

Chapter 8. Further discussion of trans-continental relationships with a view of assessing our overall Working Hypothesis

8.1. Vindicating our two Working Hypotheses

We have formulated, as our initial Working Hypothesis for the present argument, that the Presocratics may have adopted, transformed and adulterated the worldview of a transformation cycle of elements that, by their time, had already been widely available for millennia, since the Upper Palaeolithic. Now that our argument draws to a close, it is time to return to this Working Hypothesis and ascertain whether we can uphold it, or must reject it, in the light of the extensive empirical data and theoretical arguments presented so far. Once we have assessed our Working Hypothesis, we shall also be in a position to explain the presence of the traces of a transformation cycle of elements among the Nkoya of South Central Africa. Meanwhile we should heed our Alternative Working Hypothesis, which still appeals to a transformation cycle of elements as background for the Presocratics, but situates it not in the Upper Palaeolithic but in the Bronze Age.

Our linguistic discussion of West Asian, 2nd mill. BCE antecedents of at least part of the nomenclature of the East Asian transformation cycle of elements demonstrates that *we can consider our Alternative Working Hypothesis to be substantiated*: the transformation cycle of elements was available in West Asia in the 2nd mill. BCE, and the Presocratics adopted it in a highly attenuated form, so that its features of cyclicity and transformation remained largely implied and ultimately came to be rejected in the Western intellectual tradition – even though the major founding icons of that tradition, Plato and Aristotle, indicated that they were still aware of these transformative and cyclical features.

If we can uphold our Alternative Working Hypothesis for the West Asian Bronze Age, can we perhaps project it much further back into the past, and claim it as part of the Upper Palaeolithic near-global communalities that we also find as a result of the disintegration of *Borean? Can we thus confirm our initial Working Hypothesis?

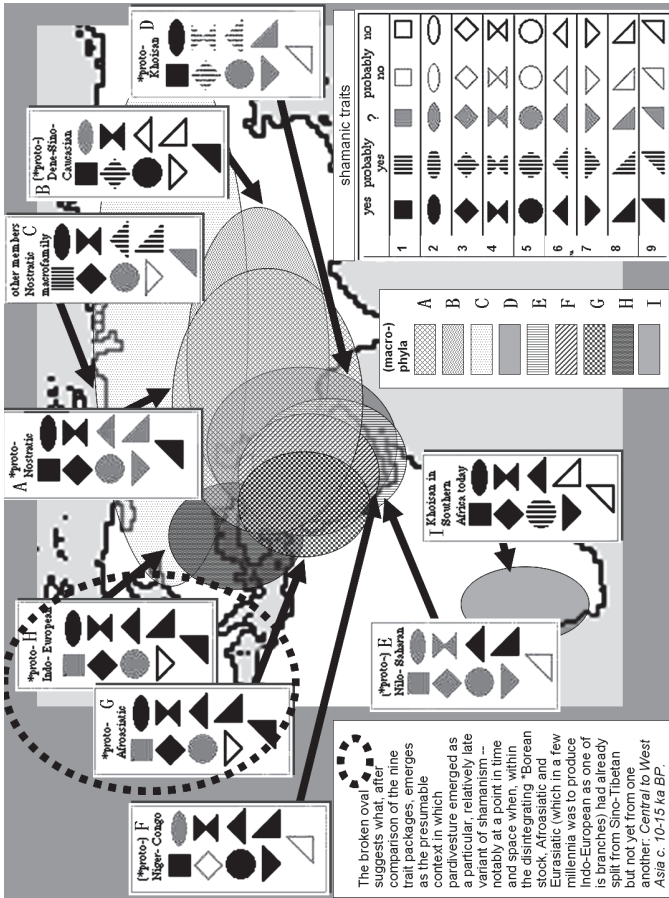
8.2. Could the transformation cycle of elements be shamanic in origin and thus date back to the Upper Palaeolithic?

Perhaps the very notion of a transformation cycle of elements is shamanic in origin, and, like shamanism as an institution, could be argued to go back to the Upper Palaeolithic of West to Central Asia (c. 20-15 ka BP). This implies two questions:

1. what was the origin of shamanism in space and time? and
2. can element thinking, cyclicity and transformation be argued to be inherent aspects of shamanism?

The first question can be answered provisionally, although it would be the work of a lifetime to substantiate the answer satisfactorily. It is a widely-held view that shamanism already existed in Upper Palaeolithic Eurasia (*e.g.* Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996; Layton 2001). Likewise, in the course of my world-wide comparative research into leopard-skin symbolism (often associated with shamanism), I developed (van Binsbergen 2004 / 2013) a typological argument suggesting that (the leopard-skin associated form of) shamanism emerged in West to Central Asia 10-20 ka BP (Fig. 8.1).²³³ There are other indications that shamanism dates from the disintegration of *Borean: the basic shamanic movement up and down the celestial axis presupposes the development of naked-eye astronomy, yet against a profusion of terms to denote ‘Earth’ and ‘Water’ (*e.g.* van

²³³ Unfortunately, my analysis at the time did not yet extend to include the macrophyla of Nilo-Saharan, Austric and Amerind, and was still based on the idea (Bomhard 1984; Bomhard & Kerns 1994), rejected by the Moscow school of long-range linguistics (*e.g.* Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008), that Afroasiatic rather than constituting a macrophylum in its own right should be subsumed under Nostratic / Eurasiatic. Also, an extensive argument is required in order to justify how in this Figure specific (macro-)phyla are suggested to originate in specific parts of the Old World. In the final, published version (2013) these questions will be addressed.



- symbols indicating aspects of shamanism:
1. speckled nomenclature for leopard
 2. speckled nomenclature for other species
 3. ecstatic cult
 4. therianthropy (humans posing as animals) attested
 5. leopard therianthropy
 6. leopard-skin symbolism attested
 7. Exalted Insider
 8. Sacred Outsider
 9. Mother goddess

- letters indicating linguistic macrophyta:
- A. proto-Nostratic / Eurasiatic
 - B. proto-[Dene]-Sino-Caucasian
 - C. other members of the Nostratic / Eurasiatic macrophyta except Indo-European
 - D. proto-Khoisan
 - E. proto-Nilo-Saharan
 - F. proto-Niger-Congo
 - G. proto-Afroasiatic
 - H. proto-Indo-European
 - I. Khoisan in Southern Africa today

Source: van Binsbergen 2004 / 2013

Fig. 8.1. Linguistic and comparative-ethnographic reconstruction of the emergence of the ritual use of leopard skins (pardivesture) as an aspect of shamanism.

Clearly, the shields setting out the combination of traits per (macro-)phylum are

hovering above the geographical plane (which is a map of the Old World), this also applies to the reconstructed Indo-European / Afroasiatic proposed origin of *pardives-
ture*, which would be not in Western Europe but in West Asia. The broken oval suggests what, after comparison of the nine trait packages, emerges as the presumable context in which *pardivesture* emerged as a particular, relatively late variant of shamanism – notably at a point in time and space when, within the disintegrating *Borean stock, Afroasiatic and Eurasiatic (which in a few millennia was to produce Indo-European as one of its branches) had already split from Sino-Tibetan but not yet from one another: Central to West Asia 10-15 ka BP.

Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142f, 406 *f.*), reconstructed *Borean has, as we have seen, just one term for ‘Sky’ – so it appears as if Heaven as a transcendent concept had scarcely been invented by *Borean times, nor could it have, in the light of my discussion, above, of modes of thought, transcendence and absolute distinctions (Section 6.3).

