

The African connection in global cultural history: Towards an Africanist redefinition of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis

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Introductory note

This seminar reports on a book I have just finished writing: *Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt, and the World: Beyond the Black Athena thesis*. It is impossible to make the book's text available in full in preparation of the seminar. Moreover, however important the *Black Athena* debate is from a point of view of scholarship and politics, few Africanists have participated in it; therefore a substantial introduction to the debate as a whole would be required before the specific argument of my book could be taken up in the context of our Africanist seminar. I have therefore opted for the following compromise: the present paper offers the book's introduction, its table of contents, its conclusions, and the most specifically Africanist chapter, which explores the possible connections with ancient Egypt of divine kingship as found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. My main inspiration is here the research I have conducted among the Nkoya of Zambia, South Central Africa, since 1972. In my oral presentation I shall dwell on such aspects of Bernal's *black Athena* thesis and of the debate it has generated, as highlight the relevance of my specific argument on divine kingship in sub-Saharan Africa.

Introduction

Martin Bernal's attempt¹ to help bring to light, systematise, and make available for broad non-specialist debate, the 'Afroasiatic roots of classical Greek civilisation' is part of a more comprehensive task: to purify global cultural history from Eurocentrist bias, in order to construct the intellectual framework for the multicultural, rapidly globalising world of the twenty-first century CE. The immensity of the task forced him to concentrate on one aspect where data abound and where scholarly and societal interest could be expected to be maximum. Hence

¹ Bernal, M., 1987, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. I, *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1787-1987*, London: Free Association Books/ New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; Bernal, M., 1991, *Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. II, *The Archaeological and Documentary Evidence*, London: Free Association Books; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

he has largely limited himself to a consideration of the antecedents of classical Greek civilisation (which Eurocentric myth has proclaimed to be the genial, unprecedented root of European civilisation); and of the possible contributions, towards classical Greek civilisation, cultural achievements of speakers of the one language family (Afroasiatic)² which — apart from Indo-European — has been conspicuous in the surroundings of the Aegean Sea ever since pre-classical times.

So far Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* project has produced two major results which may earn him a place in the hall of fame of historical scholarship:

- he has identified, as a central and urgent problem, the Eurocentric nature of knowledge production in the field of global cultural history; and
- he has (in Volume I of *Black Athena*) explained, at least *grosso modo*, how this problem could arise in the history of modern classical, archaeological and linguistic scholarship.

Even so an enormous amount of detailed and justified criticism has been directed at Martin Bernal's project so far,³ pointing out considerable errors of fact, interpretation, method, and epistemology. There are signs of stagnation of the project in recent years. Four volumes were promised for the project as a whole, of which the latest, *Black Athena II*, was published as long ago as 1991. Martin Bernal has in the meantime published a large number of responses to specific critics; these responses are often very illuminating, clearing up misunderstandings and avoiding such one-

² The term 'Afroasiatic' designates a language family which includes Semitic — for instance Phoenician, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Akkadian, Aramaic, as well as the South Arabian and Ethiopic languages — besides non-Semitic branches such as ancient Egyptian, Chadic, Beja, Berber, and three branches of Cushitic.

³ Several theme issues of international journals have been devoted to the *Black Athena* debate: Myerowitz Levine, M., & J. Peradotto, eds., The challenge of *Black Athena*, special issue, *Arethusa*, 22 (Fall), 1987; *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 3, 1 (1990); *Isis*, 83, 4 (1992); *Journal of Women's History*, 4, 3 (1993); *History of Science*, 32, 4 (1994); *VEST Tidsskrift for Vetenskapstudier*, 8, 4 (1995). Lefkowitz, M.R., & MacLean Rogers, G., eds., 1996, *Black Athena revisited*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, was intended as the final critical blow to the *Black Athena* thesis. Subsequently, however, the debate was reopened by the collection I edited in 1997: Wim Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1997, ed., *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, Hoofddorp: Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society (special issue of *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*, vols 28-29, 1996-97), which has been intended as a 'constructive re-assessment'.

sidedness and overstatement as the *Black Athena* volumes themselves may occasionally display. All this suggest that too high a price is being paid for the strategic narrowing down of the more comprehensive task to the influence of ancient Egypt upon Greece — or, by extension, the influence of ancient Egypt and the Levant which in the second millennium BCE was profoundly Egyptianised, although West Semitic languages there (Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew) had not been massively supplanted by Egyptian. Not all of contemporary North Atlantic culture derives from classical Greece; not all of Greek classical culture derives from Egypt and the Levant. From an Africanist perspective it is primarily relevant to explore the African connection of the Afroasiatic roots Bernal has claimed in the programmatic title *Black Athena*. While Egypt is situated in the north-east of the African land mass, and both ancient Egyptian, and modern Egyptian Arabic, are classified as Afroasiatic languages, Egypt's cultural relations with the rest of Africa are far from clear. They will occupy us in a large section of the present study. The route from today's global culture as largely shaped by current North Atlantic inputs, back towards an identification of such 'Afroasiatic, specifically sub-Saharan African, roots' is far from obvious. As we shall see, it was very far from obvious to the ancient Egyptians themselves (who throughout pharaonic times displayed a blatant racism vis-à-vis their Black southern neighbours). Moreover, such an attempt inevitably converges — as we shall see below — with the Afrocentrist project, for which Martin Bernal has often, and rightly, expressed sympathy, but which is also notorious for the use of lamentably inadequate data and methods in the pursuit of ideas which in themselves are at least as plausible as their Eurocentrist counterparts.

We have to look for a set of hypotheses, for interdisciplinary methods, and for data, which may allow us to further explore, on a wider geographical and temporary scale, the truly fundamental questions for which Martin Bernal has found a first appealing formulation, and a first attempt at an answer. Some of these answers lie to the South of Egypt, in Africa. Others lie in South West, South and South East Asia, as we shall indicate. Still others lie in the realisation that continents are not viable units of analysis in cultural history. And a final set of answers, to be explored towards the end of the present argument, still others lie in the realisation that in many respects, Africa, Europe and Asia, as the continents of the Old World, have been geopolitically constructed to be far more different and separate than would be commensurate with the far-reaching human biology, linguistic, religious and politico-legal continuities they display when compared to one another.

The present study is an attempt to investigate these questions in depth, adducing scattered and fragmentary material and, often unpopular, and dated, scholarly views which may yet contribute to our insight. It will result in an Africanist critique of the *Black Athena* thesis. As such it is a specifically Africanist sequel to my collection *Black Athena: Ten Years After*.

The central questions of the book are the following:

- If the classical Greek, subsequently European, subsequently global civilisation can be demonstrated to have — among others — Afroasiatic roots, and if specifically ancient Egypt can be demonstrated to have had such an extensive formative influence upon the civilisation emerging in the eastern Mediterranean basin, to what extent then did Egypt act as an independent, original force in this connection — and, alternatively, *to what extent did Egypt merely mediate more general African, notably sub-Saharan African, ancient civilisations to the wider world?*
- In the first half of the twentieth century CE, African Studies were fascinated by the reverse thesis: that — as if mirroring the *Black Athena* thesis of Greece's indebtedness to Egypt — everything of value in sub-Saharan African civilisations (e.g. sacred kingship) had of necessity sprung from pharaonic Egypt. *What remains of the Egyptocentric thesis in African cultural history, when re-examined in the light of today's methods and today's evidence?*
- *What methodological and theoretical tools (e.g. those highlighting and refining the concepts of diffusion, transformative localisation, and cultural region) do we need in order to take these questions beyond the state of scholarship prevailing in African Studies of an earlier vintage; and how may these tools enhance our African Studies of today?*
- So far we have taken for granted that Africa, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, constitutes a viable unit of analysis; if however we are prepared to admit that Africa is a geopolitical construct ancillary — by antithesis — to the Eurocentric construction of Europe as White, Christian, and Indo-European-speaking, *how can we benefit from the Black Athena debate so as to explode these geopolitical constructs — redefining Africa's place in the world, and African Studies in the process?*

However, before we set out on this ambitious trajectory, a strong disclaimer is in order. The present study is of necessity interdisciplinary, ranging from the history of social science and philosophy to Egyptology, classics and linguistics, and from African Studies to archaeology and human biology. It spans three continents and twice as many millennia. No person of sound mind would contemplate writing it, but only an absolute fool would expect to be taken even moderately seriously in such an endeavour, without insisting with all possible emphasis on the extremely tentative and provisional nature of the argument. The selection of the immense amount of potentially useful material could only be arbitrary, the treatment is often superficial and impressionistic, the bibliography massive but often merely indicative than

functional. The alternative is writing a multi-volume book which only a team can write over a period of several years; and for which I have neither the time nor the courage at this point in my scholarly life. What I have to offer is not yet a new view of Africa, nor the reviving of an old view, but merely an invitation to take another look at data which are in principle familiar to specialist scholars, and which anyway — as will be immediately clear to any specialist reading this book — had much better be handled by them than by me. If in the course of my argument I express myself with rather more determination than would seem to

benefit my limited expertise, it is not because I lose sight of the expressed limitations of my exploration. It is because, given the intrinsically ephemeral nature of all scientific texts, they can serve their heuristic and stimulating purposes all the better if formulated with clarity. The explicit aim of the theses in this text, and in any other scholarly text of my hand, is to be utterly refuted — as the best way of making a little step closer to the truth.

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5. Ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa

5.1. Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa: Two-way process or monocentric diffusion from Egypt?

Any Africanist looking over a museum collection of ancient Egyptian artefacts cannot fail to be struck by the continuities of material culture over vast geographical and temporal expanses. Shinnie⁴ provides a useful summary of this phenomenon, which may have been the main factor persuading early twentieth century anthropologists to such Egyptocentric diffusionist views as they held:

'...there are strong resemblances to Egyptian objects and to Egyptian culture scattered throughout Africa. In the realm of material culture a small number of objects have been found which might reasonably be supposed to have originated from Egypt. Amongst these are musical instruments such as the small harp used by the Azande and other peoples of the southern Sudan and Uganda, wooden headrests in various parts of the continent, certain types of sandals, and many other similar objects. In West Africa attention has been drawn to the use of ostrich-feather fans, very similar to pharaonic ones, in Wadai and Bagirmi and other places in the neighbourhood of Lake Chad. (...) In other parts of West Africa, particularly Nigeria, there are resemblances in the regalia of chiefs to the pharaonic regalia — whips, crooks, and flails have all been reported and some have seen them as direct borrowings from Egypt. The god Shango, of the Yoruba, whose sacred animal is the ram, has been derived by some from the god Amun, and Wainwright⁶ has cited a ram-headed breastplate from Lagos which certainly very strongly suggests an Egyptian influence.'⁷

A well-known chapter of Egypt-African contacts

concerns the trade and tribute contacts with the East African coast and with the interior. Queen Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt during the 18th dynasty (mid-second millennium BCE) is a cliché even in popular works on ancient Egypt. In recent decades our knowledge on the Southern overland contacts of pharaonic Egypt has greatly increased. We are now in a much better position to appreciate the formidable nature of Egypt's southern boundary, and to discern fairly independent cultures and polities to Egypt's south. That the relation between ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa — although far from cordial as we have seen — must have been a two-way process, is clear not only from the case of the Nubian kingdoms and the Black 25th-dynasty pharaohs, but also from, for instance, research by one of the principal students of African linguistics, Chris Ehret, who has demonstrated the borrowing of agricultural terms from the Nilo-Saharan language family into the ancient Egyptian language (a form of Afroasiatic).⁸ In animal husbandry the lines of borrowing between Egypt and the rest of Africa appear to put Egypt, likewise, at the receiving side: with reference to cattle husbandry as a central source of wealth and a dominant cosmological theme, Egyptian culture was already recognised by Henri Frankfort to have taken in productive patterns prevailing in the African interior.⁹ Here Egypt shows itself particularly one of the heirs of the Neolithic Central Saharan pastoral culture.

A crucial dilemma in this connection was raised by H.W. Fairman, when he pointed out that any influence claimed to have been exerted by Egypt upon Africa, might be equally plausibly explained as influence from Africa over Egypt.¹⁰ Especially after the discovery of the Central Saharan Neolithic culture, and of Neolithic and Predynastic sites in the Nile delta, there was a growing awareness among scholars that much of the culture of ancient Egypt was in fact continuous with, and transmitted from, the African interior prior to the foundation of the pharaonic

⁴ Shinnie, P. L., 1971, 'The Legacy to Africa', in: J.R. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed., pp. 434-55.

⁵ Cf. four lines up, where it is still 'small number'.

⁶ Wainwright, G.A., 1949, 'Pharaonic survivals, Lake Chad to the west coast', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 35: 167-75.

⁷ Shinnie, o.c., p. 447. The same wide African distribution pattern of the types of objects found in pharaonic Egypt is stressed in several contributions to Celenko, T., 1996, ed., *Egypt in Africa*, Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, notably: Aniakor, C.C., 1996, 'Body art in Africa: Painting, tattooing, and scarification', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 78-80; Bailey, S., 1996, 'Circumcision and male initiation in Africa', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 88-91; Bianchi, R.S., 1996, 'Tattooing and skin painting in the ancient Nile valley', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 81-83; Bianchi, R.S., 1996, 'The case against extensive masking in Ancient Egypt', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 75-77; Bourgeois, A.P., 1996, 'Masking in sub-Saharan Africa', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 68-70; Celenko, T. & F.J. Yurco, 1996, 'Depiction of humans in African art', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 50-55; Ehrlich, M.J., 1996, 'Mother and child figures in Africa', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 40-42; Green, R.L., & F.J. Yurco, 1996, 'African headrests', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 46-49; Kendall, T., 1996, 'Scarification in the Nile Valley from Antiquity to the present', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 84-87; Kusimba, C.M., & F.J. Yurco, 1996, 'Animal deities and symbols in Africa', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 62-65; Wolinski, A., 1996, 'The case for ceremonial masking in ancient Egypt', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 71-74; all with extensive further bibliography.

Puzzling cases do arise, however. An ancient Egyptian statuette was found all the way in Zaire. Shinnie suggests that it may have been an unintentional intrusion. Cf. Breuil, H., 1951, 'Further details of rock-paintings and other discoveries. 1. The painted rock 'Chez Tae', Leribe, Basutoland. 2. A new type of rock-painting from the region of Aroah, South-West Africa, 3. Egyptian bronze found in Central Congo', *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 4: 46-50; Shinnie makes reference to a bibliography of this find, drawn up by J. Leclant, 1956, which however I could not consult.

