchy

Nkoya: Although since the late 19th century, nearly all Nkoya kings have been male, a careful decoding the Nkoya oral traditions, written in a language that (like most languages) does not mark gender morphologically, suggests out that, initially, Nkoya kingship was reserved to women (van Binsbergen 1992).

Comparative: It has been a moot point among scholars, ever since the mid-19th century CE (Bachofen 1861 / 1948, Morgan 1871, 1877 / 1963, Engels 1884 / 1976, etc.), whether there ever was a historical society that could be called matriarchic in the sense of implementing, in real-life situations of the family, political and economic institutions, the premise of female supremacy implied in the cosmogony of the Water and the Land. However, throughout the huge global corpus of comparative mythology we see time and again traces of a claim of female supremacy, and of its challenge and effective rejection by males (cf. Sierksma 1962).

6. Conclusion

Several hard conclusions can be based on the extensive data presented in Section 5.

In the first place, this material proves, beyond reasonable doubt, the existence of massive comprehensive transcontinental Eurasian-African mythological continuities, in the case of the Nkoya, and of sub-Saharan Africa in general. Just like Newton (1687 / 1947) established that celestial mechanics should coincide with terrestrial mechanics, there can no longer be a separate comparative mythology for Eurasia, and another one for Africa. This does not mean there are no profound differences between mythologies in the world. Yet sharing a common origin in Africa (hence always carrying a substrate, however submerged, of Palaeo-African mythemes such as the Earth, the Spider, the Tree, and the Serpent), and being subject to transcontinental movement and feedback in more recent millennia, have produced a complex pattern of partial and fragmented continuity that cannot be reduced to a simple North-South dichotomy.

In the second place, on the basis of these extensive data, we can simply rule out Christian and Islamic contamination as the principal source of such transcontinental mythological continuities.

In the third place, it is no exaggeration to claim that for most of the mythemes considered, the Pelasgian hypothesis offers a sufficient explanation for their presence among the Nkoya. Claiming to take effect over a period of only a handful of millennia, the time span of this hypothesis is sufficiently short to allow for sometimes uncanny, precise correspondences, whose very identification admittedly borders on the insane (*e.g.* ‘Do you hear, Reed Person’ – between the Nkoya and the Gilgamesh epic). However, the data show that we cannot take recourse to the Pelasgian hypothesis for all mythemes listed. Thus, in relation with the mytheme of ‘stealing the moon’, while largely Pelasgian in its more recent distribution, the extensive North American attestations coupled with the paucity of this mytheme outside the Pelasgian realm might suggest a New World, trans-Beringian origin.⁶³ By the same token, Flood

⁶³ In addition to the fairly consensual view of eastbound trans-Beringian migration into the New World mainly during the Upper Palaeolithic as the main or only source of human population in the Americas, recent genetic research has brought to light evidence for the complementary, opposite movement (Tamm *et al.* 2007). In my multivariate analysis of flood myths world-wide (van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008), I also pointed out mythemes that might have a New World origin and that subsequently spread to the Old World. The long-range linguistic closeness of the African, Amerind and Austric macrophyla casts an interesting light on these suggestions: while typologically ‘New-World’ in view of data collected in historical times, they may yet originate in Asia, at a time when the ‘Peripheral’ macrophyla had not yet separated. The North-South dichotomy as perceived by Witzel, and the Sunda origin of major mythemes percolating in West Eurasia (like the Flood) as perceived by Oppenheimer, may yet turn out to have a genuine, though relative, basis (although very different from what these authors envisaged) in the distinctiveness of the Peripheral branch of *Borean since c. 20 ka BP. However, a caveat is in order here. Modern research on transcontinental connections (*e.g.* Jett 2002) shows that also in the most recent millennia, from widely divergent ethnic and language groups, a constant trickle of eastbound trans-Bering migrations has continued to contribute to the population of North America; so that North American mythological parallels, especially when sporadic, might sometimes be considered to be, in fact, Asian ones.

myths as such are at least Upper Palaeolithic and almost universal, yet in so far as the Standard Elaborate Flood Myth is involved, the transmission structure is primarily Pelasgian. The spider mytheme appears to belong to Pandora's Box, and from there to have been largely transmitted, also to West Asia and the Mediterranean, via the 'Peripheral' Branch of *Borean, consisting of African languages, Amerind and Austric; more recently this mytheme was redefined towards female domesticity in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age West Asia, and despite much older antecedents largely transmitted on the wings of Pelasgian expansion. The fact that so many Nkoya motifs have North American counterparts, may also be attributed (see previous footnote) to the communality of Amerind, African languages, and Austric in Upper Palaeolithic times, and reminds us that the Pelasgian hypothesis, referring to a much more recent period, can scarcely be invoked to explain African / New World parallels.⁶⁴ Also the snake / drought motif belongs to Pandora's box, and cannot be subsumed under the Pelasgian hypothesis.⁶⁵ The myth of matriarchy is highly contested; on this controversial point, no suggestion as to the transmission mechanism can be made without further study of the details; *matriliny*, however, (as distinct from matriarchy) qualifies as a Pelasgian trait.