That we are dealing here with a very ancient and essentially unitary package of ideas is also suggested by the fact that an obvious cognate of the common Bantu term for healing, *nganga*, was also claimed by Dolgopolsky (1998) for Eurasiatic / Nostratic (one of the linguistic macrophyla into which *Borean was supposed to disintegrate), with the widespread magical and healing semantic notion of ‘tying’. We are reminded once more that Niger-Congo was counted as part of what they called ‘Super-Nostratic’ by Kaiser & Sheveroshkin 1988.

It is the second question that gives us real problems. *Can element thinking, cyclicality and transformation be argued to be inherent aspects of shamanism?* If the answer is affirmative, this would mean that the cyclicality and transformation are the default values of element thinking, and that where these features are absent, we have an adulterated, eroded, typologically late form. Typologically, such features can hardly be upheld as central to shamanism – although, admittedly, much depends on the definition of that protean institution that is so widespread in space and time. Central to shamanism appears to be the emerging notion of *transcendence*:²³⁴ in a ritual setting a specialist, on behalf of his or her client or more typically of the community at large, leaves the here and now in

²³⁴ For my extensive recent argument on this topic, cf. van Binsbergen 2012a.

order to sally forth to an ordinarily inaccessible realm of existence (Heaven, or the Underworld; perhaps the fringes of the life world in a more horizontal worldview but the vertical image of the world is typical of shamanism which is therefore associated with the Upper Palaeolithic emergence of naked-eye astronomy) where otherwise unattainable benefits (information, medicine) may be obtained, and he or she returns with these benefits to let them have a positive impact on everyday life. A rudimentary ‘cyclicity’ is implied in leaving and returning, but the ‘element’ and ‘transformation’ features do not seem to be implied. A further step in our argument against a transformative element cycle in the Upper Palaeolithic would be our above analysis of prehistoric modes of thought from (a) *Borean ‘range semantics’, via (b) element thinking, to (c) triadic dialectics – with the transformation cycle of elements considered to be a form of (c). In this scheme, the transformation cycle of elements is clearly the more advanced typological format of modes of thought, which can hardly be claimed to have the near-universality of Upper Palaeolithic traits (e.g. *Borean), but must remain restricted to the much more confined space of Bronze Age civilisations – according to a distribution that may well match that we mapped in Fig. 6.7 for triads as a related mode of thought.

Therefore, we have to reject our initial Working Hypothesis. The transformation cycle of elements *cannot be projected further back than the Bronze Age, and cannot safely be postulated to have informed modes of thought in the Upper Palaeolithic*. As a result we retain and affirm our Alternative Working Hypothesis. Therefore, whenever the transformation cycle of elements surfaces in sub-Saharan Africa (the Nkoya case) and in North America (e.g. the Skagit case), we cannot invoke some Upper Palaeolithic / *Borean substratum to explain the attestation, but must resign ourselves to either of the following two explanations:

1. the attestation can be explained as an effect of Pelasgian transmission from the Late Bronze Age onward
2. the attestation is the result of an even more recent (1st-2nd mill. CE) intrusion coming directly from East Asia, where the transformative element cycle has been at home in historical times.

For North America, where many culturo-linguistic intrusions from Eura-

sia and from historical times have been attested (Jett 2002), these are readily acceptable explanations. For the Nkoya however, such explanations can only be accepted with reluctance, as we shall see in the following Section 8.3.

8.3. Are the Nkoya-East Asian parallels to be explained by (a) Upper-Palaeolithic Back-to-Africa migration (b) Pelasgian transmission in the Bronze Age (c) East Asian intrusion into Africa during historical times?

The elaborate Nkoya clan system turns out to reveal a six-element cycle with catalytic element, and with unsystematic adaptations towards the institution of kingship. The comparative evidence from Eurasia, coupled with the recent genetic discovery of the ‘Back-to-Africa’ movement and corroborative evidence from comparative mythology and ethnography along such lines, makes it very unlikely that the Nkoya system should be viewed in isolation. There are close parallels to the Nkoya system in the Taoist transformation cycle, including the ‘insulting’ / joking element between the elements. Now to understand these transcontinental similarities, in principle three different models could be invoked:

- (a) Upper-Palaeolithic Back-to-Africa migration
- (b) Pelasgian transmission in the Bronze Age
- (c) East Asian intrusion into Africa in historical times.

Let us consider them on by one.

8.3.1. Upper-Palaeolithic Back-to-Africa migration

In the Upper Palaeolithic period before the trans-Bering migration and the Back-to-Africa migration, (the South-eastern part of) Central Asia still harboured cultural traits that were to end up in North America and sub-Saharan Africa respectively. The evidence of such a transcontinental common heritage is rapidly expanding, and so far includes:

- Girl’s puberty rites especially among the NaDenē speaking peoples (whose languages have recently been clustered into one linguistic phylum, Sino-Caucasian, along with Sino-Tibetan, Caucasian lan-

guages and Basque!), which are very similar to those of Niger-Congo speaking (including Bantu-speaking) Africans.²³⁵

- Gaming and divinatory tokens, which both in South Central Africa and throughout North America come in foursomes and are often indistinguishable between both regions, while also at least one connecting attestation from Upper Palaeolithic Eurasia is available (*cf.* Fig. 8.6, below).
- Other forms of material culture (basketry, fishing implements, house building, etc.) that show a considerable affinity between Central Asia (Mongolia), North America, and (especially Bantu-speaking) sub-Saharan Africa.
- Comparative mythology reveals a considerable affinity between the myths of sub-Saharan Africa and those of the Americas – a point repeatedly made in the recent work of the comparative mythologist Yuri Berezkin, and also emerging from my research in progress on Flood myths world-wide.²³⁶
- The truly massive linguistic evidence subsumed under the heading of the *Borean Hypothesis (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008) suggests genetic links between most languages now spoken, including the African macrophyla Khoisan, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Congo (> Bantu > Nkoya), Eurasiatic (> Indo-European etc.), Sino-Caucasian (with Na-Denē as its North American affiliate), Austric, and Afroasiatic. Multivariate analysis²³⁷ suggests that *Borean first

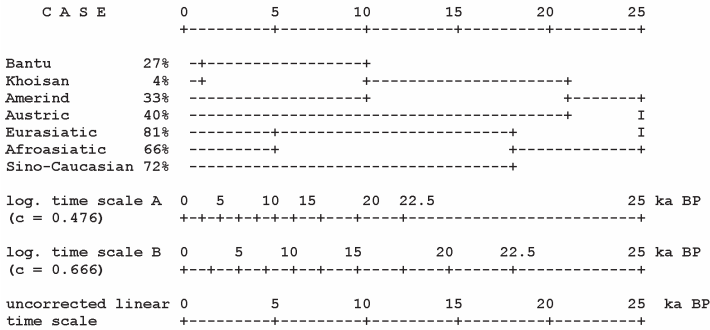
²³⁵ *Cf.* Sapir 1913; Driver *et al.* 1950; Tika Yupanqui 1999. From among many other traits I mention: the pubescent girl is usually initiated alone; by a non-kin adult woman who becomes her intimate fictive kin; in a community rite that lasts through the night and ends with the girl's solo dancing performance in the morning; when she is surrounded and encouraged by her close kin; in a dancing costume whose adornments imitate the rustling sound of rain. Despite the Upper Palaeolithic frame of reference implied in the long-range comparison of Amerind (or Na-Denē) speakers and Niger-Congo speakers, one is tempted to anachronistically interpret the rite, both in the Old World and in the New World, as a rudimentary evocation of element transformation: under the light of sunrise (Fire), the uninitiated girl with rain symbolism (Water) is transmuted into another element, perhaps Air (her elevated status as adult woman) or Earth (prospective mother).