⁸ Ehret, C., 1996, 'Ancient Egyptian as an African language, Egypt as an African culture', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 25-27. The Nilo-Saharan family comprises languages in and immediately south of the Sahara, from Mali to the Nile, and southward into Uganda, Kenya, and northern Tanzania; the family includes such sub-groups as Songhai, Chari-Nile, and Nilotic (Welmers, W.E., 1993, 'African languages' in: *The New Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*, Release 6, 1993).

⁹ Frankfort, H., 1948, *Kingship and the Gods: A study of Ancient Near Eastern religion as the integration of society and nature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; I rely on the French translation: *La royauté et les dieux: Intégration de la société à la nature dans la religion de l'ancien Proche Orient*, Paris: Payot, [year], ch. xiv: 'Le pouvoir dans le bétail: La procréation, A: L'Égypte, terre d'Afrique, p. 222f. He addresses studies of the famous (but contested) African 'cattle complex', initiated by Herskovits; cf. the latter's later overview: Herskovits, M.J., 1960, 'The cattle complex in East Africa', *American Anthropologist*, 27, 1: 230-272; 2, 361-380; 3, 494-528; 4, 633-644; cf. a more recent overview: Anacleto, A.O. & D.K. Nagala, 1981, 'The cattle complex in the ancient West Lake kingdoms', in: [editor?] *La civilisation ancienne des peuples des Grands Lacs*, Paris: Karthala, pp. 148-158.

¹⁰ Fairman, H.W., 1965, [title], African Affairs, special issue, Spring 1965, pp. 69-75, discussion on pp. 96-98.

dynastic state c. 3000 BCE. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century it was customary to identify 'African' elements in early Egyptian material culture, especially ceramics, and to distinguish these (according to the evolutionary schemes then fashionable) from the allegedly more advanced, later forms of the Egyptian civilisation proper.¹¹

African Studies in the early twentieth century CE was characterised by intense Egyptocentrism. What Stevens¹² has flippantly called "'the Martin Bernal syndrome"' of those who favour Egypt in African Studies', has had illustrious representatives, whose views, incidentally, were subsequently adopted and developed by Diop, and via him became a cornerstone of current Afrocentrism.

A deep-seated racist contempt for the Black inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa must have been one of the factors for the tendency, in the early decades of the twentieth century CE, to attribute virtually all forms of civilisation in Africa to diffusion from Egypt. Elliot Smith and his student Perry dreamed up somewhat fascistoid grand schemes postulating sea-faring pharaonic 'Children of the Sun', a 'master race' spreading their sun cult and associated items of superior civilisation (especially megaliths) all over the Old and parts of the New World.¹³ But while their interpretation is racist, the empirical facts of cultural distribution on which they (like later Baumann) based themselves cannot be denied. Elliot Smith, whose work was sufficiently appreciated at the time to earn him a knighthood, was commemorated not too long ago and then apparently was still taken seriously by two of the leading

physical and cultural anthropologists of their generation.¹⁴ One of the editors of Elliot Smith's commemorative volume was the famous South African physical anthropologist Dart, discoverer of the Pithecanthropus. In the second half of his distinguished career he was particularly interested in the human biology, cultural and trade contacts between Africa and the rest of the Old World, thus seeking to carry on Elliot Smith's work on a sounder empirical basis.¹⁵

Elliot Smith, who was primarily an anatomist, derived the inspiration for his Egyptocentrist diffusionism from his extensive work on Egyptian mummies.¹⁶ Also the leading archaeological Egyptologist Petrie ventured suggestions as to the diffusion of Egyptian cultural elements into specific African cultures.¹⁷ Wainwright was also primarily an Egyptologist, but in the later phases of his career he published extensively on the possible routes Egyptian influence might have taken in Africa, and on the various African civilisations (in West Africa, but also in Central and South Central Africa: Bunyoro, Zimbabwe) which might have been engendered in the process.¹⁸

More modestly, the French anthropologist Delafosse claimed that the Baoulé, an Akan people now in Ivory Coast, derived their culture from Egypt.¹⁹ Even Shinnie himself, however generally critical on the point of Egyptocentrism, could not resist its temptation when claiming that the famous Tassili al Ajjer rock paintings²⁰ had to be 'unmistakably' influenced from Egypt!²¹

Against this overwhelming harvest of Egyptocentrism in older African Studies, who is to reproach Bernal any longer for occasional lapses into Egyptocentrism while

¹¹ One arbitrary example out of many: van Wijngaarden, W.D., 1932, 'Drie stukken prehistorisch aardewerk uit Egypte', *Oudheidkundige mededeelingen: Uit 's Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*, n.s. xiii, 2: 71-78.

¹² Stevens, P., Jr., 1993, [Dialogue] : "On "First Word," January 1993, *African Arts* 26, 4: 14; *non vidui* — I rely on Palter; Palter, R., 1996, 'Eighteenth-century historiography in *Black Athena*' in: LeFowitz & MacLean Rogers, *Black Athena revisited*, o.c., pp. 349-401. As we have seen, Stevens's characterisation is unfortunate on two counts: Bernal's explorations into African studies so far have been minimal, and while he may be chided for a certain Egyptocentric weakness, his preferred scholarly view of cultural interactions in the ancient eastern Mediterranean is multicentred.

¹³ Elliot Smith, G., 1911, *The ancient Egyptians and their influence upon the civilization of Europe*, London: Harper; Elliot Smith, G., 1912, 'Megalithic monuments and their builders', *Man* [volume] [add pages] [ca. p. 173], also in: Report of the British Association, p. 607; Elliot Smith, G., 1913, 'The origin of the dolmen', *Man*, [volume] [add pages] [c. p. 193], also in: Report of the British Association; Elliot Smith, G., 1917-18, 'The Giver of Life', *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society*, [volume] [add pages]; Elliot Smith, G., 1919, *The evolution of the dragon*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Elliot Smith, G., 1970, *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilization*, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, first published 1923; Elliot Smith, G., 1929, *Human history*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co.; Elliot Smith, G., 1929, *The migrations of early culture: A study of the significance of the geographical distribution of the practice of mummification as evidence of the migration of peoples and the spread of certain customs and beliefs*, 2nd ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, first published 1915; Elliot Smith, G., 1933, *The diffusion of culture*, London: [publisher]; Elliot Smith, G., [year], *Ships as evidence of the migrations of early culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Perry, W.J., 1918, *The megalithic culture of Indonesia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Perry, W.J., 1927, *The Children of the Sun: A study in the early history of civilization*, London: Methuen; first published 1923; Perry, W.J., 1935, *The primordial ocean*, London: Methuen; Perry, W.J., 1937, *The growth of civilisation*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, first published 1924.

¹⁴ Cf. Dart, R.A., 1974, 'Sir Grafton Elliot Smith and the evolution of man', in: Elkin, A.P., & Macintosh, [Int] eds., *Grafton Elliot Smith The Man and his work*, Sidney University Press, pp. 25-38; Elkin, A.P., 1974, 'Elliot Smith and the diffusion of culture', in: Elkin & Macintosh, o.c., pp. 139-59; Elkin, A.P., 1974, 'Sir Grafton Elliot Smith: The man and his work', in: Elkin & Macintosh, o.c., pp. 8-15.

¹⁵ Cf. Dart, R.A., 1951, 'African serological patterns and human migrations: Presidential address, 1950, delivered before the South African Archaeological Society at Cape Town on 6 March 1951', Cape Town: South African Archaeological Society; Dart, R.A., 1954, *The oriental horizons of Africa*, Johannesburg: Hayne & Gibson; Dart, R.A., 1955, 'Foreign influences of the Zimbabwe and pre-Zimbabwe eras', NADA (Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual), 32: 19-30; Dart, R.A., 1957, 'The earlier stages of Indian transoceanic traffic', NADA (Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual), 34: 95-115.

¹⁶ Cf. Elliot Smith, G., & Dawson, W.R., 1924, *Egyptian Mummies*, London: George Allen & Unwin; Elliot Smith, G., & Derry, D.E., 1910, 'Anatomical Report: Dealing with the Work during the Months of January and February, 1910', *Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Bulletin*, no. 6: 9-30; Elliot Smith, G., 1929, *The migrations of early culture*, o.c.

¹⁷ Petrie, W.M.F., 1914, [title] [*Egypt in Africa?*], *Ancient Egypt*, pp. 115-27, 159-170. Shinnie points out that Petrie's excursions into sub-Saharan Africa is suspect: they are in part based on a much too early dating of Probenius's Ife finds as 6th century BC. The correct dating is agreed to be between the 12th and 14th c. CE. cf. Willett, F., 1967, *Ife in the history of West African sculpture*, London: Thames & Hudson.

¹⁸ Wainwright, G.A., 1949, 'Pharaonic survivals', o.c.; Wainwright, G.A., 1954, [title] *Uganda Journal* 18: 113-136; Wainwright, G.A., [year] 'The founders of the Zimbabwe civilisation', *Man*, 49: [add pages]

¹⁹ Delafosse, M., 1900, [title] , *L'Anthropologie*, 40: 431-51, 677-690.

²⁰ Shinnie, o.c., p. 452 [check pagination]

²¹ Shinnie, o.c., p. 450.

most of the time stressing a multicentred model? Yet the dilemma is clear: from the point of appreciation of sub-Saharan culture and their contribution to the global culture of mankind, Egyptocentrism is at best a mixed blessing, and potentially another racist negation of sub-Saharan African culture in their own right — and a negation very much in line with ancient Egyptian prejudice, at that. How are we going to escape from this maze?

5.2. Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa: The kingship

Might not the source of our problems be the tacit assumption that *one overall formula* defining the relation between Egypt and the rest of Africa is to suit all aspects of culture, from politics to productive systems, from mythology to kinship?

The early Egyptocentrist Africanists were in fact particularly looking for emanations, throughout Africa, of the splendour of the pharaonic kingship. Lacking a theory of culture and therefore unable to appreciate that the kingship is even a smaller and foggier window on an entire culture than language, such links as they believed to discern in the field of kingship were then generalised to encompass specific sub-Saharan African cultures in their totality. But as far as kingship in itself is concerned, may they not have had a point there? The dilemmas are clear from Shinnie's summary of Seligman's view in the matter:

'Seligman, taking the existence of such a [divine] king, or for some peoples the custom of king-killing, as an indication, suggests Egyptian influence at work amongst such diverse peoples as the Dinka and Shilluk of the Upper Nile, the Banyoro and Baganda of the Great Lakes, the Junkun of Nigeria, and the Bambara of the Western Sudan. The only one of these where the case of for Egyptian influence looks at all convincing is amongst the Banyoro, where he draws attention to two significant features:

1. The male members of the royal family are related to the eagle, though there is no eagle clan. Seligman suggests this is a memory of the Egyptian Pharaoh's membership of the falcon clan.

2. The custom of the King of Bunyoro 'shooting the nations' by bow and arrow, which he claims resembles the Egyptian *sed* festival.

Personal investigations have also shown that there is a ceremonial digging-up of the ground by the king at his accession, a custom which also has its Egyptian counterpart.

The royal family of Bunyoro have strong traditions of having come from the north, and in the royal enclosure at Hoima maintain a carefully attended clump of papyrus as a reminder of their Nilotic origin. All this does suggest, however remotely, Egyptian influences. Yet the Bunyoro royal line cannot have reached its present home more than a few hundred years ago and, as Seligman himself observed, this makes Egyptian influence unlikely, it being just as probable that these traditions are due to old and widespread African beliefs which affected Egypt as they have affected other parts of Africa.²²

Seligman²³ fascinatingly applies throughout Africa Frazer's *Golden Bough* theme, according to which the divine king, who derives his kingship not from birth but from ousting his predecessor and/or from marriage, is challenged and killed by his successor.²⁴ Of course there is no denying that customary regicide is a fundamental feature of historic political systems throughout Eastern and Central Africa.²⁵ Seligman's Egyptocentrism prevented him both from investigating other Ancient Near East connections, and from exploring the reverse hypothesis, that Egyptian pharaonic kingship looked similar to other African kingships because the Egyptian kingship had absorbed general sub-Saharan African patterns. However, implicitly Seligman may be said to have done just the latter when he interpreted the Egyptian *sed* festival as a rite of rejuvenation through which the king escapes the risk of being killed, since royal senility was considered to have a disastrous effect on the land; such an interpretation would only make sense if implied in the Egyptian festival — after a process of transformative localisation — there were *Golden-Bough*-type assumptions, which may then have been transmitted from elsewhere: for instance from the Upper Nile, or Mesopotamia.

²³ Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*, London: Routledge

²⁴ Frazer, J., 1890—1915, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 9 vols. London: Macmillan; Frazer, J.G., 1936, *Aftermath: A supplement to The golden bough*, London: Macmillan, 1936; Frazer, J.G., 1957, *The golden bough: A study in magic and religion*, abridged edition, 2 vols, London: Macmillan.

²⁵ From a very rich literature I mention: Claessen, H.J.M., & P. Skalnik (eds), *The study of the state*, The Hague/Paris: Mouton, especially the paper by Claessen, 'Specific features of the African early state', pp. 59-86; Claessen, H.J.M., 1984, 'Een wijkende einder: Problemen en perspectieven bij onderzoek van de vroege staat in Afrika', in: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., & Hesselink, G.S.C.M., eds, *Aspecten van staat en maatschappij in Afrika*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, pp. 101-117; Claessen, H.J.M., & P. Skalnik, 1978, eds, *The early state*, The Hague/Paris: Mouton; Claessen, H.J.M., & P. van de Velde, eds, 1987, *Early state dynamics*, Leiden: Brill; Claessen, H.J.M., & P. van de Velde, eds, 1987, *Early state dynamics*, Leiden: Brill; de Heusch, L., 1958, *Essais sur le symbolisme de l'inceste royal en Afrique*, Brussels: Université libre de Bruxelles, Institut de Sociologie Solvay; de Heusch, L., 1972, *Le Roi ivre ou l'origine de l'état*, Paris: Gallimard; de Heusch, L., 1982, *Rois nés d'un cœur de vache: Mythes et rites: Mythes et rites bantous*, Paris: Gallimard; de Heusch, L., 1984, 'Sacred kingship as a politico-symbolic structure: A re-evaluation of Frazer's thesis', *Sociologische Gids*, 31, 4, theme issue on the African state, eds. Geschiere, P.L., & Claessen, H.J.M., pp. 301-14 [check if in English or in Dutch: 'Sacræal koningschap als een politiek-symbolische structuur', ?]; Fagg, W., 1970, *Divine kingship in Africa*, London: British Museum; Feeley-Harnik, G., 1985, 'Issues in divine kingship', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 14: 273-313; Pettersson, O., 1973, *Chiefs and gods: Religious and social elements in south eastern Bantu kingship*, Nendeln (Liechtenstein): Kraus, first published 1953; Lund: Gleerup; Simonse, S., 1992, *Kings of disaster: Dualism, centralism and the scapegoat king in southeastern Sudan*, Leiden etc.: Brill; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1981, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory studies*, London/ Boston: Kegan Paul International; van Binsbergen, *Teurs, o.c.*, pp. [add pages]; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1996, '“Then give him to the crocodiles”: Violence, state formation, and cultural discontinuity in west central Zambia, 1600-1996', in: Van Binsbergen, W.M.J., ed., *Anthropology on violence: A one-day conference*, Amsterdam: Free University, Department of Cultural Anthropology/ Sociology of Development, pp. 75-91 — Dutch version: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1993, '“Geef hem dan maar aan de krokodillen”: Staatsvorming, geweld en culturele discontinuïteit in voor-koloniaal Zuidelijk Centraal Afrika', contribution to a special issue on state formation, guest editors H. Dahles & A. Trouwborst, *Antropologische Verkenningen*, 12, 4: 10-31, 1993; Vansina, J., 1966, *Kingdoms of the savanna*, Madison: Wisconsin University Press; Vaughan, J.H., 1980, 'A reconsideration of divine kingship', in: I. Karp & C.S. Bird, eds, *Explorations in African systems of thought*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 120-142.

