

The present book testifies to the theoretical inspiration which intercultural philosophy had brought me – but intellectually and institutionally I had soon reached the limits of what that investment could yield, my empirical orientation remained more and more frustrated in the philosophical environment, and the challenges of the fundamental unity of humankind remained without substantial progress. So from 2004 on, I allowed myself to be more and more drawn into the folds of the renewed, Harvard-centred long-range comparative mythology, increasingly at the expense of my ongoing work in intercultural philosophy.

Although I had always engaged in the study of myth, this new perspective, and the new worldwide circle of colleagues by which it was being proffered, had an enchanting effect on me – as if *everything I had always wanted to know about humankind's early history but had been afraid to ask*, was finally made available to me. If it was empirical investigation of the fundamental unity of humankind that I was after, how could comparative mythology make a contribution on this point? To answer that question, let me take the reader (whom the philosophical signature of this book has but little prepared for an exercise in comparative mythology) on a brief exploration of the spatially and temporally long-range comparative mythology of the god's name Nyambi, which is the common designation of the High God among the Nkoya and throughout Western Zambia. This will also highlight some of the linguistic and documentary resources and methods employed in this disciplinary connection.

B. THE THEONYM NYAMBI. The theonym Nyambi / Nyambē²⁶ is found, with regional variations (Zambi, Nzambi, Ngame, Nyame) all over Atlantic Africa, with eastward extensions towards the spine of the continent. In South Central Africa, the water name Zambezi derives from the original Lyambayi, which may well be a reflex of 'Nyambi'.²⁷

The etymology of the name Nyambi is puzzling. The Jesuit theologian Williams (1930), exploring possible traces of Ancient Judaism (the much-discussed problem of the lost tribes of Israel) in West Africa,²⁸ considers the name Nyame, among the Akan / Ashante (a major ethnico-political cluster in Ghana) an adulteration of the Israelite name for the Supreme God, יהוה Yahweh – which he alleges to be transmitted to West Africa via a Persian source that had *Yami* for Yahweh. For the next few decades, scholars (including myself) would have been inclined to dismiss this type of claim as myopic, Eurocentric fantasy, but the more recent, excellent research by Dierk Lange (e.g. 2004, 2011) has established beyond doubt that close links existed between West Africa and Ancient Mesopotamia – especially in Assyrian times, 7th c. BCE, when mass deportation – in this case, via Egypt, which in the Late period was first under Assyrian, then under Persian rule! –

²⁶ Cf. Hirschberg 1963; Schebesta 1964; van Binsbergen 2012d: 39; 2010a: 180 f., with references.

²⁷ Mythological sources on Nyambi include Jacottet 1899; Jalla 1903: 319 f.; the secondary account by Feldman 1963: 36 f. is unreliable because she situates in Mozambique what clearly is a myth from Western Zambia.

²⁸ A similar concern has inspired the work of von Sicard (1952), and in recent decades Parfitt (professor of Semitic languages at University College London, UK – 1993 / 1992; Parfitt & Semi 2005; Bruder & Parfitt 2012) on the Ark of the Covenant in Ethiopia, Southern Africa and even (perhaps somewhat over-zealous, chimerical?) New Guinea.

was a major political instrument.²⁹ The Mesopotamian influx turned out not to be the first major inroad into sub-Saharan Africa from the Ancient Near East. For our work on the Sea Peoples in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean³⁰ brought out that some of the Sea Peoples, after their defeat in the Egyptian Delta, migrated westward along the North African coast and then traversed the Sahara into West Africa. My analyses of the spiked-wheel trap, of the *Borean³¹ (including Austric – so by implication peripherally Eurasian) component of the Bantu linguistic family, and of the Eurasian parallels in Nkoya mythology³² also suggests major continuities between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa going back to at least proto-historical times.³³ This is not yet a window on the fundamental unity of humankind, but at least puts paid to the habitual essentialisation and alleged isolation of Africa – on the contrary, that continent, its inhabitants and their cultures have always been part of the wider intercontinental world – even besides the now generally affirmed probability that the human species emerged there c. 3 to 4 million years BP, and Anatomically Modern Humans c. 200 ka BP.

If we consider the possibility that the name Nyambi belongs not to the Afroasiatic linguistic domain (including Hebrew and Egyptian) but to Niger-Congo / Bantu, it could convincingly be associated with proto-Bantu **gamb*,³⁴ 'speak', which would give as meaning 'the speaker', perhaps: 'the one who creates with the word', as throughout the Ancient Near East.³⁵ In Nkoya (and in the cognate Luyana language, which is the Lozi

²⁹ Apparently, even the Ancient Greeks, and their unmistakable affinity with the cultural orientations and gene pools of sub-Saharan Africa, also owed their coming into being as a people partly to such mass deportation: Arnaiz-Villena *et al.* 2001; however, the latter study must be treated with considerable reservations (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 54, 400 n. 1295) in view of its lack of linguistic sophistication. On Ancient Greek-African continuities, also cf. Bernal 1987-2006; Mudimbe 2008; Mveng 1972; van Binsbergen 2010e, and extensive references there.

³⁰ van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011, with extensive references ranging from Herodotus to Lhote 1959. The major North-South routes through the Sahara are lined with rock art depicting chariots, which reached the Eastern Mediterranean in the middle of the 2nd mill. BCE (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Fig. 28.17, pp. 382 f., with sources).

³¹ *Borean is the reconstruction of a language form hypothetically spoken in Central to East Asia in the Upper Palaeolithic, and considered (and that is the basis for its reconstruction) to have left traces in the lexicon of all linguistic macrophyla now spoken; cf. Fleming 1991, 2002; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008. In the context of such long-range historical linguistics, *Austric* (cf. Blust 1993; Higham 1996) is the name given to a proposed linguistic macrophyllum combining the phyla of Austronesian and Austroasiatic, spoken today over much of South East Asia and Oceania.

³² van Binsbergen 2010a, 2010b, and in press (d); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 81 f. One of the relevant findings of my explorations in the Mediterranean Bronze Age has been the linguistic discovery of uninvited guests on the Mediterranean shores, such as the place names *Jabbok* and *Canaan*, which are unmistakably (proto-)Bantu, meaning respectively 'fordable stream' and 'place of denial'. Whatever the (widely contested) historical status of the *Exodus* tradition of a massive influx of Israelites from Egypt in the Later Bronze Age, (*Proto-*)*Bantu-speakers seem to have been among the prior inhabitants of Palestine*.

³³ Protohistory is the term to designate an era when strictly local written sources are still absent, but indirect historical data may be gathered from written sources from adjacent regions.

³⁴ Meeussen n.d.: 4.2, L; Guthrie n.d.: item 770.