²³⁶ Van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008; van Binsbergen 2010a and in preparation (c).

²³⁷ Van Binsbergen, in press (b). 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 Eurasiatic-Afroasiatic-Sino-Caucasian macrophyla), and, as a benchmark, the dissociation between Afroasiatic

disintegrated into:

- a ‘peripheral’ branch comprising Austric, Niger-Congo and Amerind, and
- a ‘central’ branch comprising Eurasiatic, Afroasiatic, and Sino-Caucasian.



Source: van Binsbergen 2011d: 315 *f.*, with extensive discussion and references; also van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77 *f.*; van Binsbergen, in press (b).

Fig. 8.2. Dendrogram setting out the relative positions of the *Borean-associated linguistic macro-phyla in relation to Bantu and Khoisan

and Eurasiatic at 12.5 ka BP (under the Natufian hypothesis – *cf.* Militarev 1996, 2002; Militarev & Shnirelman; 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 Eurasiatic 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 Eurasiatic / 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 Eurasiatic 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).

Presumably, the ‘peripheral branch’ disintegrated c. 20 ka BP in Central Asia, from there feeding the linguistic makeup of both North America and sub-Saharan Africa.²³⁸ However, if on this linguistic basis we expect the present-day Mongolians to retain remnants of some postulated Upper Palaeolithic element system, we end up with a disappointment. The Mongolian system (Mostaert 1969) revolves on the foursome Fire, Water, Earth and Air, to which occasionally (*cf.* the Taoist system) Wood and Metal may be added. In West Eurasia (Ancient Egypt, Greece) the four-element system appears, as we have seen, as standard from the Middle Bronze Age on.



Source: http://www.klausdierks.com/images/Namibia_Damara_Brandberg_Hungorob_4.JPG with thanks.

Fig. 8.3. A cult place for Heitsi Eibib in Namibia.

Probably a red herring is the name ‘Wounded Knee’ – a historically

²³⁸ Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008 for *Borean, Amerind and Khoisan, with selected Niger-Congo; more specifically, for Niger-Congo > Bantu within the *Borean context, van Binsbergen, 2010a, 2011d, and in press (b), van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011. Also see Fig. 8.2.

charged toponym in South Dakota, USA, North America (scene of a major USA massacre of Native Americans, 1890), but in Southern Africa *Wounded Knee* is the name of the principal Culture Hero (*Heitsi-Eibib*) of the Khoisan speaking peoples, whose possible Asian ancestry we touched on above. Amazing continuities, meanwhile, link Heitsi Eibib to the rest of the Old World and especially to Western Eurasia. His main cultic manifestation is the herm or stone pile – such as found throughout Eurasia from Atlantic European and North African megalithic arrangements to the *betyls* of the Levant and the stone piles of Mongolia and Tibet. Designated by a West Semitic word subsequently adopted into West European intellectual discourse, the *betyl* / *baitylia* ('house of a god') is a class of West Asian and Mediterranean shrines whose main or only feature is a rock. They have been described by various scholars, both for the Ancient Mediterranean²³⁹ and much further afield.²⁴⁰ Ducie (1888) describes three so-called *mare* [*i.e.* female horse] *stones*, megaliths, one of which is adorned with human teeth; a megalithic shrine likewise called 'mare stone' (*hasharet al-fras*) was identified by me, among many others featuring as minor Islamic shrines, in the highlands of North-western Tunisia (van Binsbergen 1971, 1985a, 1985b). The link with psephomancy (divination by means of pebbles) and geomancy is, among other indications, brought out by the fact that many divine and heroic shrines in the Ancient Graeco-Roman world operated cleromantic oracles (*cf.* Farnell 1895-1909, 1921; Graves 1964; Bouché-Leclercq 1879); and also by the ancient report according to which Eurytus, a pupil of Philolaus, used pebbles so as to form geometric figures representing animate beings (Delatte 1936: 582 n. 2). One suspects a further link with the 'pierres gravées' of the Azilien (Latest Upper Palaeolithic) (Breuil 1955). In Africa, stones are particularly conspicuous in the context of rain-making (*e.g.* Simonse 1992). In Southern Africa prehistoric bored stones abound and have been repeatedly treated in the scholarly literature (van Riet Lowe 1941; Goodwin 1947-1952); they are probably just weights to enhance the striking power of early agricultural implements. In South Asia, elongated stones are abundantly associated with the *lingam*, Shiva's procreative instru-


²³⁹ Schmidt 1893; du Mesnil du Buisson 1966; Rose 1935; Fauth 1979b; Suhr 1967; Marwitz 1979.

²⁴⁰ The Sahara, North Africa, Tibet and Central Asia; *cf.* Lhote 1955; Cadenat 1955 – mention of a betyl in the shale of a human head; David-Neel 1970; Hedin 1934.

ment. In the Ancient Egyptian context, meteorites are singled out as stones with ritual significance, and associated with lightning and with the god ithyphallic god Min; associated representations are recorded for Togo (Balfour 1903). Meteorites were similarly venerated in Ancient Arabia (*cf.* the Holy *Ka^caba* shrine), while one stage of the Islamic *hajj* pilgrimage has been the pilgrims' throwing of stones in defiance of demons. In addition to these, admittedly heterogeneous and multidimensional, stone aspects of Heitsi Eibib, even his affliction of the lower extremities may reflect transcontinental continuities, after all: the wobbling gait as a result of ritual mutilation of the lower extremities (*i.e.* 'wounded knee') or the groin in the context of initiation especially initiation into royal office (Graves 1964, 1988), constitutes a recurrent feature of Eurasian cultures and may well be originally a Pelasgian trait; a case in point is, again, Erichthonius or Erechtheus, the first Athenian king, who had to be carried around in a basket²⁴¹ because – just like the Chinese culture hero Fu Xi and (by some interpretations) the legendary Mesopotamian culture hero Oannes – he was snake-footed.

Could we invoke the same kind of Upper Palaeolithic, transcontinental connections to explain the traces of a transformation cycle of elements among the Zambian Nkoya? One of the most cherished regularities perceived by linguists, folklorists, and comparative mythologists is that *the periphery of a cultural domain has the tendency to retain archaic forms which have already been supplanted by newer ones at the centre of the domain*, where subsequent innovation has been more intensive. Do we have something similar here? If the Nkoya rudimentary transformation cycle of elements had to be explained in this light, we would expect a large number of other attestations of that transformative element system both in sub-Saharan Africa and in North America.

For North America, this expectation is not convincingly confirmed. Admittedly, we did adduce, in Chapter 4, a number of instances that seem to betray a transformative element cycle from a handful of North American ethnic groups. Now, the cultural and linguistic diversity of North

²⁴¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 552 *f.*; Hyginus (1872), *Fabulae*, 166; Pausanias, *Description Graeciae*, I, 24, 7; Herodotus, *Historiae*, VIII, 41. Note the remarkable parallel with the Ugandan queens, which I discussed above (p. 102n) with reference to the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic sign  *nbty*.

America is proverbial. The selected cases that appeared to manifest a transformative element cycle, have no recognised common cultural or linguistic affinity vis-à-vis one another, and neither case belongs to the Na-Denē linguistico-cultural cluster whose affinities with the Sino-Caucasian linguistic macrophylum of the Old World is now fairly widely accepted.²⁴² If we wish to explain the North American presence of traces of an element system they so unmistakably display, it can hardly be by exclusive reference to a common Amerind substratum going back to the Upper Palaeolithic. Instead, the attempted explanation should rather include reference to what is now an accepted model in pre-Columbian transoceanic studies (Jett 2002): an unsystematic, much more recent trickle of demic diffusion ('people on the move', bringing both their genes and their cultural and linguistic baggage) from the Old World (even from identifiable Sino-Tibetan and Afroasiatic provenances). Any transformation cycle of elements which these splinter groups on the move may have brought to North America, would ultimately have originated (possibly via illiterate, more or less acephalous, derived intermediate stages) from literate Eurasian cultures that have developed or adopted a transformative cycle of elements system.