Until quite recently, similar Egyptocentric analyses of African divine kingship were produced by such Africanists as Meyerowitz (for Ghana) and Pageard (according to whom much of the court ritual and culture of the present-day Mossi of Burkina Fasso as of Egyptian origin).²⁶

A number of points should be distinguished at this juncture:

1. The formal similarities of kingship in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa
2. The explanation of these similarities within sub-Saharan Africa in terms of diffusion — which poses the question as to the original source or sources from which such postulated diffusion may have taken place
3. The formal similarities between these sub-Saharan forms of kingship, and pharaonic kingship
4. The explanation of any Egyptian/African similarity in kingship in terms of diffusion — which again poses the question as to the original source or sources from which such postulated diffusion has taken place

The comparative and historical study of kingship was a major topic in African history and cultural anthropology, before attention was forced to shift to these kings' modern successors: chiefs and politicians in the clutches of the failing postcolonial state, non-governmental organisations, and international donor organisations. The available data, treated in a complex literature, are far too extensive to allow a summary of a few lines. However, it would be true to say that the underlying cosmologies, the ceremonial and ritual arrangements constituting and perpetuating the kingship, as well as the roles and statuses making up the organisation of the royal courts, show such convergence from Nubia westward into the Sudanic belt, and via Ethiopia, further down to Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe, to South Africa, that there is no denying claim (1), which makes claim (2) — the idea of diffusion from a common origin — rather appealing. One may also observe that the path of diffusion appears to be rather clearly marked by a sprinkling of royal attributes along the way: *mankala* board-games,²⁷ ceremonial musical instruments (bells²⁸ and drums, further south also xylophones) and iron ceremonial weapons, obese royal women with extensive

ritual and political prerogatives, a sacralisation of the royal space, person and grave marked by taboos and human sacrifice, and usurpation of the rain-calling function previously held by non-royal land priests with chthonically-anchored powers of conciliation and adjudication.

Another, less noticed, attendant feature of sub-Saharan sacred kingship, with conspicuous West Asian parallels,²⁹ is that of extispicy, which can be traced in the kingship of Nubian Napata,³⁰ Ethiopia³¹ and Zimbabwe (Monomotapa),³² and in several other places in sub-Saharan Africa.³³

Perhaps the circle-dot ornament, whose distribution can be traced all over the African continent right up to third millennium Anatolia and further into Asia, is another guiding fossil of the diffusion of the notion of kingship.³⁴ It has been typical of the early Egyptocentric phase of African studies to refuse to consider other possible connections between sub-Saharan Africa and the Ancient Near East. Thus for instance Seligman:

'hence some part of my paper must be devoted to the routes by which Egyptian influence may have reached the heart of Africa. I need scarcely add that in the present state of our knowledge references to Babylonians, Sumerians, and Hittites, such as are to be found in some otherwise valuable works, seem entirely beside the question.'³⁵

Also with regard to the apparent link between extispicy

²⁹ One of the best studies of ancient Mesopotamian extispicy is by the late U. Jeyes: 1989, *Old Babylonian extispicy: Omen texts in the British Museum*, Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut; further, cf. Bottéro, J., 1974, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures: En Mésopotamie ancienne', in: *Divination et rationalité*, Paris: Seuil, pp. 70-195; *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines: xive rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Strasbourg, 2-6 juillet 1965), Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; Larsen, M.T., 1987, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind: Reflection [check: Reflections] on science, divination and literacy', in: Rochberg-Halton, F., ed., *Language, Literature and history: Philological and historical studies presented to Erica Reiner*, New Haven (Conn.): American Oriental Society, p. 203-225; Starr, I., 1983, *The rituals of the diviner*, Malibu, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 12; Parpola, S., 1970, 1983, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Part I: Texts, Part II, Commentary and appendices, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag/Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Parpola, S., 1971, *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal*, Part IIA: Introduction and Appendices, Diss. University of Helsinki.

³⁰ Gadd, C.J., 1966, 'Some Babylonian divinatory methods and their inter-relations', in: *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines: xive rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Strasbourg, 2-6 juillet 1965), Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 21-34, p. 31f.

³¹ Abkhik, J., 1993, 'Reading the entrails: Analysis of an African divination discourse', *Man*, 28, 4: 705-726.

³² Dapper, O., 1670, *Afrika*, German tr.: von Sicard, H., 1975, 'Das Gebiet zwischen Sambia und Limpopo', in: Baumann, H., ed., 1975, *Die Völker Afrikas und ihre traditionellen Kulturen*, I. Allgemeiner Teil und südliches Afrika, Wiesbaden: Steiner, pp. 457-472, p. 469.

³³ For instance intralacustrine Bantu-speaking area: Wiedemann, C., 1909, 'Die Gottesurteile bei den Bantuvölkern, Sudanegnern und Hamiten', Ph.D. thesis, Leipzig University, privately printed in Weida i. Th. with Thomas & Hubert, Spezialdruckerei für Dissertationen; for instance Rwanda: Schumacher, P., 1939, 'Die hamitische Wahrsagerei in Ruanda', *Anthropos* 34: 130-206, pp. 164, 169;

³⁴ Segy, L., 1953, 'Circle-dot sign on African ivory carvings', *Zaire*, 7, 1: 35-54.

³⁵ Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*, London: Routledge, p. 8.

²⁶ Meyerowitz, E.L.R., 1960, *The divine kingship in Ghana and in Ancient Egypt*, London: [publisher]; Pageard, R., 1963, [title], Genève-Afrique: Acta Africana, 2: 183-206; Shinnie, o.c., explicitly rejects Pageard's claims.

²⁷ Cf. Culin, S., 1896, *Mankala, the national game of Africa*, US National Museum Annual Report, Washington, pp. 595-607; Deledicq, A., & Popova, A., 1977, *Wari et solo: Le jeu de calculs africain*, Paris: CEDIC; Townshend, P., 1979, 'Mankala in eastern and southern Africa: A distributional analysis', *Azania*, 14: 109-138; Townshend, P., 1982, 'Bao (Mankala): The Swahili ethic in African idiom', *Paideuma* 28: 175-191; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 'Rethinking Africa's contribution to global cultural history: Lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mankala board-games and geomantic divination', o.c.; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., in press, 'Board-games and divination in global cultural history: A theoretical, comparative and historical perspective on mankala and geomancy in Africa and Asia', in: I. Finkel, ed., *Ancient board-games*, London: British Museum Publications.

²⁸ Vansina, J., 1969, 'The bells of kings', *Journal of African History*, 10, 2: 187-191.

and sacred kingship it is tempting to think of diffusion from a West Asian source down to sub-Saharan Africa, but before we can decide that this was the case, two alternative hypotheses are to be refuted:

- extispicy is an aspect of the archaic Eurafian cultural substratum (see below), or
- extispicy is a specific (proto-) Semitic trait, which from the Afroasiatic Urheimat in Northeastern Africa spread both into West Asia and further across the African continent.

Gadd's³⁶ main point about the Napata case is that here, like in the moon cult at Mesopotamian Ur under Nabonidus (*obit* c. 538 BCE), extispicy occurred in a specific combination with astrology. We know enough in detail about the history of astrology³⁷ to recognise this to be a highly specialised scientific or proto-scientific system, which heavily relies on literacy, mathematics and astronomy. Astrology is a specific Mesopotamian invention,³⁸ with limited and generally late Egyptian

³⁶ Gadd, *o.c.*

³⁷ The scholarly literature on the history of astrology is extensive, the popular literature enormous but largely of appalling quality. Important works relating to the history of astrology, and partly overlapping with the literature on the general magical tradition of the Ancient Near East and Europe, include: Berthelot, R., 1938, *La pensée de l'Asie et l'astrologie*, Paris: Payot; Bouché-Leclercq, A., 1899, *L'astrologie grecque*, Paris: Leroux; Boll, F., C. Bezold & W. Gundel, 1966, *Stern Glaube und Sternkunde: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie: 5. durchgesehene Auflage mit einem bibliographischen Anhang von H.G. Gundel*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (first published Leipzig 1926: Teubner Verlag); Cumont, F., F. Boll *et al.*, eds., 1898-1953, *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*, 12 vols., Bruxelles: Lamertin; Cumont, F., 1937, *L'Égypte des astrologues*, Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique reine Élisabeth; Festugière, R.P., 1943, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste, I: L'astronomie et les sciences occultes*, Études bibliques, Paris: Lecoffre / Gabalda; Gundel, H.G., 1968, *Weltbild und Astrologie in den griechischen Zauberpapyri*, München: Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung; Gundel, H.G., 1972, 'Zodiakos', in: [editors], *Pauly's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Druckermüller, 2nd ed., vol. 19, col. 462-709; Gundel, W., & H.G. Gundel, 1966, *Astrologomena: Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte*, Sudhoffs Archiv 6, Wiesbaden: Steiner; Gundel, W., 1936, *Dekane und Dekansternebilder: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sternbilder der Kulturvölker: Mit einer Untersuchung über die Ägyptischen Sternbilder und Götter der Dekane von S. Schott*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, Bd 19, reprinted 1969, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; Nilsson, M.P., 1943, *The rise of astrology in the Hellenistic age*, Meddelande från Lunds Astronomiska Observatorium, Ser. II, nr. III, Historical notes and papers, no. 18; Pingree, D., 1978, *The Tavanadātaka of Sphujidvatja*, Harvard Oriental Series 48, 2 vols., Cambridge (Mass.) / London: Harvard University Press; Pingree, D., 1979, '*ilm al-hay'a*', in: [editors], *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., Leiden: Brill, vol. III: 1135-1138; Rehn, A., 1941, *Parapegmatidien*, Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophisch-historische Klasse (München), new series, 19; Reiner, E., 1995, *Astral magic in Babylonia*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 85, 4, Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society; Tester, S.J., 1989, *A history of western astrology*, New York: Ballantine, first published 1987; Thomas, K., 1978, *Religion and the decline of magic*, Harmondsworth: Penguin (astronomy: part III, pp. 335-460); Wright, R. Ramsay, 1934, *The book of instruction in the elements of the art of astrology by Abu'l-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni: Written in Ghaznah, 1029 A.D.*, reproduced from British Museum MS. Or. 8349, London: Luzac & Co.

³⁸ Major publications on astrology specifically in Ancient Mesopotamia up to Seleucid times include the following: Hunger, H., 1992, *Astrological reports to Assyrian kings. State archives of Assyria*, vol. VIII, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press; Rochberg-Halton, F., 1984, 'New evidence for the history of astrology', *Journal of Near Eastern studies*, 43: 115-140; Rochberg-Halton, F., 1988, *Aspects of Babylonian celestial divination: The lunar eclipse tablets of Enūma Anu Enlil*, *AJO Beiheft* 22, Horn (Austria): Rochberg-Halton, F., E. Reiner & D. Pingree, eds., 1975 & 1981, *Babylonian*

contributions (for instance the 10° decans), perfected by the Greeks, and transmitted to India in Hellenistic times; China does not seem to represent a truly independent development but the data available do not yet permit us to pinpoint the common source, if any, between Chinese, Indian and West Asian astrology.³⁹ It seems unlikely that this system in any but the most generalised and eroded form belonged to the archaic Eurafian cultural substratum. Yet the occurrence of zodiacal symbolism throughout the circum-Saharan region,⁴⁰ the zodiacal reminiscences in the ornamental rims of divination bowls both from Southern Africa and from West Africa,⁴¹ as well as the ubiquity of astrologically-based geomancy throughout Africa,⁴² shows that rather more of astrology has percolated through pre-colonial sub-Saharan Africa than would generally be believed possible. The many varieties of African geomancy largely if not entirely derive from the Arabian divination system called '*ilm al-raml*', invented in the late first millennium CE in Basra under indirect Chinese influence. This suggests that astrology has travelled from a common source in West Asia. And if extispicy tends to occur in combination with astrology, this is an argument for the hypothesis that also extispicy, instead of constituting a general substratum element which only happened to be perfected in Mesopotamia, actually was invented there and spread from there over sub-Saharan Africa, specifically in the wake of kingship.

Among the most intriguing studies in the fertile field of sub-Saharan African kingship are Luc de Heusch works,⁴³ in which he seeks to trace 'the prehistory of Bantu'⁴⁴ thought'; one of his insights is that these widespread patterns of kingship are at least a millennium old; they define a primary ritual kingship which often predates and often predates effective military and economic state formation in any particular region.

It is not so much claims (1) and (2), but (3) and (4) which pose difficulties:

planetary omens, Malibu: Udena; Sachs, A., 1952, 'Babylonian horoscopes', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, 6: 49-75; Ungnad, A., 1941-1944, 'Besprechungskunst und Astrologie in Babylonien', *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 14: 251-284; Weidner, E.F., 1941-1944, 1954-1956, 1968-1969, 'Die Astrologische Serie Enūma Anu Enlil', *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 14: 172-95, 308-18, 17: 71-89, 22: 65-75.