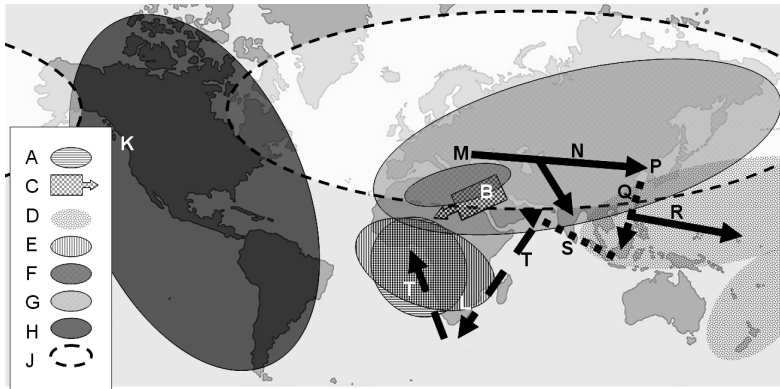
³⁵ Like in the Ancient Near East the sun god Marduk (in the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish* – King 1999 / 1902); and the Biblical 'judge' דבורה Devorah ('bee', but really 'speaker', because of the noise a bee-hive makes – *Judges* 4:4 f.; cf. the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (Budge 1969 / 1904: I, 238, my italics):

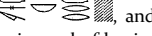
court idiom), 'speaker' is *ngambela* – more specifically the term for Prime Minister, *i.e.* the highest court officer, who communicates the king's pronouncements to the outside world, for the king, being sacred, can have no direct dealings with the world. An alternative, but probably spurious interpretation is 'the one who does *not* speak' (Anonymous, n.d. 'In the beginning...').


In this connection it is relevant that, in the South Central African worldview, as in Atlantic Africa, Nyambi is primarily considered as a creator, and is generally taken to be a *deus otiosus* (cf. Shelton 1964; Nwanunobi 1984), who has no day-to-day dealings with the natural and human world any more, and who is hardly the subject of a cult.³⁶

The leading Africanist Baumann (1936) tried to identify the origin of the name Nyambi, but failed. On the basis of knowledge of the Kongo (Brazzaville) language, however, Dennett, a well-informed trader and amateur ethnographer, offers plenty of detail on Nyambi including (1906: 166 f.) a very specific morphological analysis of the name:

'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...'



'The door of the first Circle, Sesheta, is called Ṭes-neb-ṭerer . . .  and shuts in the images of Tem [the creator god Atum], Khepera [sunrise god of beginnings] and Shu [the god of air who lifts Heaven from Earth]; when Rā [the Sun God] speaks to them they answer in a voice which resembles the *humming of bees*'.

As testified by the Telipinu epic of the Hittites (Pritchard 1954) and the Ancient Egyptian royal title  *nswt-bt* • t, 'She of the Reed and the Bee' (the two -ts leave no doubt as to gender), the bee was a solar cosmogonic symbol throughout the Ancient Near East (also cf. Draffkorn Kilmer 1987). Also cf. אלהים *Elohim* ('the gods'? or merely a *pluralis majestatis*?) creating through the word, in *Genesis* 1:3 f. Also cf. Chapter 9 below, note 357 on immanentalism.

³⁶ Although this deity may still be invoked in oaths and in the dedication (expressly: to the rising sun) of a new-born infant; there are indications (Mutumba Mainga 1972) that prayer to the morning sun as an epiphany of Nyambi was a regular institution in Western Zambia. The spread of the world religions Islam and Christianity has, however, made it difficult to confidently identify historic, local High-God cults in Africa.

- A. attestations of the theonym Nyambi and cognates (Nyame, Nzambi, Ngame etc.)
- B. locus of the Biblical theonym YHWH – C. extent of Assyrian Empire, c. 7th c. BCE
- D. Austric (= Austronesian + Austroasiatic) spoken today – E. Niger-Congo (> Bantu) spoken today
- F. Mediterranean and W. Asian virgin goddesses named *-n[]t- associated with weaving and warfare
- G. weaving goddesses as extension of F. – H. Amerind spoken in proto-historic times
- J. Central *Borean cluster: Eurasiatic, Sinocaucasian, Afroasiatic
- K. North-West Coast Raven trickster
- L. Zulu Princess of Heaven Inkosazana – M. Scythians (Iron Age)
- N. eastbound transmission across Eurasian Steppe as from Bronze Age
- P. Scythian / W. Eurasian traits in Korea, Japan and Taiwan
- Q. southbound Western Eurasian influence
- R. eastbound W.-Eurasian influence
- S. postulated westbound Sunda influence from Early Holocene on
- T. postulated extended Sunda influence into Africa

Fig. 0.1. Global distribution aspects of the theonym Nyambi.



Dennett thus implies that the four-element cosmology, best known from the Greek Presocratic philosopher Empedocles, and attested throughout the Old World and even North America since the Upper Palaeolithic, is also found in Central Africa – a finding whose considerable comparative and historical significance I have discussed in my book *Before the Presocratics* (van Binsbergen 2012d: 125 f., 157 f., and *passim*). Also among the Nkoya, in traditions supposed to refer to their oldest history, reference is made to ‘The Four’ (*Likota Iya Bankoya*, 38:6; van Binsbergen 1992: 447 and *passim*), which appears to relate to the four major royal dynasties to survive into colonial times, but may ultimately also link up with the element cosmology (although in historic times the Nkoya turn out to have a transformative cycle of six, rather than four, elements). Throughout the region of its distribution, the theonym Nyambi has solar (sometimes lunar) and spider-like connotations, as has the West-African divine trickster Anansi, whose name and character are likely to be cognate to Nyambi’s.

In my work on comparative mythology I have repeatedly suggested (e.g. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 112 f.) that Nyambi is in fact continuous with a cluster of Bronze Age goddesses distributed from the North African Sahara to West Asia, and associated with *weaving, spider-like features, a female and even virgin nature, and* (remarkable, in women – but continuous with the institution of women warriors in Ancient Dahomey, Ancient Libya etc.) *military prowess*. In the course of the Bronze Age, these goddesses were relegated (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4) to positions of domestic subordination under male celestial gods, but more originally they appear to have been supreme Mother Goddesses and Creator Goddesses; cf. Table 0.1, below, p. 31 f. On both phonological and semantic grounds, it is tempting to consider the Mediterranean members of this cluster of goddesses (e.g. Athena, Neith, Anat, Anahita, Tanit, Antinea, perhaps, although already masculinised, the Berber god Ānti / Antaios³⁷ as one coherent series of cognates. Semantically,

³⁷ Another long-range association presents itself in this context, although it is a very far shot, and most probably a red herring: given the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick–Read Thesis (note 47, below), and the several empirical indications of possible Austric presence in the Bronze Age Mediterranean (Pedersen n.d.; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.4, pp. 370 f.), the North African god Ānti (his tomb was supposed to be in Tingis, Mauretania), and the various Ancient Egyptian gods called Antī (Brunner 1975-1986; Brunner 1975-1986; Bonnet 1971 / 1952: 38f.; Sethe

and perhaps also phonologically,³⁸ Nyambi may be considered merely an outlying member of this series.