A case apart is that of the Pacific coast of Mexico.²⁴³ We have seen how Nuttall claims a four-element system for Ancient Mexico, with several other Old-World continuities. We should not just take the antiquated anthropology of Nuttall's 1909 article at face value (however, for a fuller study see Nuttall 1901). From the pioneer British anthropologist Tylor to the diffusionist Thor Heyerdahl (1952, 1988) and the Afrocentrist Van Sertima (1976), claims have been made as to extensive trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific cultural exchanges in pre-Columbian times, and they have been passionately contested (*e.g.* Ortiz de Montellano 2000), even though the accumulated evidence in their favour is now overwhelming.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Cf. Ruhlen 1998; Renner 1995; Shevoroshkin 1991; Dürr & Renner 1995.

²⁴³ Persistent though generally rejected claims of South Asian influence on Meso-America might create a background against which to interpret the appearance of foursomes in the latter part of the world, for instance the tetrarchical form of government, and the conception of the four elements. Nuttall 1909; Elliot Smith 1929: 10f; Also cf. Tylor 1879, 1880, 1896, on board games.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Jett 2002; Needham & Lu 1985; Sorenson & Raish 1996; Sorenson & Johannessen 2004. Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994 even adduce some genetic evidence in support of Heyerdahl's hypothesis of demic diffusion from Peru to Polynesia (although not for the postulated transmission from Western Eurasia to Peru).

Among the correspondences listed by Nuttall, the Mexican purple industry (*cf.* Pankonien 2008) suggests Phoenician connections – after all Phoenicians were major navigators not only for their own account but also in the service of the great states of Antiquity, and their mediating role in the transformation and transmission of art, knowledge, and the alphabet has been duly recognised. In fact, however, the case need not be specifically Phoenician: the purple snails in question are widely distributed along the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coasts of both Europe and Africa. Significantly, meanwhile, the Mexican purple industry is situated on the Pacific, not the Atlantic, coast. Let us briefly consider Nuttall's other arguments in favour of transcontinental borrowing to Pacific Mexico: the round calendar, weaving, pearl fishing, shell trumpets and mining for precious metals. As renderings of an annual cycle, calendars may have a general tendency to be round, but the round calendars of the Maya appear to have counterparts especially in Ancient China. Weaving, probably an Upper Palaeolithic invention, is widely distributed over the Old and the New World, and therefore hardly suitable to pinpoint transcontinental connections. Pearl fishing especially refers to the Indian Ocean and its extensions (Red Sea, Persian Gulf – two regions traditionally associated with Phoenician origins and activities) including its South Chinese Sea fringe, but is also common throughout the Pacific – so again inconclusive. Conch shell trumpets are conspicuous in Oceania as well as in South and Central Asian Buddhism, but they are also known from the Ancient Mediterranean – Ovid's Flood is introduced by the sea god Triton blowing one (*Metamorphoses*, I, 449f). Mining for copper, silver and gold has likewise been a fairly ubiquitous affair since the Early Bronze Age, although Meso America may have had in common with sub-Saharan Africa extensive Indian and possibly Chinese intrusions and initiatives in this field. Tylor suggested, on the basis of striking continuities in colour symbolism and board games, a link between South Asia and Meso-America, trans-Pacific rather than trans-Atlantic. This is also the model one would be inclined to adopt if one might be prepared to jump to conclusions on the basis of Nuttall's mixed bag of reminiscences concerning the four-element system in Ancient Mexico.²⁴⁵ Our conclusion

²⁴⁵ Interestingly, attention could be drawn to another indication of South Asian provenance apparently penetrating, perhaps not all the way to the Americas, but at least deeply into the Pacific. When discussing Terrien de Lacouperie's work we had occasion to remark that he was the first to recognise the uncanny similarities between

should be that Nuttall's case on West Asian Bronze Age penetrated to Mexico remains weak but plausible (also *cf.* Heyerdahl 1952: Part V, pp. 219-345, on alleged pre-Columbian Caucasian, *i.e.* West Asian, intrusion in South America) while other South and East Asian candidates for such intrusion seem to offer a better case – and they might easily have transmitted a cyclical element cosmology.

Returning now to Africa we must admit that the elaborate Nkoya system is rather at variance with the other element systems in Africa. Particularly *the transformative aspect and the presence of a catalyst*, so striking in the Nkoya system and so strikingly similar to Taoism, both seem to be lacking in the other African systems reviewed in Section 4.3.1. Also in North America, attestations of the transformation cycle of elements, although not totally lacking, are far more sporadic than we would expect in the case of an Upper Palaeolithic substrate trait. At this junction it may be useful to adduce again, to the consideration of the South Central African Nkoya case, evidence from another major strand of my Africanist research, that of Southern African divination (Table 2.3). In my ongoing research into the African geomancies in their transcontinental environment from 1988 onward, I have tended to see the emergence of the four-tablet oracle in South Central and Southern Africa as the projection of a pre-existing divination system (based on an interpretative catalogue with 2ⁿ distinct categories), onto a new type of random generator:

- no longer the chance hitting of the ground with a stick, as in the Islamic form;
- nor the throwing of sticks or coins, as in the East Asian form;
- nor the throwing of special geomantic dice, as in the relatively recent and derived South Asian form, counterparts of which are also sporadically found in Africa;
- nor the throwing of cowries or divining chains as in the West African forms including Ifa;
- nor the throwing of half-shells of *mungongo* nuts as in Southern Africa and West Africa;
- or so-called 'temple-blocks', *chiao pai*, and the bundle of sticks

Indus Valley apparent scriptural signs, and those of Easter Island. In this connection we may also mention Lessa's (1969) attestation of the Chinese trigrams in Micronesia.

known as *chim*, as in the East Asian form;

- nor the clockwork emulation of the geomantic process as in Islamic divinatory machines of the early 2nd millennium CE;



Fig. 8.4. Divination tablets from Western Zambia.

- but by a random generator consisting of four ivory or wooden tablets, each marked to be distinguished from the other three, and moreover marked so as to distinguish between front and back.

Such tablets allow for $2^4 = 16$ different names / configurations when thrown together, and the divination process consists in the production and

interpretation, in close collaboration with the client, of a specific series of these configurations, by reference to a written or oral interpretative catalogue listing all possible configurations, and assigning meanings to them and to their sequence. Against the background of the other random generators listed, and of the proven convergence of the geomantic interpretative catalogues underlying all these forms of divinations listed, continuity of the underlying system but change of random generator is a plausible explanation of the Southern African tablet cleromantic oracle.

I studied this system in the first place in Southern Africa. However, in the light of the emphasis, throughout the present book, on the ethnography of the Nkoya people of South *Central* Africa, it is relevant that divination tablets continuous with the Southern African types have also been occasionally recorded for the wider region in which the Nkoya are situated (*i.e.* Barotseland, now Zambia's Western Province), even though during my four decades of fieldwork among the Nkoya (1972-2012) I have never encountered any.