³⁹ Ungnad, [init.], [year], art. 'China und Babylonien', Ebeling, E., & B. Meissner, eds., 1932-1990-... Realexikon der Assyriologie, Berlin: de Gruyter, ii: 91-93.

⁴⁰ Pâques, V., 1964, 'L'Arbre cosmique dans la pensée populaire et dans la vie quotidienne du Nord-Ouest africain', *Travaux et Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris*, no. 70.

⁴¹ Davis, S., 1955, 'Divining bowls, their uses and origin: Some African examples and parallels from the ancient world', *Man*, 55 (143): 132-135; Hammond-Tooke, W.D., 1989, 'Rituals and medicines: Indigenous healing in South Africa', Johannesburg: Donker; Stayt, H.A., 'Appendix IV', in: Caton-Thompson, G., 1931, *The Zimbabwe culture: Ruins and reactions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 255; Frobenius, L., 1954, *Kulturgegeschichte Afrikas*, Zürich: Phaidon; first published Wien 1933, pp. 169-73

⁴² van Binsbergen, 'Rethinking Africa's contribution', *o.c.*, and references cited there.

⁴³ De Heusch, *o.c.c.*

⁴⁴ I.e. Bantu-speaking, a division of the Niger-Kordofan linguistic family.

3. The formal similarities between these sub-Saharan forms of kingship, and pharaonic kingship
4. The explanation of any Egyptian/African similarity in kingship in terms of diffusion — which again poses the question as to the original source or sources from which such postulated diffusion has taken place

The material adduced by the Egyptocentric authors is too massive than that we could close our eyes to the considerable parallels between pharaonic and sub-Saharan kingship. With due allowance for extensive transformative localisation making for all sorts of adaptive disguises, I would agree that diffusion from a common source would be a more plausible hypothesis to explain this parallelism, than sheer parallel invention. But where in time and place is the original source to be situated? We do not yet know enough about Predynastic forms of political organisation in Egypt, and elsewhere in Africa at the time, to assess how much pharaonic kingship initially owed to the rest of Africa. Once in place, diffuse but wide-spread influence emanating from the Egyptian kingship is likely. Developing in the distant neighbourhood of the incomparably powerful and rich Egyptian pharaonic system which, with ups and downs, persisted over three millennia, Egypt can scarcely have failed to have exerted some sort of influence on this sub-Saharan African royal idiom. Yet considering the fairly independent processes of state formation already at nearby Nubia, this influence emanating from a well-established pharaonic kingship was probably weak and diffuse and did not permeate the entire structure of local African societies, at a scale of the Egyptocentric claims of Seligman, Wainwright etc.

There is something to be said for the view⁴⁵ that notions of divine kingship have travelled through sub-Saharan Africa from Kush. Even if this were true, we still have to ascertain whether pharaonic kingship also derives from this source (as would be far from incompatible with what we know today of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods in Egypt),⁴⁶ or whether, after all, the form of

divine kingship which presumably diffused from Kush throughout sub-Saharan Africa derived from the Ancient Near East (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine) in the first place and only after transformative localisation in Northern Sudan was then transmitted further to the West and South of the African continent. Whatever the exact priority of Egypt and Nubia in the development of sacred kingship, the three routes which Seligman proposes along which the subsequent diffusion of the specific package of divine kingship developed in either country would have travelled into the rest of Africa make considerable sense: along the White Nile, along the Blue Nile, and along the North West African coast up to Senegal.⁴⁷

Above we indicated signs of a rekindling of diffusionist themes in anthropology today. The great objection against diffusionist arguments however is invariably, and justifiably, the decontextualisation to which the cultural items are subjected in the diffusionist discourse — as if they were not embedded in a complex, integrated culture, both at their point of origin and, ultimately, in their destination. Therefore, instead of seeking to decide, by comparative and aggregate arguments alone, on the merits of the idea of a pan-African diffusion of divine kingship, and on the place of pharaonic Egypt in this connection, let us turn to one case study where the local ethnographic context may be claimed to be sufficiently well-known to omit the dangers of isolation. I now propose to look at the kingship of the Nkoya people of western central Zambia from the perspective of the diffusion of royal and symbolic themes. The advantage is at least double: I have known this society from personal extensive research since 1972, and it is sufficiently removed from Egypt (5000 km) to constitute a firm case if any Egyptian reminiscences happen to be identified here.

5.3. A case study of intra-continental and trans-continental continuities involving Africa: Kingship among the Nkoya of western central Zambia

5.3.1. Kingship among the Nkoya

Implanted on the basis of female-headed clans, states ruled by more or less divine kings were established in this part of South Central Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth century CE, by strangers identifying with the Lunda cultural and political complex of Southern Zaire.⁴⁸ The Nkoya states⁴⁹ were secondary states,⁵⁰ unthinkable

⁴⁵ Cf. Török, L., 1995, *The Birth of an Ancient African Kingdom: Kush and her Myth of the State in the First Millennium B.C.*, in: *Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille*, suppl. iv; Török, L., 1995, *The Emergence of the Kingdom of Kush and Her Myth of the State in the First Millennium B.C.*, in: *Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille 17*: 203-228; Török, L., 1997, 'On the Foundations of Kingship Ideology in the Empire of Kush', in: *Meroitica 15*: I add pages]. For a recent perspective from sub-Saharan Africa, cf. Sutton, J.E.G., 1993, 'The antecedents of the intralacustrine kingdoms', *Journal of African History*, 34: 33-64. At the same time we have to be careful not to see the involvement of Nubia in sub-Saharan Africa entirely as a one-way process. A Meroitic 2nd-3rd century BE sandstone man's head strongly suggests West African artistic influence, reminiscent of the Nok culture, to be at work in Nubia at the time; Prese, K.-H., n.d. [1997], 'Het pantheon van Meroe', in: *Waldung with Vriete, De zwarte farao's, o.c.*, pp. 265-300, 296f.

⁴⁶ Baumgartel, E.J., 1986, '(a) Predynastic Egypt', in: Edwards, I.E.S., C.J. Gadd & N.G.L. Hammond, eds., 1986, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 1 part 1: *Prolegomena and prehistory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd ed., first ed. 1970, pp. 463-498; Brunton, G., & G. Caton-Thompson, 1928, *The Badarian civilisation and predynastic remains near Badari*, London: Quaritch, Publ. of the Egyptian Research Account and British School of Archaeology in Egypt.; Hassan, F.A., 1988, 'The Predynastic of Egypt', *Journal of World Prehistory*, 2: 135-185.; Hassan, F.A., 1996, 'The Predynastic of Egypt: Africa's Prelude to Civilization', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 31-

32; Wegner, J.W., 1996, 'Interaction between the Nubian A-Group and Predynastic Egypt: The Significance of the Qustul Incense Burner', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 98-100; Williams, B.B., 1996, 'The Qustul Incense Burner and the Case for a Nubian origin of Ancient Egyptian Kingship', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 95-97; and extensive references cited in these publications.

⁴⁷ Seligman, C.G., 1934, *Egypt and Negro Africa: A study in divine kingship*. London: Routledge, p. 9.

⁴⁸ van Binsbergen, *Religious change, o.c.*; *Tears, o.c.*

⁴⁹ This is not the place to discuss in detail the subtleties of the history of western central Zambia. Strictly speaking (cf. van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*) it is an anachronism to speak of Nkoya states. As an ethnonym, the name 'Nkoya'

without the older and more developed state forms further to the north — where the powerful state of Musumba with its hereditary ruler entitled Mwaat Yaamv ('King of Death') appears in Nkoya tradition as the origin of contemporary Nkoya dynasties. The latter's ancestors are reputed to have dissociated themselves from the Musumban court because there were humiliated there. This episode is connected with mythical material which suggests an even older and much more distant origin. The kings (*Mwene*, plural *Myene*) of the Nkoya have since maintained an extensive ceremonial court culture, in which a royal enclosure containing the palace, the royal orchestra, regalia such as ceremonial drums and iron-ware (ideally including a slender diadem *muchamo*, a battle axe, a broadsword, and bells), and royal graves, feature prominently. Because of internal colonisation by the Nkoya's westerly neighbours the Lozi or Barotse (inhabitants of the Zambezi flood plain), and the imposition of the colonial state in 1900 which relied on indirect rule via the Lozi, only a handful of Nkoya kingships survived from the nineteenth century: those of Kahare, Mutondo, Kabulwebulwe and Momba. Court circles have retained an extensive oral historical and mythical repertoire, part of which was written down and systematised in a long text entitled *Likota Iya Bankoya*; I published this text⁵¹ and, having designed a complex methodology by which to crack its layers of mythical and symbolic coding, managed to use it as the basis for a reconstruction of precolonial Nkoya history.

5.3.2. Mythical themes in Nkoya kinship suggestive of connections with pharaonic Egypt

One of the stories in *Likota Iya Bankoya* revolves on the motif of a Ladder (Kapesi) or Tower into heaven:

When Kahare had left his maternal uncle Shihoka I, he lived in the Tumba plain;⁵² thus the kingship of Mwene Kahare began. He married a Lihano [royal wife] who was a member of the Shungu [Vulva] clan; they had a son called Kapesi, nicknamed Kapesi ka Munungampanda ['Ladder Consisting of Joined Forked Poles'] One day, when

emerged only in the late nineteenth century and only established itself in the first half of the twentieth century CE, when the kingships now known as being 'Nkoya' ones were already incorporated in the Lozi state and subsequently in the colonial state. Before that time, Nkoya was merely the name of the dynastic cluster owning the Mutondo kingship. That name derived from a forest at the confluence between the Zambezi and Kabompo rivers. I suspect that ultimately the name Nkoya is a corruption of the name Kola, designating a mythical northern land from which the majority of kingships in South Central Africa are claimed to derive. Kola is usually identified with Musumba, which is also distant and northern. Perhaps the name also retains a reference to the Ugandan Ankole — and in view of the evidence presented in my argument I would not be surprised if it were etymologically possible to trace the name Kola back all the way to Egypt (*kmt*).

⁵⁰ Cf. Harris, M., [year], *Cannibals and kings: The origins of culture*, New York: Random House.

⁵¹ van Binsbergen, *Tears*, o.c.; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1987, 'Likota Iya Bankoya: Memory, myth and history', in: *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 27, 3-4: 359-392, numéro spécial sur modes populaires d'histoire en Afrique, eds. B. Jewswick & C. Moniot; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1988, ed., *J. Shimunika's Likota Iya Bankoya: Nkoya version*, Research report No. 31B, Leiden: African Studies Centre.

⁵² The valley of the headwaters of the Kabompo river, in northwestern Zambia.

Kapesi was still young, he saw the moon in the sky. Thinking that the moon was a *mpande*⁵³ (for he was only a child), he told his father: 'Father, give me that *mpande* which is shining in the sky.' Mwene Kahare called his people and told them: 'Cut forked poles and join them to a Ladder, in order to capture that *mpande* for the Prince to wear.' They started to cut forked poles and made the ladder, and it was so tall that when they climbed it, it collapsed; many people fell down and died. They tried to construct another Ladder and to climb that one, but again it collapsed and more people died. Those who remained said among themselves: 'Come on, folks, let us stop and call it a day. Let us tell the Mwene: "We are near our end, don't you see that there are only few of us left." ' Then all the people said to the Mwene: 'Mwene, this will be the end of the people, for that *mpande* many people can see there in the sky, that thing is not a *mpande*, it is the moon.' The Mwene told them to stop the construction of the Ladder. Many people died on the Ladder. Finally Mwene Kahare himself died, in Tumba.⁵⁴

This motif is widespread in Bantu-speaking Africa.⁵⁵ Also Frobenius has picked up this myth in the Nkoya area:

'Wie gesagt, ist diese Erzählung in unserem Reisegebiet sehr weit verbreitet. Dr Jensen fand sie bei den Barotse am oberen Sambesi, und ein Store-Keeper berichtete ihm, daß er sie schon vor 30 Jahren von den Makoja [Nkoya], einem damals noch völlig unberührten Volke, gehört habe. Bei der Aufzeichnung eines totemistischen Tätowierungszeichens der Mambunda [Mbunda, a neighbouring ethnic group of the Upper Zambezi] wurde unserer Mitarbeiterin Frau A. Schulz erklärt, ein bestimmtes stamme noch von den Leuten, die erstmals den Turm gebaut hätten.⁵⁶ Anno 1905/6 fand ich die Legende bei den Bena-Lulua, Kiokwe und Kanioka des südlichen Kassaibeckens⁵⁷ so daß also die Verbreitung über die ganze

⁵³ A circular flat gähite shell ornament made out of the bottom of a Conus shell; the shell's convolutions, when cut away, leave a spiral relief on the inside of the disk. These ornaments have been highly priced regalia in western Zambia. Elsewhere in South Central Africa they may be known as *ndoro*: Gelfand, M., 1952, 'The charm and the bead in African practice', NADA (Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual), 29: 18-25; Jeffreys, M.D.W., 1953, 'Cowry: Ndoro', NADA (Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual), 30: 35-52 (with rejoinder by van Sieders).

⁵⁴ *Likota Iya Bankoya*, 41: 1f; van Binsbergen, *Tears*, o.c., pp. [add pages]

⁵⁵ Roberts, A.D., 1973, *A history of the Bemba*, London: Longman. [add pages]; van Binsbergen, *Religious change*, o.c., p. [add pages]; Jensen, A.E., 1932, 'Die staatliche Organisation und die historischen Überlieferungen der Barotse am oberen Zambezi', Jahresbericht Württembergischer Vereins für Handelsgeographie, 50: 71-115, p. 76.

⁵⁶ That the people who built the tower did not live in the very distant past but were nearly our contemporaries is, incidentally, a persistent rumour in western central Zambia. As late as 1989 I was in a position to interview, in Shipungu's village, Kawanga valley, Kaoma, an extremely old man who was known as 'Mwe Kapesi' ('Headman Ladder') and who was reputed to have survived the very collapse of the tower, by stepping aside at that crucial moment — however, his own recollections of this crucial moment in world history were garbled beyond retrieval; van Binsbergen, *Tears*, o.c. [add pages] It is just possible that the rumour reflects a fairly recent eschatological cult or prophetic movement reviving in the actual construction of the ladder, the mythical contents of a much older story. Prophetic movements abounded in Zambia in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, and the greatest and most widespread of these, Mupumani's movement of 1913-14 [check], included the ritual planting of tall, debarked forked poles throughout the villages of western central Zambia — enough to remind one of a mythical figure called 'Ladder Consisting of Joined Forked Poles'; van Binsbergen, *Religion change*, o.c., pp. [add pages]

⁵⁷ Original reference to: Atlantis-Ausgabe [of what] pp. 196-7 [complete reference]

Westbahn der süderythrischen Kultur erwiesen ist.⁵⁸

Via the Biblical story of the tower of Babel (whose collapse, like in the African versions, was the origin of linguistic and ethnic diversity), and the archaeological evidence of actual ziggurats in ancient Mesopotamia this may tempt us to trace the theme back to the Ancient Near East, with the oldest documented states in world history.