Eliade (1965 / 1953) stresses the binding / weaving aspect of the *moon*³⁹ and discusses Athena in a lunar (whose sea / watery nature I have argued elsewhere; 2011f) rather than solar connection. Also Graves – notoriously disreputable as a scholar, but often with a poet’s stunningly convincing insights – sees (1965: 22 f.) West African Nyame in a lunar perspective. Yet in comparative religion it is rather the (often female!) sun which has spider-like connotations (van Binsbergen, in press (g), (b)), and it is illuminating to consider Nyambi in the light of the global distribution of spider motifs (van Binsbergen 2010: Fig. 9.7, p. 185, reproduced here as Fig. 0.2).

I have given an extensive but far from conclusive discussion of the possible etymology of the name *nt* / Neith in *Ethnicity in Mediterranean Protohistory* (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 88 f.). There, after exploring the possibilities of an Afroasiatic and Indo-European background, arguments are adduced, in regard of Ancient Egypt, for a possible North-Eastern, Uralic background with shamanic connotations (in accordance with the Bronze-Age spread of horse and chariot technology from proto-Uralic Central Asia), while, through the semantics of ‘wetness’, confirming Neith in her hypothetical primary identity as ‘Mother of the Waters’. (Proto-)Uralic thus appears as another uninvited guest on the Mediterranean linguistic scene of the Bronze Age. Beyond this Uralic connotation however, a proto-Austrian connotation (suggestive of South East Asian or Oceanian provenance – in line with the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read or Sunda Hypothesis) may be adduced (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 370 f., Table 28.4), not only for the name *nt* / Neith but also for such other important Mediterranean Bronze-Age names as Osiris, Ra^c, Men(es), Daidalos / Talos, Dilmun, and Atlantia. The semantic and phonological resemblance of the name and symbolic connotations of Neith with proto-Austrian **nah* ‘bow’ (with the final *-t* interpreted as the

1930: §51 f.; Otto 1975–1986), there might be a connection here with the Oceanian Gilbert Islands, where gods are called *anti* and divine ancestors *anti-ma aomata*, ‘living gods’; cf. Cotterell 1989: 50 f.; Starostin & Starostin 1998–2008, ‘long range etymologies’: proto-Austrian **TVŋ*, ‘hear’, proto-Austronesian **a’ntin*, ‘hear at a distance’ < *Borean **TVNV*, ‘know, hear’ (here and elsewhere, *V* = unspecified vowel). For such an interpretation, it would have helped if there are any attributes or connotations of these Mediterranean gods that could be argued to have Sunda implications. This however seems scarcely the case – although, as we have just seen, the *possibly* Austrian element in the Mediterranean Bronze Age is not limited to this one case. One Egyptian *Anti* is known as ‘Lord of the East’ – but this can hardly be taken to refer to South East Asia rather than to Eastern Egypt. Another is associated with the expression ‘two claws’ – again scarcely specifically Sunda. Greek accounts of *Antaios* depict him as a collector of human skulls for the roofing of a temple of his father *Poseidon* (Fontenrose 1980: 33), killed by *Herakles* ‘in Libya’ – which in Antiquity was a geographically very wide concept, also cf. Fig. 8.1, below – by lifting him off the ground – *Antaios* was invincible as long as in contact with his mother, *Earth* / *Gaia* (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.15). Apart from the apparent Sunda / Austrian etymology of Greek *aēr* (cf. Austronesian *air*, ‘water’) and *haima* (‘blood’, with the tell-tale, probably Austrian *-m-*), the only likely Sunda element here would be *headhunting*, but although this is a widespread institution in South East Asia and Oceania, its Eurasian and African attestations are sufficiently numerous not to rush to Sunda conclusions on this point (van Binsbergen 2014). The somewhat hybrid conception of *Antaios*’ descent selectively combining elements from both the cosmogony of the Separation of Heaven and Earth (lifting is deadly for him) and that of the Separation of Water (*Poseidon*) and Land (*Gaia*), suggest, rather than long-range connotations of South East Asia / Oceania, that he belongs to the class of very old mythemes of which particularly North Africa appears to have retained a fair helping.

³⁸ Neith’s *nVt* (*V* = undetermined vowel; the *i* and *th* are artifacts of Greek transliteration) > ? Nyambi’s *n*[/z-...

³⁹ Also manifest in discussions of witchcraft both in Ancient Greece, and in modern North America; Adler 1990 / 1979.

common feminine ending in Old Egyptian ($\Delta / -t$), is remarkable (Neith is semantically and iconographically associated with the bow and arrows, e.g. ,  or  – the right-hand signs in the latter two utterances represent a bundle of two bows packed together; in the well-known 1st-dynasty stela of Queen Merit-Neith two arrows cross the familiar heraldic inflated bag on a pole). Yet the similarity between the Austric and the Ancient Egyptian word is probably largely coincidental, all the more so, because it is only the oldest reconstructed Austric proto-form that resembles the name of Neith, whereas the late forms in Austronesian and Austroasiatic are widely divergent from the Egyptian name. So we must look further for etymologies of our chain of female theonyms. In doing so, as non-specialists, we will lean very heavily on the authoritative etymological database of the *Tower of Babel* (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008).



If we assume that the common lexical element in the series of Mediterranean Bronze-Age female theonyms Neith / Athena / Anahita / Anat / Tanit etc. is $*-nt-$, then for the identification of its etymology we might in the first instance go back (Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008, 'long-range etymology') to a *Borean root $*(NVTV)_n$ (V is again an undetermined vowel), of which so far three variants have been reconstructed:

1. $*(NVTV)_n$, 'to move quickly'; with reflexes in Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic (Illich-Svitych, 1967: 338 f., 1976: II, 90 f.; Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1608; all changing *Borean $*-T-$ into $*-d-$, hence phonologically unsuitable for our present purpose, while also without semantic relevance;
2. $*(NVTV)_2$, 'female relative', with reflexes in Eurasiatic and Afroasiatic (Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1570), the latter in proto-Afroasiatic: $*nVH\dot{t}$, making both semantically (these are goddesses!) and phonologically an attractive case, cf. 'Anahita'; and
3. $*(NVTV)_3$, 'snake', with reflexes in Indo-European and Amerind, which however are not adequately documented in the *Tower of Babel* database. To some extent Neith, as goddess of the waters, is a cognate character to such Ancient Near East serpentine chaos figures such as Tiamat and Leviathan; therefore this possibility should not be discarded off-hand.

Nor does this exhaust the etymological possibilities of our chain of female theonyms, especially since West Asian traits abound (Hoffman 1979 / 1991; Kammerzell 1994) in the Ancient Egyptian Delta, where Neith's town Saïs is situated.