In the second quarter of the 19th century the so-called *Mfecane* ethnic migratory turmoil brought the Sotho-speaking Kololo offshoot of the Nguni ethnico-linguistic cluster of South Africa all the way to the Upper Zambezi region, where they redefined the existing Luyana state into the Kololo state, and greatly expanded it, so as to include Nkoyaland among other parts. Apparently Southern African diviners and their tools were introduced in that connection. The documentary evidence on the Barotseland divining apparatus is puzzling. One missionary who spent many years in Barotseland, reported various divination methods with bones (Bouchet 1922: 32) but remained very unspecific as to their material description. Another missionary there described many divinatory methods but nothing that could be positively identified as the four-tablet oracle (Jacotet 1899-1901: 157 *f.*). The *mungongo* nuts that are elsewhere in Southern Africa used for divination, have been recorded as mankala tokens in use in Barotseland (Chaplin 1956: 168). Frobenius 1931 (*Karte* 8, p. 45) sees the *Hakata* (the Shona generic name for the Southern African four-tablet oracle) as limited to the region between the Zambezi and the Limpopo, so outside Barotseland. Garbutt, however, in two partially overlapping publications from 1909, is unequivocal in his description and depiction of four-tablet oracular sets from Barotseland's indigenous capital Lealui (Garbutt 1909a: 546, fig. 4, and 1909b: 61): square tablets

with a circular appendix on one side (Fig. 8.4).



Source: Ronnberg *c.s.* 2011: 549. Note the frayed material surfaces, lavishly hung with bone elements that are decorated with circle-dots and that are often indistinguishable from the divination tokens used in Southern Africa in historical times

Fig. 8.5. A present-day shamanic apron from the Tlingit, N.W. Coast, Alaska, c. 1860 CE.

Although such a circular element is reminiscent of the eye symbol that appears on many Southern African tablets, the Barotsse tablets are without striking parallels in Southern and South Central Africa, especially where the circular appendix is concerned; however, Northeast African / West Asian parallels could be suggested for them, from Ancient Mesopotamia (notably – Farber 1987 – New Assyria, whose penetration into West Africa c. 600 BCE is now an established fact due to Dierk Lange’s work – 2009, 2012), Ancient Egypt (which incidentally was under Assyrian occupation in the 7th c. BCE), and Bronze Age Cyprus. In these Ancient contexts the winged solar disk was a central symbol, as was also the case in Ancient Israel and Ancient Iran.²⁴⁶ In addition, Garbutt (1909a: 539) reports more usual *Hakata* from the Southern periphery of Barotseland,

²⁴⁶ Cf. Mayer 1984; Parayre 1987, 1990; Anonymous, ‘winged [S]un’; Sergi 1901: 30; for Cyprus: Ohnefalsch-Richter 1899; and for Africa: Jeffreys 1951.

among such peoples as the Toka, Totela and Leya, who (Brelsford 1965 / 1956) have strong cultural and political affinities with the Nkoya.

I am not in the least suggesting a direct and exclusive link between Ancient Mesopotamia and Barotseland. Rather, one is tempted to see a shamanic substrate surfacing here. There is a striking similarity with the ornaments on the shamanic apron shown in Fig. 8.5, from the Tlingit of British Columbia. Distinctive features here are the elongated tooth shape (not uncommon in Southern African divination pieces, but not including the Barotseland ones of Fig. 8.4) and especially the circle-dot incisions. The circle-dot is a simple pattern whose very wide distribution in space and time need not point to a common origin. In prehistoric contexts the circle-dot and related dotted signs (*cf.* cupmarks, such as abound worldwide in megalithic contexts; and leopard-skin symbolism) is often interpreted as an evocation of potency,²⁴⁷ although in certain contexts (as we have seen with regard to the Pleiades) specific reference to stars and constellations may be involved.²⁴⁸ In historical times, the circle-dot motif's regions of concentration have included sub-Saharan Africa, especially Southern Africa (Segy 1953; Nettleton 1984) but also Madagascar (Linton 1933: 77); the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of North America,²⁴⁹ and Ancient West Asia.²⁵⁰ In Egypt (with echoes elsewhere in the Ancient Mediterranean, *e.g.* among the Ancient Etruscans; von Vacano 1961: 75) the circle-dot was the hieroglyph N5 ☉ denoting the Sun, Rē^c – whose veneration appears to be a Pelasgian²⁵¹ cultic theme gaining

²⁴⁷ *E.g.* Middleton 1994; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1996; Garlake 1995.

²⁴⁸ Thus a Chinese astronomical disc shows an arrangement of circle-dots arranged according to a grid (Anonymous [Marseille, Jacques] 1994: 102).

²⁴⁹ Jenness 1961: Plate XI, on unnumbered page preceding p. 837: the Items 4, 11, 13 show circle-dots; so does the text illustration on p. 844.

²⁵⁰ Gurney 1952: Plate b opposite p. 128; Hrozny 1951: 169, after E.J.H. MacKay.

²⁵¹ Meuli (1975: 863) stresses, following Eduard Schwarz, that also Siberian shamans venerate the Sun as a deity – interpreting extensive mendicant tours as emulating the Sun's course through many countries. Perhaps this should be read as an indication that the shamanic influence reached Egypt already well before the second millennium. When the Greeks came into contact with this cult among the Scythians, they interpreted it as directed at Hyperborean Apollo. The position of the Sun in the Greek pantheon remains puzzling: the Indo-European gods are male and celestial, but not in

momentum in Egypt only from the 5th dynasty on. Like so much in the Egyptian Old Kingdom, this is suggestive of West Asian continuities, and by the same token we may note the surfacing of traits suggestive of shamanism in Ancient Mesopotamia²⁵² and Egypt – where a pardivested shaman is claimed to appear in the person of the Țt official on one of the earliest written documents (the Nrmr / Narmer cosmetic palette) from the very outset of the dynastic period, but where also major theonyms, as well as the New Kingdom tomb of Tut-^cAnḥ-Amon, turned out to contain suggestions of shamanism and Uralic / Altaic elements including what looks like a shaman's crown.²⁵³ As an Upper Palaeolithic substrate going back to the disintegration of *Borean with its suggestion of a Peripheral cluster of macrophyla including Amerind, Austric and the African macrophyla Khoisan, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, and / or as a result of much later Pelasgian transmission from the Late Bronze Age on, these motifs – even though simple enough to allow independent parallel invention – yet may well have found their way into sub-Saharan Africa from a common Eurasian origin, and surface in Africa in the context of divination.

Another intriguing comparative ethnographic fact relating to the Southern African divinatory foursomes is, meanwhile, that they are strikingly similar to sets of four tablets or sticks used in Native American games and forms of divination in North America, which most probably follow a pre-Columbian tradition (Culin 1975 / 1902-1903; cf. Fig. 8.6 below). Under the Back-to-Africa Hypothesis *this may be seen as much more than mere coincidence* – notably, as a sign that a four-based element cosmological system was already available in Central Eurasia in the Upper Palaeolithic, and from there was transmitted to *both* sub-Saharan

the first place solar; and Helios, although around at least since Homeric times, is, as a Titan, rather an outsider. Bernal's identification of Apollo as ḥpri, 'rising Sun' suggests that the Greeks derived part of their religious perception of the Sun, from Egypt, and that this was an indirect way in which shamanic / Asian influence was transmitted to the Aegean during the Bronze Age.

²⁵² E.g. in the art of the traditional healer, and in mythical motifs e.g. the *Descent of Inanna* which – among other dimensions, cf. Buccallati 1982 – recounts a shaman's descent into the underworld; Ritter 1965; Jacobsen 1976; van Binsbergen & Wiggermann 1999. Oppenheimer (1966: 37) also sees extispicy as part of the 2nd mill BCE intrusion of shamanism in the Ancient Near East.