Strikingly, *all* the features which Shinnie, summarising and evaluating Seligman, singled out as possible Egyptian reminiscences in sub-Saharan Africa, are also highly conspicuous in the Nkoya kingship. The High God Nyambi (of unspecified gender) and the latter's child Mvula (Rain) are considered to be birds, while the kingship and their incumbents (associated with the eagle and hawk clans) are the 'Tears of Rain':

'The kingship of the Nkoya is said to have started with the large Cooking-Pot full of Game Meat. Many of the Nkoya in the past said that Mwene Nyambi is a bird; and that Mwene Nyambi has a child, by the name of Mvula [Rain], also a bird; and that two clans in this world are the kin of Rain: the Nkwehe [Hawks] on the part of the birds, and the Mbumze [Buzzards] on the part of mankind.'⁵⁹

The Bunyoro rite of shooting the nations, perhaps reminiscent of the Egyptian *sed* festival, also has its counterpart here as a central symbol of legitimate control of the land:⁶⁰

'It was in the year 1900. Mwene Mutondo Wahila had been Mwene for approximately five years in the Nyango capital. In 1905 the first Mubushishi [colonial official] came and found him. When the Mwene saw the Whiteman entering the capital, Mwene Mutondo came forward with his drums and his bow, and with many people, men as well as women. He came to formally welcome Mubushishi; and when Mubushishi saw that the Mwene had brought his drums and xylophones and his bow, Mubushishi was greatly pleased. He asked the Mwene: 'Mwene, shoot with your bow so that we can see it.' Mwene Mutondo Wahila then shot an arrow into a tree, before the eyes of Mubushishi.'⁶¹

Seligman also claimed an extensive influence of the Egyptian funerary cult upon Central Africa.⁶² In view of

⁵⁸ Frobenius, *Erythraea, o.c.*, p. 169.

⁵⁹ *Likota Iya Bankoya* 4: 1; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*, pp. [add pages]

⁶⁰ As well as in other parts of South Central Africa in connection with kingship; cf. Binsbergen, *Religious change, o.c.*, pp. [complete reference]

⁶¹ *Likota Iya Bankoya* 51:1f; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*, pp. [add pages] Incidentally, as part of an attempt to formulate, in a popular book, one all-encompassing ancient Old World cosmology, Pennick (Pennick, N., 1992, *Secret games of the gods: Ancient ritual systems in board games, York Beach (Maine): Weiser*, reprint of the 1989 ed; first published London: Century, 1988) signals the widespread occurrence of the shooting theme (which he interprets on p. 102f — mainly by implicit reference to Nordic European cosmology — as

'the fundamental geomantic act transfixing the dragon and erecting the cosmic pole';

The anthill theme would then have an echo in the Aegean omphalos, the rounded stone — with *lingam* connotations, see below — which serves as the navel of the world (Pennick, *o.c.*, p. 101f). The problem with such ideas is that are too intriguing to discard, but too sweeping to take seriously.

⁶² Seligman, C.G., 1932, [title] in: *Studies presented to F.L. Griffiths*, Oxford: [publisher], p. 458.

Egyptian parallels which I believe to detect in the royal funerals of the Nkoya people, he may have a point here. Royal burial takes place in the valley, in the proximity of a river. A special road is constructed exclusively for the purpose of taking the body to the grave. The grave is a vertical shaft opening into a rather spacious cavity dug out in the sandy soil of western Zambia; the excess soil excavated leaves a considerable mound, with a c. 25 m² rectangular base, and sloping sides of c. 1.5 m high. Here the dead king is seated on his throne, his feet resting on two anthills — the latter having replaced the heads of slaves, which until the late nineteenth century supported the king's last stance. Human sacrifice, real or imagined, at a rather more massive scale than suggested by only two anthills representing skulls, is still a dominant feature of Nkoya kingship and royal burial. Although funerary human sacrifice was very rare in ancient Egypt, the parallel with Egyptian iconography is striking nonetheless; in Bernal's words:

'He [the triumphant pharaoh Senwosret I or III of the 12th dynasty, early second millennium BCE, who incidentally was one of the most 'African' of Middle Kingdom pharaoh's, of Nubian connections and reputed to be black] is often depicted with his feet placed on two heads symbolising the foreign enemies of Egypt, the Negroes and the Syrians'⁶³

The Senwosret/ Nkoya parallel however could be explained in at least two ways:

- either Senwosret is emulating a general African pattern which also returns in the Nkoya burial, or
- in a very personal sense has the peculiar biography of Senwosret himself set a pattern which was then transmitted through Africa.

It is clear that Bernal would favour the latter explanation. With a naive recourse to euhemerism, he also interprets the widespread iconography of the slaying pharaoh, even similar themes associated with Herakles and with storm gods elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, as reminiscences of the exploits of the very same Senwosret I or III — as if the slaying pharaoh were not an iconographic constant in Ancient Egypt since Predynastic times; cf. Figure 7), but I think that he is mistaken on this point, and that the former alternative is to be preferred.⁶⁴

⁶³ Bernal, *Black Athena II, o.c.*, p. 577 n. 53; cf. Spiegelberg, W., 1927, *The Credibility of Herodotus' Account of Egypt in the Light of the Egyptian Monuments*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Cf. Yurco, 'Black Athena: An Egyptological review', *o.c.*, pp. 62-100, p. 83.

[insert figure 7]

Figure 7. The Narmer palette, Early Dynastic period, c. 3100 BCE, *recto*.⁶⁵

[insert figure 8]

Figure 8. The Narmer palette, Early Dynastic period, c. 3100 BCE, *verso*.⁶⁶

In view of the prominence of a cherished papyrus clump in another sub-Saharan African kingdom alleged to have Egyptian reminiscences (as discussed above), it is interesting to find, in another section of *Likota Iya Bankoya*, that 'reed' (Nkoya: *shitete*) is specifically addressed as a person (under the name of Katete)⁶⁷, with truly amazing implications:

'When Luhamba ['Royal Soaring-High'⁶⁸] and [his sister] Katete ['Reed Person'] were being hidden by the members of the Mbunze ['Buzzard'] clan — Luhamba in a beehive made from bark, Katete in a mat — the Humbu [Mwaat Yaamv's warriors] came to the village of Lyovu son of Mbuwa and asked if any member of the Sheta ['Dizzy'] clan was present there. The Mbunze answered: 'There are no Sheta left alive. This we declare, and if the Beehive would have been a person it would have heard. "Do you hear, Beehive?" By the same token, if the Reed Mat had been a person she would have heard. "Do you hear, Reed Person?"'⁶⁹

The royal clan derives its nickname 'Dizzy Ones' from the Nkoya myth of origin of kingship, in which Shilayi Mashiku, the valiant daughter of the female clan leader Mwene Libupe and of the (commoner) hunter Shikalamo — implied to take her father's clan identity and therefore not herself a member of the original royal clan — managed to get at the meat of kinship which was cooking in a great pot, by repeatedly going around the fire and extinguishing it with water from a watertight basket.

Already this very short passage — whose clearly mythical contents is impossible to interpret merely on the basis of latter-day Nkoya culture — ancient Egyptian reminiscences abound: the juxtaposition of the two symbols of the 'Kingship of Lower and Upper Egypt'

⁶⁵ Height 53 cm. Cairo, Egyptian Museum; photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art; source: Fagan, B., 1987, *New treasures off the past*, London: Quarto.

⁶⁶ As previous footnote.

⁶⁷ In the Nkoya language, *ka-* is the singular prefix in the noun class reserved for human beings.

⁶⁸ The prefix *lu-* marks the singular of the noun class reserved for things royal. The name is an oblique reference, perhaps because in this narrative context it may be taboo to directly refer to the concept of the bee (Nkoya: *kapuku*).

⁶⁹ *Likota Iya Bankoya*, 7: 1f; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*, pp. [add pages] In my 1992 translation of this fragment I had 'bark container' instead of 'beehive', the Nkoya word in question (*shikumba*) has both meanings, since here as in many other parts of Africa a beehive is nothing but a bark cylinder hung in a tree.

(ancient Egyptian *n-sw-bit*):  70 the papyrus (cf. Reed) and the bee (i.e. Royal Soaring-High, hidden in the Beehive); its suggestion of very close association between royal brothers and sisters — a trait with pharaonic parallels which is repeated throughout Nkoya precolonial royal history⁷¹ and royal enthronement ritual⁷²; and its evocation of the royal Egyptian totemic bird the falcon ('Buzzard'; another designation of this clan is Nkwehe, 'Hawk').

Reed has a great symbolic significance in Nkoya cosmology, which has always puzzled me until, very recently, I began to consider it in the present light of trans-African royal symbolism with a possible Egyptian provenance. A key tradition of the branch (called Mashasha) of the Nkoya people ruled by Mwene Kahare, is that Mashasha is a nickname, which although connected through a popular etymology with a particular kind of sour (Nkoya: *shasha*) beer, really has to do with the fact that at one stage in their (i.e. their royal family's) peregrinations, they arrived in the Zambezi flood plain carrying their reed mats on their shoulders. The significance of the episode has long eluded me, for the Nkoya, although until well into the twentieth century CE counting among their men big game hunters who follow the game during the hunting season, are not known to be nomadic, and travelling on foot carrying a big reed mat is rather awkward. In 1977, when I took a state photograph of Mwene Kahare Kabambi, to my surprise he insisted on posing seated on his throne and holding vertically in his right hand a rolled-up reed mat resting with one end on the ground; he explained this oddity by reference to the Zambezi story which however again failed to strike me as a meaningful myth of origin. Not unlikely, the reference — lost even to the king, or too sacred to reveal — is to the papyrus clump as the emblem of the kingship of Upper Egypt. It is even thinkable that precisely such a papyrus clump is being emulated by the royal *shgine* which, since the early 1990s, features at the neo-traditional annual Kazanga festival of the Nkoya people: a local shrub at the fringe of the festival area, at the foot of which an enamel dish sunk into the ground (imitation of a skull cup)⁷³ constitutes a miniature pool of

⁷⁰ Gardiner, A.H., 1994, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, rev. 3rd ed., Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum, this edition first published 1957, first edition published 1927, p. 71. Significantly, for fear of the magical powers attributed to the bee sign (or to any other hieroglyph depicting live animals), the bee sign in this expression could

be replaced by that of the red crown of Lower Egypt: , featuring the uraeus snake as the feminine symbol of kingship (Gardiner, *o.c.*, p. 504, and references there).

⁷¹ van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*, pp. 182f and *passim*.

⁷² On the eve of his installation the Nkoya king is to have ritual sexual intercourse with his sister — an incestuous act surrounded with the greatest abhorrence; this custom is still observed, although these days a somewhat distant classificatory sister performs this duty.

⁷³ Nkoya kings and their courtiers are reputed in oral history accounts which I collected since 1972, to have habitually drunk their beer or mede from from the skulls of defeated enemies; the same information was given by Westbeech, who travelled in Nkoya lands in the 1880s, cf. Sampson, R., 1972, *The man with a toothbrush in his hat: The story and times of George Copp*

local beer from which the king, kneeling down, has to drink the empowering sacrificial beer (which cause him to be possessed by his deified royal ancestors) before setting out on the royal solo dance which is the culmination of the festival — an echo of the Egyptian *sed* festival?⁷⁴ During his solo dance, the Nkoya king brandishes the broadsword, not unlike the slaying pharaoh of iconographic convention.

[insert figure 9]

Figure 9. The late Mwene Kahare Kabambi, one of the traditional rulers of the Nkoya people, posing in state in his palace, September 1977.

5.3.3. Wider mythical themes

Much further down South in Africa, the papyrus clump has even a faint echo in Zulu myths concerning the beginning of time.⁷⁵ But there is also a parallel here with the more than four thousand year old Gilgamesh epic from Mesopotamia, in which Utanapishtim, the Sumerian Noah, is warned for the imminent flood in the following manner:

'God Ea, the wise, who used to cavedrop on them
betrays there plan to a reed hut:
'Reed hut, reed hut! Wall, wall!
reed hut, listen! Wall, do understand!''

You, man of Shurripak, you son of Ubara-tutu
demolish the house, build a ship!''⁷⁶

If the Mesopotamian parallel (speaking to Reed as a person) may look to be farfetched or even entirely accidental, it is prudent to realise that it is not the only possible correspondence between Nkoya royal myths and the Gilgamesh epic. This becomes clear from a story with Frobenius recorded about the king of the Rozwi in Zimbabwe — a people whose sacred kingship has much in common with that of the Nkoya. The king refuses to die (cf. the otherwise strangely superfluous closing words concerning Mwene Kahare's death in Tumba, in the Kapeshe story), and the *hakata* four-tablet oracle reveals to him that he can avoid death if he picks the moon from the sky to serve as his breast pendant. Frobenius⁷⁷ does realise the parallel between the Rozwi king and Gilgamesh, who sets

out to gain immortality and in the end even spots the herb conveying it, but he is unable to avail himself of its powers. The Rozwi story reveals the underlying Gilgamesh-like structure of the Kapeshe myth — and also an oblique *Golden Bough* element, of the king refusing to die at the end of his term of office, and seeking an escape.

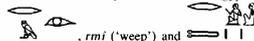
The story of picking the moon from the sky revolves on the idea of the ladder into heaven, which is found in the Bible and elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, including ancient Egyptian mythology and funerary practices.⁷⁸ And while the Nkoya see their kingship as the 'Tears of Rain',⁷⁹ i.e. of the demiurge Mvula the son of the general West and Central African sky god Nyambi, the ancient Egyptians saw general mankind (*rmty*) as stemming from the tears (*rmty*) of the sun god.⁸⁰ Here it is as if in the Central African royal context a myth which originally applied to the whole of mankind, has now been selectively retained and transmitted by an elite group because the institution which they administer, the kingship, affords them a special link with Northern countries. Of course, if this striking parallel between Central Africa and pharaonic Egypt is to be pursued any further, we have to take into account that the role of the sky god, which throughout Africa and much of the Ancient Near East is that of providing rain, in pharaonic Egypt had to be modified because of Egypt's peculiar ecology: an abundantly river-fed irrigated agriculture, and virtual absence of rain. One may be tempted to invoke Nubia as the source of both the Egyptian and the Central African symbolism, but then we would have to ascertain whether the wordplay on *rmty*, which makes sense in the ancient Egyptian language, equally does so in ancient Nubian — which is very unlikely.