4. Proto-Afroasiatic $*\lambda am-$, 'woman', > proto-Semitic $*\lambda ant- at- / * \lambda am-$, 'woman' (3100) and Old Egyptian $im\dot{z}t$. It is possible that our chain of female theonyms derives from proto-Semitic and merely denotes the gender of the deities involved, as (demoted) Great Mothers. In the course of the Bronze Age such female deities were, as we have seen, eclipsed by male gods, often with celestial connotations, and relegated to inferiority associated with such female tasks as spinning and weaving, despised from a male dominant perspective. However, in an earlier dispensation they would probably not be defined by juxtaposition to males but have stood on their own, and then designation by their gender identification seems implausible.
5. *Borean $*HVNTV$, 'front', has reflexes (Dolgopolsky n.d. no. 1875) in Eurasiatic (= Nostratic), Afroasiatic and Sinocaucasian; in the latter two macrophyla the *Borean $*-H-$ tends to be retained in modified form (although proto-North Caucasian $*?end\dot{u}$, 'forehead', as it is in proto-Eurasiatic, $*Han \cdot V$, 'front', which is unsuitable for our purpose; however, the *Borean $*-H-$ is dropped in most reflexes in Eurasiatic including most Indo-European ones (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 65 f.), although do note Hittite / Hatti $hant-$, 'forehead', $hanta$ 'opposite', Luwian 'first'. Along this line of approach we may yet come to our female theonyms, highlighting their bearers' super rank.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Perhaps this is also the place to point at proto-Indo-European $*k(')enta$, for an adverb or

6. In principle fitting for a chain of female theonyms is also the following etymological connection: proto-Semitic **ʾanta*, 'thou' (3084), which however has no reflex in Old Egyptian.
7. Reminiscent of the watery aspect of this chain of goddess as hypothetical transformations of the 'Mother of the Waters', is the proto-Indo-European root **-unt-* or **-und-*, 'wave', which however does not readily drop its *-u-*, and only has reflexes in Germanic and Latin (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 252*f.*), and therefore is unlikely to have relevance for our chain of theonyms spread as it is over a vast region where various macrophyta have been attested in (proto-)historic times; but *cf.* the semantically interesting proto-Altaiic **ʔuntu* (*-o*), 'whirlpool, tide', Ozawa 1968: 59*f.*
8. Similarly reminiscent of the watery aspect of our chain of goddesses as hypothetical transformations of the 'Mother of the Waters, and therefore semantically stimulating, is the North Caucasian protoform **-ontV-* (*/-intV-*), 'soft; liquid; wet; to warm up (a liquid)', with reflexes in various North Caucasian languages, *cf.* proto-North Caucasian **ʔəmtü* (*~ -n-*), 'soft, liquid, wet'; Caucasian connections may be detected in older layers of Biblical myth, *e.g.* the Noahite narrative in *Genesis* 5 to 10, while the bee complex of Ancient Egypt (especially manifest in the bee connotations of Saitic Neith since the earliest dynastic times, and in the Ancient Egyptian royal title,  *nswt-bît* 'She of the Reed and the Bee', which evokes the two aspects of later cosmogony, Heaven and Earth) has Anatolian and Caucasian continuities, especially in the Telipinu epic. But again it is hard to explain how the vowels *-o-* / *-i-* could have been dropped.
9. From a perspective of comparative mythology, where storm' and 'sea' may be associated with the same divine figure (*e.g.* Japanese *スサノオ* Susanoo, Ancient Egyptian  Seth, Ancient Greek Poseidon), a moderately interesting angle of approach is *proto-Indo-European **[h](a)wē-* / **(a)want-*, 'to blow (of wind); wind', < Nostratic **Hewa*, 'to blow, to winnow' (with further reflexes in Altaic and Dravidian) < *Borean **HVVV*, 'to blow, to winnow'. It is only in Hittite, Tokharian, Germanic, Cymric / Welsh, and Latin that *-nt-* is seen as a later development, which, if at all applicable to our series of female theonyms (which is unlikely), suggests, again, a West Asian provenance for them.
10. Considering the connotations of military prowess which the goddesses in our widespread chain have, another promising proto-Indo-European root is **nent-*, 'to dare', with reflexes in Tokharian, Germanic and Celtic⁴¹ 'struggle' (Pokorny 1959-1969: II, 317). However, this relatively recent root does not seem to be a reflex of proto-Eurasianic let alone *Borean, and its exclusively Indo-European background would seem to be too narrow for our widespread chain, despite the considerable West Asian impact on Egypt, especially on the Delta. Remotely connected may seem Proto-Indo-European **(o)neid-*, 'to insult', with reflexes in Old Indian, Avestan, Armenian, Old Greek, Baltic and Germanic (Pokorny 1959-1969: II, 322).
11. proto-Afroasiatic **ʔnt-* 'louse'. This is again an unlikely connection since it has no reflex in Old Egyptian. Neith however is reported to be associated with beetles and other bugs, and the Mother Goddess which appears to be a Neolithic transitory stage between the Upper Palaeolithic 'Mother of the Waters' and our Bronze Age god-

preposition meaning 'under, lower, deep, along, against', with reflexes in Hittite, Tokharian, Old Greek, Latin / Italic, and Celtic (Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 459*f.*; Tischler n.d.: item 539*f.*) This root is largely irrelevant in our present context, since in none of its reflexes it sheds its initial *k-*. Yet it ties in with the more general 'earth / bottom / human' complex to be discussed shortly.

⁴¹ *E.g.* Old-Irish *nēit*, – there also exists a Celtic war god Neit or Neito, epigraphically attested in the Iberian Peninsula – which ties in with the Mediterranean associations of our chain of theonyms, and with the war-like connotations of Egyptian Neith; Simón 2005.

deuses, is associated with bees as signs of death and rebirth (Gimbutas 1982, 1991).

12. Another possible etymology of Neith is Indo-European: **nedh-* 'net' < Eurasianic **nVdV*, 'to tie', with further reflexes in Uralic and Dravidian, but also an extension in Chadic (Illich-Svitych 1967: 364 and Illich-Svitych 1976: II, 324; Dolgopolsky n.d.: item 1533). This 'ties' in with some of these goddesses' specialisations, spinning and weaving, but leaves unaccounted the military and watery dimension, and does not consider the relatively late, Bronze-Age connotations of these goddesses' demotion and relegation to the women's quarter.⁴²

Overlooking the wealth of lexical / etymological material that has been presented here, we can hardly claim to have offered a compelling etymology of the chain of female theonyms that stretches from West and North Africa to West Asia. Yet two options emerge as rather convincing: the serpentine / cosmogonic option (3), and the 'exalted' option (5) – with possibly the 'tying, weaving' dimension as a more recent, Bronze-Age addition (12).