²⁵³ Cf. Helck 1984; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 18, 93, Fig. 4.6 and 4.7, and p. 370 f., Table 28.4.


Africa, and North America – just like the linguistic macrophyla of Niger-Congo, Khoisan and Amerind under the *Borean Hypothesis. As we have seen, the general thesis claiming historical, generic continuity between speakers of Niger-Congo and Amerind is now well supported by linguistic and comparative ethnographic data: female puberty rites, mythology, basketry, etc. In the specific field of divination, there is some slight archaeological support for the postulated, Upper Palaeolithic link between sub-Saharan Africa and North America in that a pair (not four, alas) of extensively worked bone artefacts, rather resembling the North American divination and gaming tablets as well as Southern African divination tablets, have been unearthed in Upper Palaeolithic Western Europe (Dewez 1974; van Binsbergen 2005b; see Fig. 8.6). All this then constitutes additional, yet still weak, support for the suggestion that a four-based cosmology probably revolving on the idea of elements existed in the Upper Palaeolithic Old World, more than 10,000 years before Empedocles. Yet our discussion of prehistoric modes of thought makes it very unlikely that this Upper Palaeolithic system was already both transformative and cyclical.

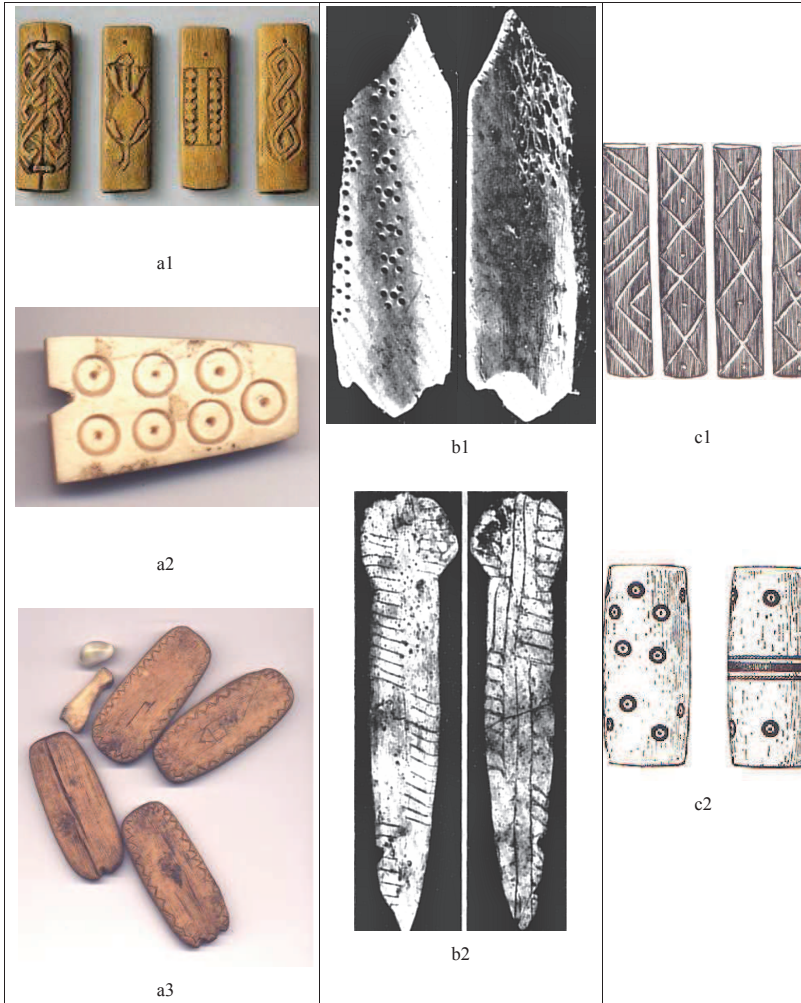
The long-range connections which thus manifest themselves in the context of divination have been spotted before by others. Above we already noted Trilles's account of Pygmy divination, and Coon's reflection upon it. Similarly, Baumann, Westermann & Thurnwald in their classic *Völkerkunde von Afrika* (1940), where ample attention is paid to divination forms, identify a cleromantic oracle whose basic opposition is that between male and female, as characteristic of the Steppe-hunter culture. Such a characterisation has obvious Upper Palaeolithic implications (before Neolithic times hunting and gathering constituted the universal mode of production!), but also has echoes in the gendered conception of the present-day oracular tablets in Southern Africa, and of *Yin / Yang* as the underlying dichotomy informing the 2ⁿ configurations of *Yi Jing*. However, for the above typological and historical reasons such a rudimentary prehistoric system would still lack the crucial features of the Nkoya clan system: transformation, and catalytic action in triads. This renders it impossible, despite the above discussion, to explain the Nkoya clan system in its totality as the surfacing of an transcontinentally widespread Upper Palaeolithic substrate cosmology. Let us now assess whether the Pelasgian Hypothesis brings us further on this point.

8.3.2. Pelasgian transmission in the Bronze Age: Vindicating our Alternative Working Hypothesis

My Pelasgian Hypothesis identifies Neolithic Bronze-Age West Asia as seething with cultural initiatives, resulting in an extensive package of cultural traits percolating through that region, expanding into the Mediterranean, and from the Late Bronze Age being transmitted in all four directions including, via the Steppe, to East, South and South East Asia and even into Oceania; moreover (along the Sahara and the Indian Ocean) into sub-Saharan Africa; and perhaps occasionally, via unrecorded so merely postulated trickles of demic diffusion, to North America. Above we have seen indications of the existence of a transformative element cycle in West Asia and Egypt during the Bronze Age, and it is quite conceivable that this system, as part of the Pelasgian expansion, ended up in South Central Africa. Many of the c. 80 Pelasgian traits which I identified and whose distribution I traced *grosso modo* (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.5, p. 374 *f.*) are actually found in sub-Saharan Africa, not least among the Nkoya, so the overall framework for Pelasgian transmission of the transformative element cycle certainly seems to apply there.

Ancient Egypt is a region where our dozens of Pelasgian traits are particularly well-attested, and if there are manifestations of Egyptian traits in sub-Saharan Africa, this would prepare us for the possibility that also the transformative element cycle followed the Pelasgian route South – as well as, by the same token, being transmitted transcontinentally in the other three directions of the ‘cross-model’. As we have seen (p. 73), Egyptian manifestations in sub-Saharan Africa are in fact abundant, also among the Nkoya.

That the postulated cross-model creates astounding parallels between sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia we have already seen in the Introduction, with the case of the mythical role of the wagtail (*Motacilla*) (p. 39 *f.*). Let us cite another case, of a specific Nkoya-Japanese parallel. Rather to my surprise, the primal Nkoya mythical character Katete ‘Reed Person’ (which I argue to relate, with her counterpart Luhamba, to the Ancient Egyptian royal title *nswt-bit* , ‘She of the Reed and the Bee’; van Binsbergen 2010a and above, p. 101).



(a) Recent southern African divination tablets, author's collection (a1, commercially acquired wooden set, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 1989; a2, item from a commercially acquired set of four, ivory, bought in Limpopo Province, South Africa, 1994, courtesy Gina Buys; note the circle-dots); a3, set (the author's of a four wooden tablets (with one cowry and one goat's foot bone as peripherals), cut in a *sangoma* lodge, Francistown, Botswana, 1989); (b) possible divination tablets from Remouchamps Cave, Belgium, Upper Palaeolithic: b1 excavated in 1902 (68.8 mm); b2 excavated in 1970 (72 mm) (both after Dewez 1974); (c) c1, c2, 19th century gaming / divining tablets from North America (Culin 1902 / 1975).