Today mythical knowledge among the Nkoya is scarce and it does not circulate as before. In the stories which are still told by the fireside in the villages at night, and in the

⁷⁸ Budge, E.A.W., 1971, *Egyptian magic*, New York: Dover; orig. ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner, Books on Egypt and Chaldaea, II, 1901, p. 51f; Budge, E.A. W., 1969, *The Gods of the Egyptians: Or studies in Egyptian mythology*, 2 vols., New York: Dover, 1969, republication of the first edition, Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company & London: Methuen & Co., 1904, pp. i: 167f, 188, 490, ii: 92; 241. [check]

⁷⁹ Van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c., passim*. Strictly speaking, the underlying Nkoya expression *Limata Iya Mvula* in the first place means 'drops of rain'. The translation 'tears' is however correct in a figurative sense, and accepted as such by educated native speakers of Nkoya, Mvula being a personalised demiurge and *limata* his liquid secretion. Considering however the semantic similarities (if not semantic identity) between *limata* and the South Asian *soma*, it is useful to remind ourselves that the semantic field of *soma* certainly extends to a variety of symbolically charged whitish or transparent liquids, including rain, drops, ambrosia, sperm, saliva, and possibly sesame oil. The same polysemy, incidentally, underlies the North African popular use of the Arabic word *baraka*, 'blessing', and by consequence a saint's blessing can be conveyed by his saliva, his sperm (but not his blood nor his urine), by the springs that he locates, by the rain that falls through his intercession, and by the words that refer to him: invocations, votive meals over which his name has been spoken, oaths etc.

⁸⁰ Pinch, G., 1994, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, London: British Museum Press, p. 68; Pinch uses a popularised orthographic rendering with uncertain vocalisation: *remtj*. Cf. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, o.c., p. 578, s.v.



remi ('weep') and *remtj* ('men, people'); note that homonymy is only apparent: the *t* in *rmL* 'people', is emphatic, the morphological suffix *t* in *rmL* 'that which is wept', is not.

Westbeech in Central Africa, Lusaka: Multimedia. [add pages] Like the human sacrifice at royal burials, the circle-dot motif, the mankala board game, and perhaps the hour-glass drum as an item of the royal orchestra, this trait has a wide distribution both in Africa and, skipping ancient Egypt, in West, and Central and East Asia. One cannot help wondering what continuities across the Old World further research on these elusive points might bring up.

⁷⁴ van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1994, 'The Kazanga festival: Ethnicity as cultural mediation and transformation in central western Zambia', *African Studies*, 53, 2, 1994, pp 92-125; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., in press, 'Nkoya royal chiefs and the Kazanga Cultural Association in western central Zambia today: Resilience, decline, or folklorisation?' in: E.A.B. van Rouveryoy and Nieuwaal & R. van Dijk, eds., *African chieftaincy in a new socio-economic and political landscape*, Hamburg/Münster: LIT-Verlag.

⁷⁵ Knappert, J., 1977, *Bantu myths and other tales*, Nisaba series 7, Leiden: Brill, p. 37.

⁷⁶ After: Böhl, F.M.T., 1941, *Het Gilgamesj-epos: Nationaal heldenicht van Babylonie*, Amsterdam: Paris, p. 82.

⁷⁷ Frobenius, *Erythraea*, o.c., p. 66f.

fragmentary images of the past which we encounter throughout *Likota Iya Bankoya*, one can still detect old myths, and these display themes which such wide distribution and such early attestation in other parts of the Old World, that the thought of diffusion (especially diffusion in the context of kingship, which may be legitimated by these myths) should not be suppressed as heretical or obsolete. Let us consider, for instance, the following myth, which derives from the Mankoya District Notebook (p. 400), an administrative log-book kept by colonial civil servants over the years; the myth was published by the musicologist Brown:⁸¹

'In the beginning, there was a God, Lubumbaushi ['Royal Kneader of Smoke, of Chaos'] who with his wife, Nakena ['Mother Anthill'] lived in a Mafulo [homestead] on the Earth. He does not appear to have helped his people, the Mankoya, to any particular extent, because to satisfy their hunger, they were compelled to eat dust and mud. There was no rain and consequently no crops. After a while, Nakena gave birth to a son, Nyambe⁸² (the 'mulimu' ['tribal' god] of the Barotsi);⁸³ and when he grew up, Nakena went to her husband and claimed from him a portion of the Earth for her son. This request was refused by Lubumbaushi and Nakena then left him and went away with her son, telling Lubumbaushi that they would go and live in the sky — to which he replied that although they lived apart from him, they would find that he was stronger than they. Nyambe then, with his mother, built a Mafulo in the sky, and finding Rain there, poured it down to the Earth so that the people were able to cultivate crops and became fat and strong. They then said 'Nyambe shall be our chief — not Lubumbaushi for the former is mightier than the latter.' Thus deposed, Lubumbaushi left the Earth and went to dwell in a Mafulo under it.'

Here the link with the kingship is established not only through Rain, which through Nyambi's intercession came

⁸¹ Brown, E.D., 1984, 'Drums of life: Royal music and social life in Western Zambia', Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, School of Music; University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, p. 193. I was told a variant of the same story in November 1973 by the healer-prophet headman Lubumba, Lubumba village, Mwene Kahare, Kaoma, Zambia; cf. van Binsbergen, Religious change, o.c.: Plate [give number] and caption to that plate.

⁸² The name Nyambi, and variant, is widespread throughout West Central Africa. It has no recognised popular etymology or meaning in the Nkoya language. The Jesuit theologian Williams (Williams, J.J., 1930, *Hebrewisms of West Africa: From Nile to Niger with the Jews*, London: Allen & Unwin, see index to that book) points out that Nyame is the name of the supreme being of the Ashanti; via reference to a doubtful Persian source claiming 'Yami' to be the Jewish god, Williams claims Nyame to be a corruption of the Hebrew Yahweh. This is an extremely problematic etymology of Nyame/Nyambi, if only because the vocalisation of the Hebrew tetragrammaton *יהוה* — ideally never to be pronounced — is per definition unknown. Writing on the Lower Congo, Dennett (Dennett, R.E., 1906, *At the back of the black man's mind: Or, Notes on the kingly office in West Africa*, London: Macmillan), takes it for granted that the name Nyambi has a transparent meaning in local Kikongo: 'the personal essence (*imb*) of the fours (*zia* or *za* = four)'. Besides a possible geomantic connotation (cf. van Binsbergen, 'Rethinking Africa's contribution', o.c., and extensive references cited there) such a reading, if correct (but that is very unlikely) might even have an Ancient Egyptian one: referring to the principal divine quartet of Osiris, Isis, Nephthys and Set, the children of female (!) Heaven (Nut) and male Earth (Geb). Also *Likota Iya Bankoya* contains a section 'The chapter concerning the four', which deals with four close kinsmen, members of a matrilineage. Even though one of them is significantly called Katete (Reed Person), and although their genealogy is thoroughly mythical and impossible to put a date to (van Binsbergen, *Tears*, o.c., p. 439f), I cannot detect anything that would reveal them as a divine quartet with ancient Egyptian connotations.

⁸³ The phrase between parentheses is an aside by the civil servant who recorded the myth.

to earth and produced the kingship from its tears, but also from the fact that 'anthill' (Nkoya: *kena*) and 'royal court' (Nkoya: *lukena*) derive from the same lexical root. The Lubumbaushi myth contains — besides a possible evocation of Ptah, the Egyptian creator god — all sorts of old and widespread themes of the Chaos/ Python myth as analysed by Fontenrose,⁸⁴ such as the reference to smoke as a manifestation of the earliest state of the universe, the dissent between the treacherous father god (who turns out to be the death god), the oedipal theme of the enemy's female partner who nevertheless sides with the good filial god, the cosmological distinction between volatile heaven and solid earth, etc. Across vast distances of space and time possible continuities begin to suggest themselves here.

The tradition which sees the High God Nyambi and Mvula (Rain) as birds may be interpreted in the light of the Egyptian royal falcon god Horus (identified with the sun, Osiris's posthumous son by Isis, or a son of Re' himself), of which every Egyptian king was considered an incarnation. It is highly significant that the Nkoya king is symbolically equated with the sun. The royal orchestra is played at sunrise and sunset. During the day it is impossible to approach the king or distance oneself from him without squatting down and rhythmically clapping hands, but during the night this salute is absolutely forbidden. The king is unique, cannot meet with other kings, and cannot eat with whatever other humans. The king impersonates life force *par excellence*. He is not allowed to go to funerals or even set eyes on a grave, and to die is his greatest, truly unspeakable sin. Rejuvenation medicine, traditionally prepared from the brains of slave children, must keep the king in a state of intact life force. The royal wives constantly report to the court steward on the king's sexual powers; an impotent king has to die.

There is another association of the Nkoya kingship which has strong pharaonic reminiscences:⁸⁵ when the unspeakable thing happens and the king dies, he immediately turns into a lion (who in solitary or even collective hallucination is seen speeding from the palace towards the nearby forest), and in the chaotic and fearful liminal period preceding interment, and even for months afterwards as long as the mourning period lasts, this lion is reputed to roam around the palace, jealous of all pretenders to the vacant throne.

A final Nkoya/ Egyptian parallel concerns male circumcision. Although the evidence⁸⁶ is scanty and confusing, circumcision was very early attested in the Lower Nile valley, and is likely to have been among the sub-Saharan African traits constitutive of Egyptian culture. Although far from a royal prerogative, at was mandatory

⁸⁴ Fontenrose, J., 1980, *Python: A study of Delphic myth and its origins*, Berkeley etc.: University of California Press; paperback edition, reprint of the 1959 first edition.

⁸⁵ Cf. Romano, J.F., 1996, 'The Beast of Kings: Male Lion Imagery and Kingship in the Ancient Nile Valley', in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 66-67.

⁸⁶ Bailey, S., 1996, 'Circumcision and male initiation in Africa, in: Celenko, o.c., pp. 88-91, and references cited there.

for the higher classes.⁸⁷ Perhaps it has to be added to the divine kingship package that travelled through sub-Saharan Africa — in many parts of which, however, it was probably established before that specific package arrived. Over the past few centuries, circumcision has played a major role in Nkoya kingships, king defining their identity either through personal control of circumcision, or by the wholesale banning of the practice from their realm.⁸⁸ It is possible that in doing so, they were emulating as aspect of divine kingship that was already part of the package before it left the Nile valley.

Thus it is unmistakable that very specific ancient Egyptian echoes reverberate in Nkoya kingship — perhaps right up to the royal diadem (*mushamo*), which according to the testimony I have received⁸⁹ would look somehow similar to the Egyptian red crown, with the uraeus — in whose place however Nkoya kings wear the round white *mpande*, also with a spiral motif.

The bird theme however shows that monocentric diffusion from ancient Egypt is too simple a model to explain Nkoya kingship. For that theme links up with other very ancient mythical themes,⁹⁰ spread across a considerable part of the Old World: of the Mesopotamian mythical storm bird Zu or Anzu⁹¹ which turns out to be closely linked with the Indian Garuda figure. The latter appears from earliest times onwards in the Vedic literature, at first as entirely eagle, later increasingly in partial human shape, and often the name for a category of gods instead of one unique god.⁹² From Garuda it is told⁹³ that he diverted the water of 'ninety times ninety rivers' in order to quench the fire which protected the *soma* (the divine food) — a striking parallel with Shilayi Mashiku's actions, in whose mythical account repeated reference is made to the themes of 'bird' and 'Rain' (= bird = Garuda).

⁸⁷ de Wit, C., 1972, 'La circoncision chez les anciens Égyptiens', *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache*, 99: 41-48.

⁸⁸ van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1993, 'Mukanda: Towards a history of circumcision rites in western Zambia, 18th-20th century', in: J.-P. Chretien, avec collaboration de C.-H. Perrot, G. Prunier & D. Raison-Jourde, eds., *L'invention religieuse en Afrique: Histoire et religion en Afrique noire*, Paris: Agence de Culture et de Coopération Technique/ Karthala, pp. 49-103.

⁸⁹ No such crown is available among Nkoya regalia today. Court circles describe the *mushamo* as a slender diadem of wrought iron. One was reported to be last seen on the grave of Mwene Mutondo Kashina, c. 1870; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.*, pp. 402. Although iron-working skills have declined, the people of western central Zambia have been able to work iron for about two millennia, so there is no implication that the actual *mushamo* (and not just its model) may be brought all the way from northern lands. Meanwhile it is part of the divine kingship complex that kings are credited with the invention and introduction of iron-working; their iron regalia testify to this.

⁹⁰ Fontenrose, *Python, o.c.*: ch. viii, ix, pp. 146ff.

⁹¹ Cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., & F.A.M. Wiggermann, in press, 'Magic in history: A theoretical perspective and its application to Ancient Mesopotamia', in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn, eds., *Magic in the Ancient Near East*, Groningen: Styx.

⁹² Winternitz, M., 1988, *A general index to the names and subject-matter of the Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 50, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Müller, Motilal Banarsidass: first published Oxford: Clarendon, 1910; Macdonell, A.A., 1897, *Vedic mythology* (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, iii 1A, Strassburg: publisher]

⁹³ Fontenrose, *Python, o.c.*, p. [add pages]

Also mead (honey beer) plays a role not only in traditional Nkoya culture (where it is the royal drink *par excellence*), but also in the cultures of Madagascar.⁹⁴ From there it is only one step to the cultures of Indonesia, whence, as Jones⁹⁵ has demonstrated — on the basis of highly specific tuning frequencies whose identity could not be attributed to chance — some of the most important regalia of the Nkoya and of many other African peoples derive: the xylophones. After Hinduisation of Indonesia as from the middle of the first millennium CE, Garuda came to play a great role in the cultures of the archipelago. As is manifest from countless sources, the East African coast, Madagascar, and the Comoro islands have been incorporated in an intensive mercantile network along which Indonesian, Sri Lankan, Arabian, Persian and Chinese influences have come to the African continent. Also the hour-glass drum (with the kettle drum and the xylophone the main instrument in the royal orchestra), is known to have a wide distribution throughout Africa and Asia, and it is considered⁹⁶ as a sign of Asian influence on African music.