Our discussion of the etymology of our chain of female theonyms would remain one-sided and even more unconvincing than it already is, if we would not take this opportunity of drawing on a much more comprehensive, in fact global, context, where the most likely solution for our etymology seems to lie. An important step in the recent rise of long-range linguistics has been the formulation, by John Bengtson and Marvin Ruhlen (1994), of so-called 'global etymologies': words that are found in most macrophyla spoken today, and that have retained the recognisable marks of both phonological and semantic cognation. I found (van Binsbergen 2010c; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 76 f.) that another such global etymology could be given for the immensely important conceptual complex designating 'earth / bottom / human' – a complex moreover that convincingly highlights the extent to which sub-Saharan Africa is in continuity with the cultural history of Eurasia (*pace* Cavalli-Sforza – 1991; Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* 1994 and many other writers, who have erroneously relegated African languages to the extreme peripheral recesses of human cultural history). I am giving the original analysis in full (van Binsbergen 2010a: 155 f.), because beyond highlighting the etymology of our female goddess names and beyond the rehabilitation of the Bantu philum, it also contains important lessons towards another one of this book's major themes, *the fundamental unity of humankind*.

BB. A GLOBAL ETYMOLOGY: THE COMPLEX 'EARTH / BOTTOM / HUMAN'.

The following example, although excessively long, may serve to indicate the relevance and the power of the **Borean* hypothesis as a long-range approach. Remarkably, the root *-ntu*, 'human, person', although only one of many of hundreds of reconstructed proto-Bantu roots (*cf.* Guthrie 1948, 1967-1971, and n.d.: **nto*, Guthrie no. 1789; Meeussen 1980 and n.d.: **-ntu*), found in many or all languages of the large Bantu family (a division of the Niger-Congo or Niger-Kordofan phylum), 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

⁴² And even this lavish listing does not exhaust the rival possibilities. Thus, in addition, we have: proto-Semitic **ytn* ~ **ntn*, 'give' (3143; no reflex in Old Egyptian), unfortunately without consistent treatment in the *Tower of Babel* database; Old Egyptian: *nty.w* 'people, men' (Old Kingdom) [original note: '-y may be a suffix or a reflex of a front vowel'], again without consistent treatment in the *Tower of Babel* database; Old Egyptian: *ntnt* (Middle Egyptian) 'skin' / ('loin cloth leather') < **IVtIVt?* < proto-Afroasiatic **lat-* (?), 'skin' (but the analysts themselves complain of 'scarce data!'); and Old Egyptian: *nt3* (Pyramid texts), 'run' < proto-Afroasiatic **nVta2-*, 'go, run', also with reflexes in Semitic and Western Chadic, but without obvious semantic applicability in the present context. None of these options seem remotely convincing as etymology for our chain of female theonyms.

form of the plural personal nominal prefix). However, *-ntu* is not exclusive to the Bantu family. This is already clear from proto-Austronesian **tau*, ‘human, raw’ (Adelaar 1995). 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’, Pokorny 1959-1969: I, 323) – thus proposing a semantics of ‘human’ as ‘ground or underworld dweller’. Thus, incidentally, Ode also offered an interesting etymology of the long contested Ancient Greek theonym Athena as an underworld goddess.⁴³ Along this line, many more possible (pseudo-?) cognates from many language phyla come into view. The background assumption in this kind of historical linguistic reconstruction is that standard methods of historical and comparative linguistics allow us, with intersubjective scientific plausibility, to reconstruct progressively older levels of parent forms, right up to the oldest possible reconstruction, *Borean; nearly all linguistic macrophyla spoken today contain, among an admixture of forms of unidentified provenance, also reflexes from *Borean. Against this background, (pseudo-?) cognates of Bantu *-ntu* seem to be proto-Afroasiatic **tV?* ‘a kind of soil’ (cf. Old Egyptian *t* / *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 Sinocaucasian⁴⁴ notably as 土 *tǔ* (modern Beijing Chinese), 地 *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 **təj* ‘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 similarities⁴⁵ between Southern and Eastern African Khoisan on the one hand, and North Caucasian on the other hand, one should not be surprised that also some Khoisan language families seem to attach to the very old and very widespread ‘earth / bottom / human’ complex which we are identifying here: South Khoisan (Taa): **tʰaʰ*, **tuʰ*, ‘person’; North Khoisan (proto-Zhu) **ž u*, ‘person’ – Central Khoisan has **khoe*, etc. ‘person’, which might well be a transformation of **ž u*. (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

⁴³ For alternative etymologies, of the name *Athena*, cf. Hrozný 1951: 228; Fauth 1979a. Regrettably, Martin Bernal took his (*demonstrably wrong*) etymology of Greek *Athēnē* < Egyptian *nt* / Neith as the heraldic emblem of his (yet greatly inspiring) *Black Athena* Thesis, which generated considerable debate: Bernal 1987 vol. I; Jasanoff & Nussbaum 1996; Egberts 1997 / 2011; van Binsbergen 1997b / 2011e; Blažek 2007.

⁴⁴ Also cf. the North Caucasian language Khinalug: *ant*, ‘earth, ground’, North Caucasian etymology 2191, < proto-North-Caucasian **?antV* (~ m), ‘dirt, earth’, clearly part of the same complex analysed here. (*my later addition*.)

⁴⁵ For which the geneticist Cavalli-Sforza *et al.* – 1994 – has given (*pace* Vigilant *et al.* 1989) an adequate explanation: today’s Khoisan speakers are a hybrid African-Asian population which had still ancestors in West Asia 10 ka BP – they are another example of the Back-to-Africa movement.

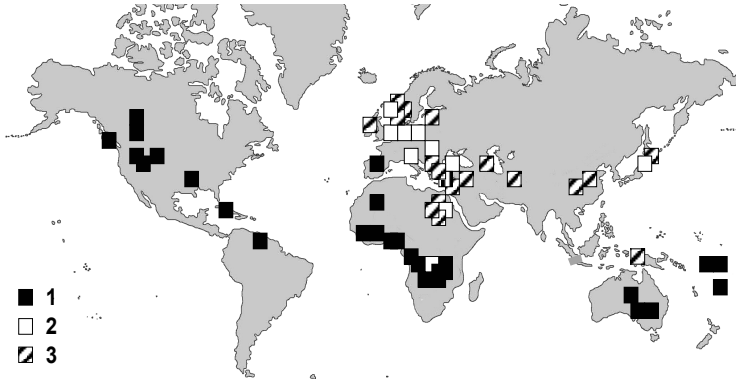
possibilities are contained in the reflexes of another *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', which however is both semantically and phonologically so close to *TVHV 'earth' (however, in *Borean reconstructions, the vowels, indicated by *-V, had to remain unspecified and therefore could differ) that we may well have to do with one and the same word: proto-Sinotibetan *diəH 'bottom' (e.g. Chinese 底 *təjʔ 'bottom' Karlgren code 0590 c; 根 *təjʔ, 'root, base', Karlgren code 0590 d) from proto-Sinocaucasian *dVHV, 'bottom'; from the same *Borean root *TVHV, 'bottom', also Afroasiatic *duH, 'low' (e.g. Egyptian: dH (z1) 'low', East Chadic: *dwaHdaH- 'down') as well as proto-Austroasiatic *dʔuj (also *tu:ʔ 'tail, vagina'), proto-Miao-Yao *tʃoʃi.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; Starostin & Starostin 1998-2008).