Fig. 8.6. Divination: Continuities in space and time.

has a literal counterpart in the Japanese god うましあしかびひこちのかみ Umashi-ashi-kabi-hiko-ji-no-kami ‘sweet reed-shoot prince elder’, of the first generation of gods in the Japanese classic 日本紀 *Nihongi*. This could be sheer coincidence, despite at least one other such coincidence: that of the wagtail. However, the Japan-Nkoya reed parallel takes on a different significance once we realise that, at various parts of the putative Pelasgian periphery (if we take its epicentre to be in West Asia) great cosmogonic importance is attributed to reed: Ancient Egypt, Yoruba, unspecified Bantu-speakers, the Nkoya, the Zulu, and Ancient Japan. Emphasis on reed is also found in North American Flood myths. The Pelasgian Hypothesis proves to be an illuminating perspective.

In my study of transcontinental resonances in Nkoya mythology²⁵⁴ I noted a number of surprising Scythian and Mongolian correspondences with the South Central African case. The Altaic language family to which Turkic, Mongolian, Korean and Japanese belong, dominated the Eurasian Steppe before modern times, and Scythians are considered to belong to either that language family or to Indo-European. But this belongs to a period many millennia after the disintegration of *Borean. The Nkoya / Scythian-Mongolian parallels cannot all be convincingly be attributed to a common Upper Palaeolithic substratum but must, in large part, be attributed to much more recent intrusions, during or after the Bronze Age, either as a result of direct Pelasgian, cross-model expansion into sub-Saharan Africa, or as a result of indirect mediation of Scythian-Mongolian traits via South Asian or East Asian penetration during the Common Era, into South Central Africa, and via India, Ceylon, China, Korea, or Japan.

In my most elaborate published discussion of the Pelasgian Hypothesis so far (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 372 *f.*) I provisionally listed²⁵⁵ 80 proposedly Pelasgian traits, and indicated that several dozens of these traits also obtained among the present-day Nkoya, who therefore are

²⁵⁴ van Binsbergen 2010a; where also cross-cultural references to *reed* in comparative mythology may be found at p. 177 *f.*

²⁵⁵ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 374 *f.*; this tabulation was still only provisional in the sense that full references to all the 80 entries had to wait till the more definitive publication in van Binsbergen, in press (a).

clearly part, at least typologically, of the Pelasgian realm. Moreover, the cross-model transmission of Pelasgian traits in all four directions of the compass is suggested by me to start in the Late Bronze Age (13th -11th c. BCE), which is half a millennium *before* Empedocles, but *after* the time when, according to my reconstructions above, the West Asian correlative system had been invented. Conceivably, therefore, the Nkoya clan system with its transformational and catalytic overtones could derive from the Pelasgian heritage, but we have only very slight and circumstantial evidence to back up such an explanation.

8.3.3. East Asian intrusion into Africa during historical times?

Given the severe limitations of the Pelasgian explanation in the case of the Nkoya clan system, we must consider the obvious alternative: *recent East or South Asian intrusion into South Central Africa in historical times*. In recent centuries, Africa and Africans have been pushed to the periphery of the World System and to the bottom of a global scale of prestige and power – resulting in their appearance as the outsiders *par excellence*. To counter this unfortunate and historically distortive situation, I have cherished, for decades now, the idea of Africa's continuity with the other continents, even if this means that the intra-continental cultural initiatives and achievements to be attributed to Africa appear in a more relative light of transcontinental exchanges and common origins, thus blurring what Strong Afrocentrists have claimed to be Africa's inalienable contributions to global cultural history, e.g. geomancy. Now, although I have often expressed my sympathy for the Afrocentrist perspective, the painstaking analysis of empirical data as in the present argument yet brings me to admit that Africa has always been an integral part of global cultural history at large, but hardly, since the Upper Palaeolithic (30-12 ka BP), with the decisive, pan-continental impact Afrocentrists have claimed for the African continent. (For the Out-of-Africa Exodus, 80-60 ka BP, such an impact goes without saying.)

Now, apart from an effect of the 'Back-in-Africa' overland migration flow from Central or West Asia which started in the Upper Palaeolithic, and from the Pelasgian transmission from the Late Bronze Age onward, could the presence, among the Nkoya, of apparent Central and East Asian themes, such as traces of a transformation cycle of elements, *be accommodated by direct, much more recent transoceanic influences*, effected

from the far end (Korea, Japan) or from a Southern branching (South Asia) of the Steppe and its culture? There has been considerable critical debate doubting the presence of Malagasy / Austronesian kingdoms beyond Madagascar on the African mainland (Kent 1970). Likewise, there have been extensive claims of a historic Japanese Buddhist influence on Madagascar (Raison-Jourde 1994); but also these claims were dismissed as mythical. Yet a strong case is currently building up, largely in and around my recent work but with great initial stimulus from the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick–Read Hypothesis on a considerable demographic and cultural influx from South and South East Asia on sub-Saharan African soil, for a considerable South and South East Asian, especially Buddhist presence in South Central Africa in the last two millennia.²⁵⁶ In Southern Africa, the archaeological complexes of Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe,²⁵⁷ from the late 1st and early 2nd millennium CE, have been widely²⁵⁸ recognised to incorporate Asia-derived elements. It is my contention, now backed up by extensive empirical evidence and elaborate arguments, that other Asian state complexes had a more or less precarious and short-lived existence in South Central Africa and along the African Atlantic coast in the first and second millennium CE, where the prevalence of the name *Mbedzi* / *Mbetsi*²⁵⁹ (common Bantu: ‘Moon’; but also, in Asia, a widespread designation of the Buddha; name of a major ethnic cluster among the Venda of Transvaal; and also of an apical ancestor in the Douala region, Cameroon) reminds us of them, as do numerous institutional traits surrounding the kingship, popular ritual, (second) burial (e.g. among the Bamileke of Cameroon), reincarnation beliefs,

²⁵⁶ Cf. Dick-Read 2005, 2012; Thornton 2012; Hromnik 2012, cf. 1981; and my work in connection with the 2012 Leiden conference.

²⁵⁷ E.g. Garlake 1973; Huffman 1984, 1987; Vogel 1994; Caton-Thompson 1931; Bent 1892 / 1969; Fouché & Gardner 1937-1940; Schofield 1937; Huffman 2000.

²⁵⁸ ‘Widely recognised’, but not universally so. There is a widespread tendency in African Studies to insist that things African must be uniquely explained by reference to Africa – an unfortunate form of Political Correctness, which, if applied to the study of European cultural history (where much of the constitutive culture, religion, script, probably also languages, initially derive from outside Europe) would immediately reveal its ideological, identitary, in short false, overtones.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Ralushai & Gray 1977; Frobenius 1931; van Binsbergen 2003: 300 f.; Dolisane-Ebossé Nyambé 2005; Birkeli 1936.

kinship (e.g. the institution of the paramour; Tauchmann 2010), cults of affliction, etc.²⁶⁰ There is also considerable genetic evidence for such South Asian and East Asian intrusions into sub-Saharan during the last few millennia (van Binsbergen 2012e).