[insert figure 10]

Figure 10. The royal musical instruments of Mwene Kahare, one of the Nkoya kings, western central Zambia, in 1977

Hour-glass drums and xylophones constitute fundamental aspects of royal myth and ceremony among the Nkoya people, and hence the corner stone of their ethnic and political identity as highlighted in royal ceremony and legend over at least two hundred years. Now,

⁹⁴ Beaujard, P., 1994, 'Les rituels en riziculture chez les Tanala de l'Ikongo (Sud-Est de Madagascar)', paper presented at the congress on Malagasy cultural identity from the Asian perspective, Leiden, Centrum voor Niet-Westerse Studies, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 28-29 March 1994, p. 9 n. 19 [now published]; also cf. Beaujard, P., 1983, *Princes et paysans: Les Tanala de l'Ikongo. Un espace social du Sud-Est de Madagascar*, Paris: L'Harmattan; Beaujard, P., 1988, 'Les couleurs et les quatre éléments dans le Sud-Est de Madagascar: L'héritage indonésien', *Omaly sy Anio*, 27: 31-48; Beaujard, P., 1991, *Mythe et société à Madagascar (Tanala de l'Ikongo): Le chasseur d'oiseaux et la princesse du ciel*, Paris: L'Harmattan. I was interested to learn that on Madagascar people shave their heads for mourning (cf. Middleton, K., 1994, 'Tombs, umbilical cords, and the syllable fo', paper presented at the congress on Malagasy cultural identity from the Asian perspective, Leiden, 28-29 March 1994. [now published]). This is what, until the early twentieth century CE, all the subjects of a Nkoya king had to do upon his death; whoever failed to comply risked being executed by the king's secret terrorist band, the *tupondwa* (Likota Iya Bankoya [add ch and verse]; van Binsbergen, *Tears, o.c.* [add pages]). For a study of ancient Malagasy kingdom stressing their African elements rather than the other way around, cf. Kent, R., 1970, *Early kingdoms in Madagascar 1500-1700*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

⁹⁵ Jones, A.M., 1964, *Africa and Indonesia: The evidence of the xylophone and other musical and cultural factors*, Leiden: Brill. A more comprehensive discussion of links between Africa and Indonesia in: Murdock, *Africa, o.c.*, 1, pp. 212ff. Jones detects similar African/Indonesian parallels in the *mankala* game, another 'guiding fossil' of divine kingship. It is certainly worthwhile to look afresh at Indonesian influences on African kingship as a whole. For a more recent past however (the second half of the second millennium CE) various specialists have stressed the formative influence of African kingships on political development in Madagascar; cf. Deschamps, H., 1960, *Histoire de Madagascar*, [place: publisher]; Davidson, B., 1972, *Africa: History of a continent*, London etc.: Spring, rev. ed., 1st ed. 1966, p. 258; Kent, R., 1970, *Early kingdoms in Madagascar 1500-1700*, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

⁹⁶ Kwabena Nketia, J.H. 1975, *The music of Africa*, London: Gollancz.

if these musical instruments have really an intercontinental origin this means that local identity symbols at the same time form a condensation point, an index, of this people's intracontinental and intercontinental cultural indebtedness.

Once our attention has been drawn to the South Asian connection, an amazing number of sometimes very precise correspondences open up which throw a totally unexpected light on the Nkoya kingship.⁹⁷

These correspondences are indications of a common substratum extending from South Central Africa north to Egypt and east to India and Indonesia — Frobenius's South Erythraean culture complex. But can we be more specific, and interpret this substratum as have resulted from a process of diffusion, from a specific source and in a specific direction?

The complexity of the correspondences, and their extreme temporal and spatial extension, make this a very difficult to answer without falling in familiar traps such as Egyptocentrism. Yet a somewhat sophisticated historical argument begins to emerge.

The existence, in the South Central African context, of the combined theme of reed and bee, does seem to be so specific and from a structuralist point of view so improbable (bees and reed having no obvious biological relationship, and each belonging to different though potentially adjacent ecological settings) that it is highly persuasive to assume that this combined theme refers to post-unification Egypt (after 3000 BCE), with its standard

formula *n-sw-bit*, , 'King of Upper Egypt and of Lower Egypt'. So this appears to give us an Archimedean fixed point in time and space. We would however be more comfortable if we could systematically explain, by exclusive reference to Egyptian data, why, of all possible symbols, bee and papyrus were chosen to represent Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt (from which Lower Egypt was conquered c. 3000 BCE), and not for instance the other way around. Both bee and papyrus are more typical of the ecology of the Delta, whose liminal qualities between land and water, and whose riches in wildlife and fish, have made it a region full of symbolic significance, with connotations of being away from the world of the living — of foreboding afterlife; it is as such that the Delta features, for instance, in the symbolism of the *znt* board-game, especially in New Kingdom times.⁹⁸ Also the distant lands beyond Egypt's southern border had connotations of afterlife — as geographical peripheries in general, throughout the Ancient Near East, represented the underworld — but this does not yet explain the

juxtaposition bee/ papyrus. If no systematic explanation can be given for the this juxtaposition from within Egyptian culture, a possibility remains that it was already in place in the African interior (Kush, or the Central Sahara) and from there travelled north to Egypt, south to South Central Africa.

There is more to suggest an origin south of Egypt, for the divine kingship which characterised the pharaonic period. Here the restoration of the Qustul incense burner (1977) plays an important role. This clay artefact of the so-called A-Group of Protodynastic period (3100-3300 BCE) found in northern Nubia, is already

'decorated with scenes that incorporate Egyptian-style pharaonic imagery. The scenes show a boat⁹⁹ procession moving towards a niched palace facade¹⁰⁰ and include the depiction of a king wearing the Upper Egyptian white crown,¹⁰¹ as well as the archaic Egyptian Horus title and *serekh*¹⁰².'¹⁰³

This is certainly no exaggerated rendering, for these are the words of a scholar, Wegner, who exhorts us not to rush to conclusions on the basis of these truly amazing facts. Wegner adduces more recent evidence and literature, also by the champion of the Qustul artefact Williams himself, which stress the essentially endogenous development of the pharaonic political culture in Predynastic times, without precluding influences from outside Egypt: Nubia, Sumer.

Whether or not Nubia was the source of pharaonic kingship in the first place, it clearly served as the main interface between on the one hand pharaonic Egypt once established, and sub-Saharan Africa on the other. Kush's massive human sacrifices at royal burials suggests that here at least fundamental additions have been made to whatever components of sub-Saharan African kingship travelled south from Egypt; and there are more such indications at Kush of familiar sub-Saharan royal traits, such as royal spirit wives,¹⁰⁴ the selection of the royal successor from a pool of not very close kinsmen rather than — as in Egypt — through precise dynastic precedence,¹⁰⁵ the prominent

⁹⁷ I have so far limited my explorations to the 49 volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*, which are eminently accessible through Winternitz's exhaustive index volume: Winternitz, *o.c.* This leaves aside, for the moment, major sources such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana epics, and many texts not included in Müller's selection, which while extensive is over a century old. A detailed and specialist assessment of mythological correspondences between South Asia and South Central Africa is beyond my present competence.

⁹⁸ Kendall, T., 1978, *Passing through the netherworld. The meaning and play of senet, an ancient Egyptian funerary game*, Belmont: The Kirk game company.

⁹⁹ Cf. the later hieroglyph  for sacred bark.

¹⁰⁰ Cf the later hieroglyph .

¹⁰¹ Exactly as the later hieroglyph ; on the remaining fragments of the incense burner, only the crown is actually displayed, not the king himself.

¹⁰² The pharaonic *serekh* is the cognizance or royal standard, cf. Budge, *Gods, o.c.*: i: 25f. On the Qustul incense burner, the Horus title and

serekh is represented as a falcon  on a standard or pole , in

combination  much like on the *verso* of the later Narmer palette which depicts a royal procession to the Horus shrine.

¹⁰³ Wegner, J.W., 1996, 'Interaction', *o.c.*, p. 98; cf. Williams, B., 1996, 'The Qustul Incense Burner and the Case for a Nubian origin of Ancient Egyptian Kingship', in: Celenko, *o.c.*, pp. 95-97; and extensive references there.

¹⁰⁴ Kendall, T., n.d. [1997], 'De koningen van de Heilige Berg: Napata en de Koesjitiese dynastie', in: Wildung with Frieze, *Zwarte Jarao's, o.c.*, pp. 161-203, p. 164.

¹⁰⁵ Kendall, 'De koningen van de Heilige Berg', *o.c.*, p. 168; for

role of the royal mother and royal wife as if these were legitimating a man's claim to the kingship¹⁰⁶ the royal parasols,¹⁰⁷ the round thatched royal quarters as nostalgic identity architecture within a courtly environment otherwise dominated by rectangular Egyptian conventions, and the monumental round thatched audience room.¹⁰⁸

How illuminating the connexion is of South Central African and Egyptian themes, will become clear when we now consider a signet ring which was found in Nubia and which dates from nearly two millennia after the Kerma kingdom: from the Meroitic kingdom in the beginning of the Common Era.

[insert figure 11]

Figure 11. A Meroitic electron signet ring depicting an enthroned royal figure, and flanked by a ladder (on which a perched falcon) to the left and a mankala board by the right.¹⁰⁹

It is interesting that the Egyptologist republishing this artefact identified the iconographic themes as in the above caption (without mentioning the winged solar disk, the flail and the puzzling shadings — perhaps the bird's wings? — between the royal figure and the bird), but felt obliged to add with reference to the ladder, the falcon and the mankala board:

'the meaning of these motives is unknown'.¹¹⁰

This can only mean that from the available, immensely extensive corpus of established Egyptology these motives have no recognised meaning. But they have now for us: they summarise without the slightest doubt the entire symbolic repertoire of African divine kingship which we have first studied in detail in the context of the Nkoya of South Central Africa, and which obviously was already fully developed at Meroe in the beginning of the Common Era. Here again the argument of the complexity of the package transmitted in diffusion must be invoked. Presumably, for each of the themes on the Meroitic ring its own separate diffusion history may be drawn. But for the entire package to be present in the 2nd-3rd century CE in Nubia, more than one and a half millennia later in Zambia,

specific diffusion from the Nubian source is the only plausible explanation. Thus the detailed study of Nkoya kingship seems to confirm, albeit with the addition of a decisive stop in Nubia, the Egyptocentric monocentric theories *en vogue* in African Studies more than half a century ago, and since utterly discarded.

So much for the Egyptian connexion.¹¹¹ But let us now turn to the South Asian one.

5.3.4. The South Asian connection

A closer look at the *Sacred Books of the East* does not so much help us to further develop the Garuda theme,¹¹² but brings out a host of other Nkoya/ India correspondences, particularly around the *soma* theme. The complex concept of *soma* resonates with virtually all the mythical and ceremonial material presented above for the Nkoya.¹¹³ In the Indian sacred literature, *soma* is said to be:

the imperishable red drop¹¹⁴
the king, lord of kings¹¹⁵
the red young child of heaven¹¹⁶
King Soma is the moon, the food of the gods¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ It would be worthwhile to re-examine the splendid Lozi or Luyana kingdom (also second half of the second millennium CE) in the same light of Egyptian correspondences: the flood plain ecology, the annual royal Kuomboka festival in which the king moves from the Lealui to the Limulunga residence when the Zambezi water level reaches its highest level, the king's identification with the land of the kingdom, the symbolic and productive emphasis on cattle and reed, the cult of royal graves and of the rising sun — all this suggests a rich harvest which the ban on Egyptocentrism has prevented Africanists of reaping so far. Cf. Gluckman, H.M., 1951, 'The Lozi of Barotseland, N.W. Rhodesia', in: Colson, E., & Gluckman, H.M., ed., *Seven tribes of British Central Africa*, Oxford University Press for Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, pp. 1-93; Gluckman, H.M., 1957, *The Judicial Process among the Barotse*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Gluckman, H.M., 1968, *Essays on Lozi land and royal property*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers no. 10, reprint of the original edition of 1953; Mutumba Mainga, 1972, 'A history of Lozi religion to the end of the nineteenth century', in: Ranger, T.O., & Kimambo, I., eds., *The historical study of African religion*, London: Heinemann, pp. 95-107; Mutumba Mainga, 1973, *Buluzi under the Luyana kings*, London: Longman.

¹¹² For in the *Sacred Books of the East* it is primarily Gayatri who, in the shape of a falcon (cf. the Egyptian Horus) carries off the *soma* from heaven; cf. *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 12, *Sacred Books of the East: Translated by various oriental scholars*, ed. M. Müller, first published Oxford: Clarendon Press, 18XX [add year]-1910, reprinted 1988, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. xxiv, 183f, 183n; 233, 452; *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 26, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, pp. xiv, xix-xxiii, xxf. n., 52-4, 58, 71n, 78, 88, 149-152, 241, 329, 422; *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 41, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, pp. 331f, 580f; *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 43, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, pp. xxi, 46n; *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 44, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, p. 122. Fontenrose acknowledges that according to a different version it was not Garuda but Indra in the shape of an eagle, who stole the *soma*: Rig Veda 10.99.8; cf. Macdonell, *Vedic mythology*, o.c., p. 152.

¹¹³ Even the Ladder symbol may have a South Asian resonance, when in *Sacred Laws of Aryas*, vol. 14, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, p. 309, the Rishis (sages or seers) are said to have reached their high station by 'the ladder of the gods'. The cosmological position of the Rishis in the South Asian schema, is then in the South Central African schema occupied by the sacred kings.

¹¹⁴ *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 41, o.c., p. 405

¹¹⁵ *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 26, o.c., p. 79f and n.

¹¹⁶ *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 46, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-edition, pp. 360, 362

¹¹⁷ *Upanishads*, vol. 1, *Sacred Books of the East etc.*, Delhi re-

Napata and Meroë: Priese, K.-H., n.d. [1997] , 'Het koninkrijk van Napata en Meroë', in: Wildung with Frieze, *Zwarte farao's*, o.c., pp. 207-252, p. 212.

¹⁰⁶ Priese, 'Het koninkrijk van Napata en Meroë', o.c., p. 212.

¹⁰⁷ Leclant, J., n.d. [1997] , 'Egypte in Nubie: Het Nieuwe Rijk', in: Wildung with Frieze, *Zwarte farao's*, o.c., pp. 119-142, p. 124.