As we have seen, one of the most inspiring recent long-range theories spanning vast expanses of space and time has been the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read 'Sunda' Thesis (postulating massive South East Asian demographic and cultural impact on South and West Asia, and by extension sub-Saharan Africa, from the Early Holocene onward).⁴⁶ Although my initial enthusiasm for this hypothesis prompted me to regard the conspicuous African distribution of the spider theme in terms of the otherwise well-attested transmission from South East Asia / Oceania in proto-historical times (as appeared to be the case for a variety of musical instruments, certain styles of 'hunched' sculpture, ecstatic cults, the peopling of Madagascar with Austronesian-speakers, etc.), further analysis on a global scale (which especially brings out the prominence of the spider motif in the New World) suggests that with the spider we are dealing with something rather different than a Sunda effect: notably, a very ancient mythological element, which may be dated more precisely if we assume it to reflect a transcontinental distribution interpretable as

⁴⁶ Oppenheimer 1998; Dick-Read 2005; van Binsbergen 2012c; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008. But although an Anti / Antaios / *a'ntiŋ connection may be suggested in the light of the Oppenheimer–Tauchmann–Dick-Read Hypothesis for which especially in the African context evidence is now accumulating, it does smack of the absurdities of an antiquarian super-diffusionism. The consonantal combination *VntV is far too common to be pressed into service for such a far-fetched claim linking the Western Mediterranean and Oceania. Besides, plenty of alternative, and probably equally unlikely and spurious, long-range associations could be adduced in this connection:



- Proto-Altaiic *ant'a 'slope', with reflexes in Tungus-Manchu, Korean and Japanese < Nostratic *Hant.V, 'front', < *Borean *HVNTV (see above)
- Eurasianic *antV, 'to join, together', with reflexes in Altaic ('oath, comrade, match'), Dravidian and Chukchee-Kamchatkan, < *Borean *HVNTV, 'to join, together'
- Japanese *amá-, *ánti 'taste, tasty, sweet' < Proto-Eurasianic *xamV < *Borean *HVMV 'to taste, sour'
- Japanese, *anti, 'kind of duck', proto-Altaiic *ǎŋatV, 'a kind of duck' < proto-Eurasianic *ǎŋVtV, 'duck'
- Japanese anti, 'plough' < Proto-Altaiic *amča 'plough'
- Eurasianic *aŋTV, 'a kind of plant', with reflexes in Indo-European, Altaic, Uralic and Dravidian
- Uralic *onta < Proto-Eurasianic *yontV, 'heat'
- Uralic *ontV 'root, origin', < Proto-Eurasianic *ŋŋŋtē

a manifestation of the Upper Palaeolithic communality of African, Amerind and Austric linguistic macrophyla after the disintegration of *Borean and the branching off of a 'Central' cluster (with the macrophyla Sinocaucasian, Eurasian and Afroasiatic) c. 15 ka BP (cf. van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 77f., with the cluster dendrogram; also cf. van Binsbergen in press (c)).



1. Spider Supreme god; – 2. oblique references to spider in folklore etc., not mythical;
3. spinning / weaving goddesses, with spider connotations; references in: van Binsbergen, in press (g), in press (b).

Fig. o.2. Global distribution of spider mythology (van Binsbergen 2010: Fig. 9.7, p. 185).

Time to return to our analysis of the theonym Nyambi. Typical of Nyambi in the African context is that, as a Supreme God, this deity occurs in isolation rather than paired with a counterpart. This is not the case with some of the other female Old-World deities considered in the present connection as possible cognates of Nyambi. Egyptian gods tend to be organised in pairs or triples reflecting the history and power games of their cultic constituencies *i.e.* local and regional congregations, so we should not be surprised to find Isis and even Neith paired with various major male gods, especially  Osiris and  Seth. Astarte is paired with Ba'al ('Lord'), whose very *name* she is claimed to be. Greek Hera is paired with the Supreme God, Zeus. Athena is usually associated with Poseidon (whom she contests the loyalty of the town of Athens – and with whom she already appears to be connected in a much earlier dispensation, in Central Asia; cf. Karst 1931), – but her adoptive or vicarious child Erichthonios (actually born by Gaia, therefore emphatically 'autochthonous'), the first Athenian king, sprung forth from the semen which Athena's charms brought Hephaistos to spill (Pausanias 1.2.6; Apollodorus 3.14.6); and Hephaistos is in many respects Athena's counterpart as god of artisanal arts and crafts. In the Israelite tradition, substrate gods with female connotations were paired with, identified with, or subdued by, Yahweh – much like their Arabian counterparts in regard of Allah. Something similar applies to the Japanese creator goddess イザナミ Izanami (who was subdued by her brother イザナギ Izanagi), and 天照 Amaterasu (temporarily subdued by her brother スサノオ the sea / storm god Susanoo).⁴⁷ The brother-sister rivalry that comes to light

⁴⁷ Interestingly, the Japanese comparative mythologist Obayashi (1989) interprets the vicissitudes of Amaterasu and Susanoo's relationship in terms of Dumézil's (1958) tripartite ideology of Indo-European societies, which therefore requires a third deity, Ohokuninushi ('Harvest deity'; cf. Mackenzie 1923: 373f.). While this is a moot point (in my opinion Indo-Europeanists,


here, reminds us of a common mythological pattern in the Early State (Africa, Egypt, Aegean, Celts, Nkoya, etc.), where the woman is constitutionally considered the owner of the kingship, but this right is held to be usurped by her brother or husband (van Binsbergen 1992b).

Since world-views tend to constitute – especially (but far from exclusively, as Lévi-Strauss has emphasised in his approach to *La Pensée Sauvage*, 1962) in the literate environments of civilisation, during the last handful of millennia – *correlative cosmologies* (so that, for instance, social relationships are paralleled by those between colours, animal species, celestial bodies, musical notes, deities, seasons, etc.), it is to be expected that such pairing of major deities is associated with natural pairs in the human experience. Besides ‘dark and light’ / ‘night and day’, the most obvious pairs are those of Light and Dark, Sun and Moon, Heaven and Earth (the Separation of Heaven and Earth has been the central theme of mythology world-wide since the Upper Palaeolithic) and Water and Land (whose separation seems to have been a dominant cosmogonic theme prior to the shamanic invention of naked-eye astronomy and rise of the Heaven-Earth separation as main mythological motif).⁴⁸ Inevitably, and as we have already seen, Nyambi