Among the Nkoya, specifically, a South Asian element is suggested by many details of social life especially the kingship. In Nkoya royal circles, personal names circulate that have scarcely a Bantu etymology and that appear to have come straight from South Asia (e.g. Shikanda, cf. Skanda, the South Asian god of war – or स्कन्ध, *skandha*, ‘element’, especially in the Buddhist context; and Mangala, the South Asian god presiding over the planet Mars, and as such equivalent to Skanda. Moreover, in court culture and protocol, ceremonial arrangements, royal control over natural resources, paraphernalia and regalia, the royal orchestra, layout of the capital, royal historical traditions, royal burial practices, we find a remarkable number of close parallels with Indonesia, Buddhist South East Asia and Buddhist South Asia (from the first millennium CE onward) which constitute the topic of my ongoing research into African-Asian continuities. The Nkoya king, although in an intact South Asian tradition he (but the Nkoya ruler is often a queen) would have to be assigned to the Kshatriya warrior caste, yet looks in many ways like an exalted Brahmin, secluded and pure, and unable to receive food from others. Nkoya royal traditions trace their origin to an enigmatic, distant land to the North East, ‘Kola’, which some informants situate in Central Africa near the Congo-Zambezi watershed (cf. the toponym ‘Angola’) but which may well be in South, South East or East Asia.²⁶¹ Among the Nkoya and surrounding

²⁶⁰ However, the alternative possibility is that we, reversely, attribute the Asian-African parallels to early *African sallies into Asia*, as suggested by Winters (1981, 1983, 1988).

²⁶¹ Munda-Kolar(-ian) is an Austro-Asiatic (< Austric) language group around the Gulf of Bengal. Repeated Tamil invasions in Sri Lanka have been associated with the C[h]ola dynasties. In a generally dismissed late book, the famous decipherer of Hittite, Hrozný (1951: 196), claims that in Ancient Egyptian inscriptions, the name Kode (<*Kole?) is used for the peninsula Kathiavar south of Sindh, South West Asia. Karst (1931a: 241) mentions for the Dravidian region the toponyms ‘Kurukh, Koroi, Kurru, Kora’; Sanskrit कूल *kula* translates, among other meanings, as ‘group, people’ (Monier-Williams 1960 / 1899, s.v., pp. 294 f.; Karst 1931a: 538), which would suggest a wide range of applicability for that word as an ethnonym. Kola as a toponym has a wide geographical distribution also beyond South Asia (e.g. Northern Europe on the White Sea and in East Anatolia), cf. Table 2.1. in van Binsbergen &

peoples the name Kapesh ka-Mununga-Mpanda ('Kapeshe Who Joined Forked Poles') appears as a dynastic apical ancestor associated with a Tower (and by implication Flood) myth – the name has no proper etymology in Central Bantu, but compare (de Vries 1958 *s.v.* 'gaffel') **ghabasti*, proto-Indo-Iranian for 'forked gable, chariot pole' – a nearly perfect match both semantically and phonologically. By the same token, one of the principal regalia among the Nkoya is the hourglass drum, *mukupele* – again a common Nkoya word without a proper Bantu etymology, but *cf.* Sinhalese (Sri Lankan) *mahabela*, 'big drum'. Elsewhere (2012d) I have argued how the Tower myth of hubris and destruction surrounding the Nkoya king Kapesh seems to have considerable historical roots in the Sri Lankan episode around king Kasyapa of the towering Sigiriya rock, in the 1st millennium CE, – in addition, of course, to the Biblical Nimrod (*Genesis* 10-11). Several other South Asian references cluster around the Kapesh name: Kashapa, originally a pre-Vedic god, became a most prominent Hindu sage (Rishi) to whom even the Buddha paid homage²⁶² and who is counted as the father of Garuda (Vishnu's mount), Aruna (Dawn), the Nagas (serpent lords), Apsaras (vegetation gods), etc. and pseudo-epigraphical author of the *Kashap Samhita*, a classical Ayurvedic medical text. The historical person Mahakasyapa was a prominent disciple of the Buddha. All these parallels between South Central Africa, and South Asia, are too close and too specific than that they could be convincingly attributed to remote and diffuse transmission processes several millennia or longer back. Against this extensive South Asian background among the Nkoya dating from historical times, we are justified to propose a recent Asian background also for the Nkoya clan nomenclature. One major hurdle then still to be taken is that most of the Asian traces in South, South Central and West Africa have South and South East Asian connotations rather than East Asian ones, while the opposite is true for correlative systems displaying our central features of cyclicity, transformation and element cosmology. Element-cosmological aspects are implied in certain aspects of South Asian mythology, icono-

Woudhuizen 2011: 43. Considering the remarkable Scythian and Mongolian traits among the Nkoya (van Binsbergen 2010a), we should also consider, as an etymon of Kóla, 'Kórea' (at the Eastern end of the Eurasian Steppe), which of course is an alien-imposed designation yet goes back to the Goryeo (Korean: 고려) dynasty (918-1392 CE) – in terms of transcontinental contacts a plausible periodisation.

²⁶² *Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga*, I, 249; Rhys Davids & Oldenberg 1988 / 1881-1910.

graphy and ritual (e.g. the हवन *homa* fire ritual and its Vedic protoform; Staal *et al.* 1983), and were listed as such in our Table 4.1, but it would require a specialist argument in its own right (for which I lack the Indological competence) to ascertain whether South Asian cosmological expressions can be said to revolve on cyclicity and transformation. Meanwhile, for Vedic India a system of caste nomenclature has been described where each professional group, in totem-like fashion, is identified with an animal species, and which is strikingly reminiscent of Nkoya clan nomenclature:²⁶³

caste's professional status	species
wheelwright, weaver	young buffalo
smelter, trader, turner, blacksmith, trader	tiger, rhinoceros, buffalo, elephant, antelope
merchant's clerk	rhinoceros, antelope
turner	elephant, beehive

Table 8.1. Proposed relations between professional castes and their animal 'totems' in Vedic India.

Although most of the species mentioned in Table 8.1 are not highlighted in the Nkoya clan context, 'elephant' and 'beehive' are, and the 'turner' element that is so conspicuous among the Nkoya (*Sheta*), is encountered here in a different light. Even though there is no evidence yet that a transformation cycle underlies the South Asian caste names, yet the proximity of East Asia and the many contacts e.g. through Buddhism and seafaring make more specific Taoist influences quite possible.²⁶⁴

I suggest that these observations, if they can be substantiated systematically, have a wider applicability than just the Nkoya case. They point to

²⁶³ The unauthoritative source of Table 8.1 is: Anonymous, 'Language'; however, a further background for the association between animals and castes is offered by Michelutti 2007; Deshpande 2001; Smith 1991, 1994.

²⁶⁴ Around the major sea port of Basra, where Chinese ships abounded at the time (Chau Ju-Kua 1911; Sauvaget 1948; Tibbets 1971) and which also received part of the Silk Road trade, Taoist influences are conspicuous at the end of the first millennium CE, for instance among the important intellectual movement of the *Iḥwān al-Ṣafā* / Brethren of Purity, and include the adoption of Taoist medicine e.g. reading the pulse (Needham c.s. 1961, Vol. I), while the notational system of the divination system of *ilm al-raml*, decisively developed in this milieu, appears to be indebted to the later Chinese notation of *Yi Jīng*, i.e. broken and unbroken lines – of course, after the original open or filled dots had given way to lines with the invention of the writing brush.

the presence, in addition to

- a) the postulated results of Upper Palaeolithic continuity and of
- b) Pelasgian transmission,

of

- c) a massive Asian substrate, resulting from the more recent phases of the Back-to-Africa migration *i.e.* from the last two millennia, and informing – to a greater or lesser extent – a wide variety of cultural expressions we have so far been used to cherish as typically or uniquely African.

If our point (c) here can be substantiated, it means that we are well on our way to liberate ourselves from the essentialisation of African identity and of the African past, and begin to accept that Africa's cultural history within the wider world has been very similar to that of Europe: sometimes taking historic initiatives, but often receiving the initiatives from elsewhere, and turning them into something local and vital in a creative process of adaptive localisation.