The systemic divorce between the royal and the commoner modes of Nkoya society (although greatly overlapping in time, place and personnel) makes for an internal contradiction, which I have discussed elsewhere (van Binsbergen 2003b) as if these were two complementary modalities within the same culture (*cf.* Leach 1954), regardless of their apparently very different historical antecedents:

- the villagers have been pacifist, productive in many ways, and largely stationary (displaying a regional continuity going back at least two millennia, as the archaeology of Western Zambian pottery suggests),
- whereas the royal capitals have been centres of organised violence directed both at strangers and at the local population, have been non-productive and parasitical, and have been nodes through which foreign artefacts, people and cultural forms have passed for centuries.

As the extensive non-Nkoya African references in Section 5 suggest, there is – perhaps with the exception of their rare musical talents – little to make the Nkoya exceptional among their neighbours. In some respects, however, the Nkoya case, and the South Central African case in general, seem to occupy a special place in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

In the first place, we are reminded of Willis' (1994: 265) distinction of mytho-

⁶⁴ Although little noticed by comparative mythologists (however, *cf.* Berezkin 2008, 2009), these parallels are extensive, including, in addition to mythology: female puberty rites, divination and gaming, basketry, hunting and fishing methods.

⁶⁵ Meanwhile it is remarkable that the Indo-European roots for 'earth' (**dg'hem-*) and 'snake' (**g'(h)em-*, **g'(h)mēy-*) are, according to specialist opinion, hardly distinguishable (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 'Indo-European etymology'; Pokorny 1959-69: I, 662 f, 790; Buck n.d.: 16).

logical zones in sub-Saharan Africa according to linguistic (macro)phylum, where especially the mythologically elaborate, non-Bantu Niger-Congo speaking West African region (with the Dogon as a typical, though ethnographically highly contextualised case; cf. van Beek 2010) is contrasted with the Bantu-speaking South Central and Southern region possessing relatively rudimentary and implicit mythologies – of which the Nkoya are a typical case. As Victor Turner's famous studies (Turner 1967, 1968) of the Ndembu Lunda (quite close to the Nkoya in culture and language) indicate, the central locus of cultural memory in the societies of South Central Africa is ritual action, to which mythical and religious texts are a diffuse, oblique, multi-layered, fragmented, unstable and situational, occasional commentary.

In the second place, kingship-related themes are so dominant in South Central Africa (due to the excessively violent grasp in which kingships have held this region during the centuries of long-distance trade especially in slaves) that, in this part of Africa, the mythological expressions suggestive of Eurasian mythologies (centring on the kingship and the Separation of Heaven and Earth) have left little room for Palaeo-African expressions, such as focussing on the Tree as the source of life and of humankind, on the emergence of humankind not from heaven but from the Earth, on the Rainbow Snake, the rain bird,⁶⁶ the origin of death, animal stories featuring tricksters such as Hare, *etc.* Only a few fragments of these presumably Palaeo-African mythologies (as well-known from other parts of Africa) became visible to me in the Nkoya case – such Narrative Complexes (NC, cf. Table 9.1.) as the Moon (NC 9), Spider (NC 15), and Cosmogonic Rainbow Snake (NC 13); for instance, the standard African myth of the origin of death through ontradiictory messengers (NC 20), which Yuri Berezkin 2009 considers to go back to Pandora's Box (*pace* Oppenheimer 1998) does not feature in my Nkoya mythological corpus, although it does in texts collected by missionaries in Western Zambia around 1900. This state of affairs suggests that, while in the Nkoya case the element of Eurasian-African continuity is extensive and undeniable, this may be less so for some other parts of Africa – and that in the latter regions, the Palaeo-African mythological element harking back to the pre-Exodus times, is rather more conspicuous.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *E.g.* Jacottet 1899-1901: II, 152.

⁶⁷ By a different route, Michael Witzel has arrived at a similar conclusion in his contribution to the present book (p. 232 n. 14). I have no quarrel with his attempt to identify a very old mythological layer in global cultural history – my concept of 'Pandora's Box' does exactly the same, and was inspired by his work in the first place. Where we part is when Witzel, with his strict distinction between Laurasian and Gondwana mythologies, suggests that the former, more developed, type should be exclusive to Northern regions, the latter, more 'primitive', type to the Southern regions, – instead of recognising that, since all mythologies ultimately derive from pre-Exodus Africa, there is an implied 'Pandora's Box' / 'Gondwana' substrate in every mythology recorded in historical times, whenever and wherever.

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