given their fixation on linguistics and their lack of sophistication in socio-political theory, tend to rely too readily and automatically on the Dumézilian schema), it at least helps us to interpret the parallels between Isis and Amaterasu in terms of long-range Eurasian continuity in space and time. The invention of the spoked-wheel chariot in Kazakhstan c. 4 ka BP opened up the Eurasian Steppe for linguistic and cultural continuity all across Eurasia, and probably the Japanese Amaterasu account (only committed to writing, in classic Chinese of all languages, in the early 8th c. CE, more than three millennia after the flourishing of Egypt’s Old Kingdom!) is indebted to some West Asian source (with a likely impact on Ancient Egypt, as so much in West Asia at the beginning of the Bronze Age – cf. Rice 1990) rather than the other way around. Scythian *i.e.* West Asian / Pelasgian influence on Mongolia, Korea and Japan has great plausibility. According to state-of-the-art long-range linguistics, the realm of the Altaic phylum stretches contiguously from modern Turkey to Japan! Sunda influence on West Asia, the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa is still a moot point and at the focus of my current research (van Binsbergen 2012c, 2012e, 2012g, and in press (b); van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: Table 28.3, pp. 361), but it might constitute the return movement by which (as shown in Fig. 0.1, above, stretches N-P-Q-S) the circle is closed, and cultural material may have been pumped around all over the Old World in recent millennia, as depicted in Fig. 0.1, the sequence N-P-Q-S-T.

⁴⁸ Inevitably, we have no direct conventional (*i.e.* written) sources on mythologies in periods preceding the invention of writing, c. 5.1 ka BP – although since Gimbutas (1991: ch. 8) interesting, but much contested, claims have been made concerning rather older language-based sign systems. However, the revival of comparative mythology since 2000 CE (largely at the instigation of the leading Sanskritist Michael Witzel, of Harvard, formerly at Leiden) is predicated on the insight that the accumulated results of long-range linguistics, archaeology, ethnographic distribution patterns, and comparative religion, against the background of advances in molecular genetics, provide a framework within which prehistoric thought patterns may be reconstructed with considerable intersubjectivity and reliability, on the basis of myths and other language forms collected in historic times as well as pre- and protohistoric iconographies, provided one has at one’s disposal an elaborate theoretical model whose extrapolation into pre- and protohistoric periods is rendered plausible since it has already stood the test of application to empirically known later periods; there are indications and claims to the effect that comparative mythology has by now reached this important stage: Witzel 2001, 2012; Harrod 1987, 2010; van Binsbergen 2006a, 2006b, 2010a. If from 2004 I have been drawn into this field it was not only because my Africanist and Mediterraneanist empirical knowledge as well my proto-historic methodologies and theories proved to be very welcome there, nor again because the Harvard connection afforded me much needed comparative opportunities for Asian travel I had never had as an Africanist, but particularly because it is in this booming field of long-range, interdisciplinary research that I could hope to empirically consolidate the thesis of the fundamental unity of humankind,

and more or less cognate deities have also been drawn into such complementary cosmological schemes. Typically, the latter's application is seldom consistent, and may be reversed or muddled especially when mythical material is transmitted across linguistic and ethnic boundaries – as is very often the case. The process of supplanting a cosmology by a later dispensation that is more attuned to new modes of production and to the complexity of new forms of socio-political organisation, is seldom total and completed – remnants of the earlier systems will continue to cling to the later versions, making for alternative non-integrated variations and repertoires. Thus in many respects, even if incorporated in a later, vertical cosmology hinging on the Separation of Heaven and Earth, yet the older cosmology hinging on the horizontal Separation of Water and Land will continue to shimmer through in the mythical and ritual material. Above I have suggested that the complex figure of Antaios is a case in point. This principle may also explain why in South Central Africa, including among the Nkoya (*Likota Iya Bankoya* 4:1), Nyambi may take (Tegnaeus 1950: 193, *carte* / map 5; Wasitau 1997) the form of a *bird* – and not, like the culture heroes of adjacent regions, that of a hunter. For white, aquatic birds have been closely associated with (even identical to) the cosmogonic Mother of the Waters since the Upper Palaeolithic (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: *passim*). In Ancient Egypt, Neith has clearly retained many features of the 'Mother of the Waters', but so has Greek Athena – and this correspondence is a major reason *not* to consider (*pace* Bernal's *Black Athena* Thesis) the latter as a reflex of the former, but to assume an underlying common source, probably in West or Central Asia (van Binsbergen 2011f). De-throned by later, male-centered and vertical, celestial cosmological dispensations, the cosmogonic females may be turned not only into relatively docile (but occasionally rebellious) domestic spinsters and weavers, but also into divine tricksters – I take it that the widespread bird-like divine trickster of North American mythology (*Raven*; Robinson 1981) may be partly⁴⁹ explained in this way – and perhaps also the constructive but humble earth diver, which in flood stories the world over, but especially in North Asia and North America,⁵⁰ restores Land after the Flood, albeit often not as an independent agent but as a servant of the (already typically male) Flood survivor. The fact that the spider appears as a creator deity in Oceania and North America, but also as a persistent association of Nyambi in the African

whose philosophical underpinning so far did not satisfy me, or eluded me. My claim of the succession of two Separation cosmogonies in the Upper Palaeolithic, one hinging on Water-Land, supplanted by one on Heaven-Earth, is also such an informed conjectural model. I have invoked and elaborated it in various recent writings (van Binsbergen 2010a, 2012d; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011; van Binsbergen with Isaak 2008) where it turned out to be in accordance with the specific comparative mythological data adduced, but I have so far not come around to spelling out all the evidence and theory systematically. Such evidence, of course, includes various cosmogonies (*e.g.* *Genesis* 1: 1 f; the Ancient Egyptian cosmogonies featuring the Primal Waters  Nun – the hieroglyphic sign depicts water containers over 'sky', since the Primal Waters comprised underworld, sea and sky), the abundance of data on Flood myths world-wide (undoing the order installed by the Separation of Land and Water, the Flood myths describe simply an anti-cosmogony), the very wide-spread mytheme (from Ancient Egypt to Ancient Greece, Africa and Oceania) of raising of Heaven so as to make room for the second generation of gods, and for the world at large, *etc.* However, this is not the place to pursue this point any further.

⁴⁹ I say: *partly*, because, given my cluster analysis of the disintegration of *Borean, any analysis of African / American similarities has to take into account that the most obvious point of cultural and linguistic convergence between Africa and North America is situated in the Upper Palaeolithic. However, indications of trickles of trans-oceanic exchanges between the Old World and the New are now sufficiently numerous, and by now sufficiently mainstream, to allow for exchanges in far more recent millennia in addition to a common Upper Palaeolithic origin; *cf.* Jett 1999, 2002.

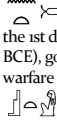
⁵⁰ Villems 2006; Weigle 1987; but also *cf.* *Genesis* 8:7.

context, suggests that here (in a fragmented distribution massively overgrown with later mythological innovations) even considerably older layers of mythology struggle for survival, going back to the Middle Palaeolithic or even further.

Brown (1991) considers 'intertwining, e.g. weaving' a universal of culture, but although attestations of weaving go back to the Upper Palaeolithic,⁵¹ weaving in the narrower sense is not a universal among Anatomically Modern Humans. Whereas weaving is a central institution in West Africa, yet in most of Africa South of the Congo-Zambezi watershed, and in parts of Oceania and South America, no weaving seems to have been practiced in the last few centuries. However, at least for the African case various authors⁵² have adduced evidence of pre-existing weaving. Probably such local weaving was eclipsed by the import of British textiles after the Industrial Revolution – and a similar argument might be made for imported South Asian textiles. Although the wooden, ivory, bone or leather tablets of the geomantic oracle in Southern Africa (to which we shall often return in the present book) could be argued to derive from distant prototypes in East African and even Chinese divination,⁵³ yet it is tempting to think that their more immediate prototypes derive from weaving utensils (shuttles, spindle whorls) which were in use regionally in proto-historical times, and which make excellent random generators in the sense that they may be thrown and fall in a limited number of differentially interpreted positions.

Von Sicard (1968-1969) in his extensive, well documented overview of the *unilateral mythical character* generally designated *Luwe* in the scholarly literature, suggests that also the Nape divinatory god of the Tswana as identified in some sources (notably Brown 1926) is in fact a form of Nyambi. Jacottet's (1899) account suggests a close association between Nyambi and the unilateral character Mwendanjàngula – which is also the conclusion I drew in a detailed analysis (van Binsbergen 2011a) of a Nkoya composite statuette depicting that major god, among others.

I have found the tabulation of traits and their implications a major aid in the analysis of mythical material, and it is with one such table that I will conclude this account of Nyambi as one particular theme in comparative mythology:

	Region (Bronze Age)	early Mother goddess	Subdued by male god	Reduced to a secondary role as	References and notes (also cf. Hastings 1909-1921)
1	Mesopotamia	Spider goddess Uttu	Raped by Enki 'Lord Water' (who has usurped the sea, as one of the domains of the Mother of the Primal Waters)	Uttu, goddess of weaving and clothing; Ninhursaq, Earth and Underworld goddess	Cotterell 1989: 86
2	Egypt	 Neith in the 1st dynasty (3100 BCE), goddess of warfare and hunting; Isis is also a	Horus, Ra ^c	Neith as Goddess of weaving and funerary goddess in the New Kingdom c. 1300 BCE, but	Carter & Mace 1923-33; Cotterell: 1989: 108; there is a remarkable parallel between Isis and 天照 Amaterasu: both were forced by their tempestuous brother (Seth in Egypt,

⁵¹ Czech Republic, 27,000 BP; cf. Anonymous, 'History of clothing and textiles'.

⁵² Fagan (1969: Plate 10b after p. 66); Ralushai & Gray, 1977: 8; Theal (1898-1903: VI, 261); and Wilson (1969-1970: I, 175 – weaving as a prerogative of the Lemba – with probable Israelite connotations, cf. von Sicard 1952, 1962; Thomas *et al.* 2000, with extensive references).

⁵³ E.g. temple blocks, dice made out of *astragali*, etc.; van Binsbergen 2005d, 2013.

		weaving and spinning goddess – although as a culture hero, the male  Osiris (but note his dependence on the Isis orthography) is credited with introducing weaving		continues to rule the waters and to have a final say in the assembly of gods	スサノオ Susanoo in Japan) to be confined to the weaving room – Willis 1994: 49; Plutarch 1934b-1935b
3	Iran, Armenia	Anahita, Anahit	Aramazd, Vahagn	Anahita largely reduced to domestic and subservient function, but still a weaving virgin and control over waters	Cumont 1911
4	Ancient Syro-Palestine	Astarte-Name-of-Ba'al; Anat; Ašerat (cf. 2 Kings:23)	Ba'al	consort; the goddess slays Ba'al's enemy and revives Ba'al, yet is relegated to the subaltern level	as Name of Ba'al: Glueck 1945; Albright 1936-37
5	Greece	Athena, Hera	Zeus, Poseidon, Hades	Demeter, Persephone / Proserpina, Harmonia, Athena as goddesses of hand-crafts and weaving	Athena and Arachne, Ovid (1812 / 1815) <i>Metamorphoses</i> , 6: 1-148 f.; cf. Glei 1998
6	North Africa and Sahara (Tuareg)	Antinea			Benoit 1920; Lhote 1958 / 1959
7	Rome	Magna Mater	Jupiter	Juno	Grant 1962
8	Judaism	El, Elohim, Yam	 Yahweh	Names of Yahweh; Leviathan	de Vaux 1969
9	Arabia	The pre-Islamic goddesses at Mecca	 Allah	Names of Allah	Wellhausen 1927
10	Early Japanese society	イザナミ Izanami, giving birth to the entire world and to the elements is her epiphany	イザナギ Izanagi, スサノオ Susanoo	Izanami as death goddess; but the celestial realm remains under female rule, notably that of the Sun goddess 天照 Amaterasu, who is mainly a weaver	古事記 <i>Kojiki</i> , cf. Philippi 1977; Chamberlain 1882

11	classical China	Weaving Girl	Cowherd		this could be read as an astronomical myth: the relation between its two characters is analogous to the distant association between the constellations of Gemini and Cygnus in the sky (in Greek mythology, Zeus sired the Heavenly Twins / Dioskouroi on Leda in the shape of a swan, cf. Rappenglück 1999; van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen: 363 n. 1215); or between Lyra and Aquila (the Chinese stellar equivalents; Ions 1980: 192 f.; Willis 1994 /1993: 95, who mentions Vega, i.e. α Lyrae – the brightest star of that constellation – instead of the entire constellation)
12	Atlantic and Central Africa, including Akan and Nkoya	Nyambi, Nzambi, the trickster Anansi; spider themes abundant in Western Grassfields iconography, Cameroon			see main text
13	Nordic Europe	Holda, Frigg, and the Daughters of Sun and Moon			Bonser 1928; Cotterell 1989: 89
14	Zulu (South Africa)	Princess of Heaven Inkosazana / Nomkhubulwana, the heavenly princess	has the rainbow as her weapon; mediates between Heaven and Earth (rain, fertility, general well-being); and may be associated with female puberty rites; no details on any weaving activities	subordinated to her Father, the King of Heaven	Berglund 1976, Scorgie 2002

Table 0.1. Old-World goddesses of weaving, virginity, and prowess, often with spider-like connotations (largely based on: van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 142, Table 6.4).



Overwhelmed, as also the uninitiated reader is supposed to be at this point, by the unlimited vistas of space and time which comparative mythology was opening up for my research, and by the promises this particularly held for the vindication of Africa's place in global cultural history, while eager to acquire the new fields of knowledge and skill which this next step entailed, I was tempted to think that in this field, rather than in intercultural philosophy, my main research of the next decade was to be situated. And indeed, that inspiration has by now fed several more book-length studies on Africa's transcontinental connections in pre- and protohistory, now nearing completion.