¹⁰⁸ Leclant, J., n.d. [1997] , 'Egypte in Nubie: Het Oude en Middenrijk', in: Wildung with Frieze, *Zwarte farao's*, o.c., pp. 73-118, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Wildung, D., n.d. [1997] , 'Het goud van Meroë: De schat van Amanisjakheto', in: Wildung with Frieze, *De zwarte farao's*, o.c., pp. 301-340, p. 337, no. 391; height 2.8 cm., diameter 2.2 cm. Provenance: Gammai Harvard University - MFA Boston expedition, 1915/16, Oric Bates, find no. 16-1-12 Donated by Oric Bates, 1942 Meroitic, 2nd-3rd century CE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 42.126; cf. Bates & Dunham, Excavations at Gammai, Harvard University, African Studies, VIII, Cambridge, Mass. 1927, 78ff, no. R 50, pict. XXXIII (D, DD), 6 (K), LXVIII, pict. 9; T. Kendall, *Kush: Lost Kingdom of the Nile*, Brockton (Mass.) 1982, 47, no. 60

¹¹⁰ Wildung, 'Het goud van Meroë', o.c.

the person in the moon worshipped as the king, clad in white raiment,¹¹⁸
and *soma* is invoked for royal power¹¹⁹

In a way which combines an Egyptian and a Vedic theme,

soma is said to fly away having become a falcon,¹²⁰
soma is called *dānu*, 'liquid, rain',¹²¹
soma drops, are compared to the Maruts, [the servants of the gods, who are between heaven and earth]¹²²
soma (rain) is given by the Maruts¹²³

In other words, it is perfectly clear that the Nkoya Mvula/Rain, is none other than Soma:

the child of the waters¹²⁴
[who descends] in showers of rain,¹²⁵

It is interesting how *soma* emerges on the one hand as indispensable cosmic force and life force, associated with the fundamental bringers of order and structure (gods, kings), but on the other hand is associated with intermediate beings such as the Maruts who — themselves rain makers, leading the clouds as their horses¹²⁶ — are often likened to birds¹²⁷ and whose being mounted on dappled deer¹²⁸ is suggestive of a distant, more northern ecology.¹²⁹ *Soma* is also depicted as being guarded by the Gandharvas, who have the connotations of preying the massive social and political order of the gods and the kingship. The Gandharvas are representatives of a pre-hegemonic layer¹³⁰ of society, history and the human psyche, a force explicitly recognised in the Vedic texts to be beyond good and evil. But profound as this may be, what does it teach us specifically about Africa?

When such precise semantic correspondences flow richly as *soma* (life force, water, sperm, rain) itself, how

can we possibly make sense of the tangle of possible interconnections which emerges? Diffusion from Egypt to India and from there back to Africa via the Indian Ocean, with possible a detour via Indonesia? Diffusion from the Indus civilisation to both Vedic India and Egypt, and by either routes into the African interior? Diffusion from the African interior, up north to Egypt, and due east, via the Indian Ocean, to South Asia? A table and extensive Old World substratum where all these traits emerge, with minor local variations, from the Palaeolithic, or the Neolithic...?

It is the Neolithic that may help us out here. One of *soma*'s features is that it or he is the deity of sesame. This is most interesting, for sesame is a tropical oil crop, which was first domesticated in sub-Saharan Africa and from was transmitted over land to India.¹³¹ Sesame is still a principal crop of the Republic of Sudan, but it is insignificant in other African countries.^{132 133} Is the *soma* complex with its rich symbolism of kingship then perhaps part of an originally African heritage which diffused, with sesame, to South Asia?

5.4. Sub-Saharan African origin and complex transcontinental history of divine kingship in Africa

While it may be tempting to see the central symbols of kingship as being transmitted into sub-Saharan Africa from an outside source or sources (the interconnected Egypt — Indus valley — Vedic India), there are indications that early and vital cultural transfers emanated from sub-Saharan Africa to these regions of later high culture — while reminiscences of these transfers are enshrined in the very symbolism of kingship. Was it merely that Egyptian and South Asian cultural material, once having arrived in sub-Saharan Africa, found fertile ground there, in the form of rudimentary symbolic structures which had meanwhile developed to much greater heights in Egypt and India? Or was the original flow from the interior of Africa outwards? It is too early yet to attempt answer these questions, but it is clear that a simple model of mono-directional diffusion to a sub-Saharan Africa thought to be culturally passive and receptive, is not going to help us out.

Instead, a pattern emerges as represented in Figure 12 below. From a fourth millennium centre in Nubia,

edition, pp. 80, 287, 303

118 *Upanishads*, vol. 15, *Sacred Books of the East* etc., Delhi re-edition, pp. 101, 103

119 *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 44, o.c., p. 63

120 *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 26, o.c., p. 80; note the combination of Egyptian and Vedic correspondences.

121 *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, *Sacred Books of the East* etc., Delhi re-edition, p. 40

122 *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, o.c., pp. 279, 282f, 416.

123 *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, o.c., p. 400.

124 *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 26, o.c., P. 384

125 *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 26, o.c., pp. xvi, xix-xxiii.

126 *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, o.c. [add pages]

127 *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, o.c., many entries listed by Winternitz s.v. Maruts.

128 *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 12, o.c., p. 242, and many entries in *Vedic Hymns*, vol. 32, o.c.

129 Cf. the reference to 'marut-eyed gods in the north', *Satapatha-Brahmana*, vol. 41, o.c., p. 49

130 With my colleague Wiggermann I identified a very similar pre-hegemonic, pre-state, pre-religious layer in magical structures of ancient Mesopotamia, cf. van Binsbergen & Wiggermann, o.c.

131 Darlington, o.c., [add pages]

132 There is also a much simpler explanation: that sesame oil — the product which features so prominently in the *Thousand and One Night's* story of 'Alī Bābā — was also recognised to be one of the manifestations of *soma*.

133 *Soma* has yet another crop connotation: barley grains are said to be bought from, or for King Soma (*Grihya-Sūtras*, vol. 30, *Sacred Books of the East* etc., Delhi re-edition, pp. 53, 269). Barley, again, is of great significance for Old World continents: it was one of Egypt's earliest and most important crops, was later also found in the Indus civilisation, and was the principal crop in the Aegean when agriculture was introduced there c. 2000 BCE. Contrary to sesame barley does not thrive under fully tropical conditions, so it is not found in sub-Saharan and it is recognised to originate from West Asia. Africa, but it is not unlikely that it was first domesticated not exactly in the Lower Nile valley but further south along the Upper Nile, or elsewhere in the vast laboratory of domestication that Africa was in Neolithic times.

constitutive ideas on sacred kingship emanate to the Lower Nile valley (Egypt), to distant South Asia, and probably also to other parts of the African continent. This is not the only formative influence upon the pharaonic state: Sumer in eastern Mesopotamia is also likely to have been a distant influence, on Egypt, but also on the Indus valley and even further afield, on China. Pharaonic kingship is established, no doubt with a fair amount of independent local Egyptian input, and it sends out its specific pharaonic influences all across the African continent — where they blend with earlier direct offshoots from the fourth-millennium Nubian inspiration. Meanwhile in South Asia the Indus civilisation, under influence of immigrations of Indo-European speakers, develops into the Vedic one, which in its turn makes an impact on East and Southern African divine kingship, both directly and at an early stage (first millennium BCE), later via Indonesia which brings not only Vedic but also Austronesian linguistic and cultural additions.

[insert figure 12]

Figure 12. Transcontinental connections of African divine kingship, with special reference to South Central Africa

That Indian correspondences emerge only as a serendipity from my restudy of Nkoya kingship, is largely due to strong and long-standing pressures in African Studies to suppress South Asian perspectives on Africa. This is partly due to the utterly misplaced and in fact condescending idea that denying Africa all historical intercontinental links, and studying the Africa's socio-cultural phenomena exclusively by reference to an African context, is a fair scholarly contribution to decolonisation of the mind. However, if applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to European ancient history or Chinese ancient history, the same attitude would be immediately exposed as ruling out vital evidence of transcontinental influences. Another reason is that South Asia gives rise to contradictory ambivalences in the African context of the twentieth century CE. On the one hand Indians have massively migrated to Africa and have established themselves conspicuously in the societies of East and Southern Africa — often in class positions which are above those of the majority of the local African populations; as a result, anti-Indian feelings have repeatedly erupted post-Independent Africa. On the other hand, the scale, the uneven but impressive economic, technological and political development of post-colonial India, and its non-aligned stance, have made India the most likely locus for a valuable non-hegemonic perspective on Africa, parallel to the North Atlantic but free of the latter's overtones of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Against this background, approaches stressing South Asian connections of Africa are not tolerated in African Studies today. This is the reason — far more than occasional and inevitable errors of fact — why the fascinating work on Zimbabwean history by the Swedish

missionary Harold von Sicard is held in such bad repute. It includes attempts to discuss Niger-Kordofan (including Bantu) lexical roots in the light of Indo-European ones; he also sees detailed parallels between Zimbabwean kingship and that of the ancient Israelites, whose Ark of the Covenant he believes to recognise in South Central African royal drums.¹³⁴ Needless to say that von Sicard, despite his Uppsala doctorate in comparative religion, was declared anathema among respectable students of Zimbabwe society and history working within the accepted, fragmented Africanist anthropological framework. An even more dismissive treatment was to be the deserved fate of the author of *Indo-Africa*,¹³⁵ who presented essentially interesting material on South Asian/ African connections in language and metallurgy within a racist framework denying Black people's capability of original invention. Who wants such company? Yet it should be possible to study transcultural contributions to the global cultural achievements of mankind in a more detached and positive context.

(...)

8. Conclusion

Having arrived at the end of our all too rushed excursion through three continents and six millennia, let us have another look at the four central questions highlighted in the introduction of this little book.

- If the classical Greek, subsequently European, subsequently global civilisation can be demonstrated to have — among others — Afroasiatic roots, and if specifically ancient Egypt can be demonstrated to have had such an extensive formative influence upon the civilisation emerging in the eastern Mediterranean basin, to what extent then did Egypt act as an independent, original force in this connection — and, alternatively, *to what extent did Egypt merely mediate*

¹³⁴ Cf. von Sicard, H., 1940-1941 [published 1942-1943], 'Drie grondlegende Wörter der suderythraischen Kultur', *Anthropos*, 35-36: 559 f; von Sicard, H., 1944, 'Mwari: Der Hochgott der Karanga', *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik*, 6, *Koloniale Völkerkunde* I, pp. 134-191.; von Sicard, H., 1948, 'The brother-sister marriage in the Southerlythraean [sic] culture', *Ethnos* (Stockholm), [vol.] [add pages]; von Sicard, H., 1950, 'The derivation of the name Mashona', *African Studies*, 9: 138-143.; von Sicard, H., 1951, 'Mambo Dyembewu', *Proceedings of the Rhodesian Scientific Association*, 43: 175-213.; von Sicard, H., 1952, *Ngoma lungundu: Eine Afrikanische Bundeslade*, *Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensis*, V, Uppsala: Universitet Uppsala; von Sicard, H., 1968-69, 'Luwe und verwandte mythische Gestalten', *Anthropos*, 63-64: 665-737; von Sicard, H., 1975, 'Das Gebiet zwischen Sambesi und Limpopo', in: Baumann, H., ed., 1975, *Die Völker Afrikas und ihre traditionellen Kulturen*, I. Allgemeiner Teil und südliches Afrika, Wiesbaden: Steiner, pp. 457-472.

¹³⁵ Hromník, C.A., 1981, *Indo-Africa: Towards a new understanding of the history of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Juta: Cape Town; cf. Hall, M., 1984, 'The burden of tribalism: The social context of Southern African Iron Age studies', *American Antiquity*, 49, 3: 455-467, p. 458. Hall's exposing the book as not only racist (its conclusions certainly are), but also as sponsored by South African industrial interests, reflects the wider sociology of knowledge as indicated by me. Only a view years after Hall wrote, major breakthroughs in the establishment of democratic rule in South Africa were sponsored by the same industrial interests.

more general African, notably sub-Saharan African, ancient civilisations to the wider world?

On this point our argument has shown how complex the situation actually is. Not ancient Egypt, but ancient Nubia formed the true mediating factor between on the one hand the ancient civilisations of sub-Saharan Africa, and on the other hand those of the eastern Mediterranean basin (including pharaonic Egypt) and the Middle East. In so far as this mediation amounted to the export of African cultural achievements, it was most conspicuous in times designated as Predynastic in Egyptian history: before the third millennium BCE. Once the Egyptian state was firmly established, the maintenance — through military and administrative means as well as through racial prejudice — of a formidable southern border was one of its priorities, and as a result the free northbound flow of sub-Saharan African influence was, for millennia, reduced to a trickle. Therefore it does not do (as current Afrocentrist strategies advocate) to merely situate ancient Egyptian culture, timelessly, within a general African context, and assume that automatically Africa, through *pars pro toto*, will share in the glory of Egypt as one of the major civilising forces on the ancient Aegean and the Levant. Much more careful and chronologically calibrated research is needed before the specifically sub-Saharan African elements in the ancient civilisations of the Mediterranean, the Near East and South Asia can be identified with certainty.

Meanwhile we had to realise, in the course of this book's argument, that cultural indebtedness and continuities between sub-Saharan Africa, ancient Egypt, South West Asia, and Europe, do not primarily and most conspicuously present themselves in the form of straightforward diffusion of cultural elements, or even of packages of cultural elements. Before we can speak of diffusion, we have to look again at existing distribution patterns of relevant cultural packages. We will then become aware of such comprehensive and massive cultural continuities as do in fact link Africa (both Northern and sub-Saharan) to the rest of the Old World. Obviously, we shall come back to these continuities when considering, below, the fourth leading question of this book's argument.

- In the first half of the twentieth century CE, African Studies were fascinated by the reverse thesis: that — as if mirroring the *Black Athena* thesis of Greece's indebtedness to Egypt — everything of value in sub-Saharan African civilisations (e.g. sacred kingship) had of necessity sprung from pharaonic Egypt. *What remains of the Egyptocentric thesis in African cultural history, when re-examined in the light of today's methods and today's evidence?*

On this point we had to repress our tendency of wholesale rejection of older views, despite the latter's partially racialist inspiration (sc. the denial of original Black African creativity). A detailed analysis of divine kingship in one well-studied sub-Saharan African ethnographic situation

5000 km away from Egypt, revealed such uncanny detail of Egyptian parallels, that diffusion from pharaonic Egypt seems to be the only realistic explanation. This casts a new, positive light on the many other Egyptocentric interpretations of African divine kingship in West, Central and East Africa. The most likely model emerging is the following: African cultural themes, focused and articulated through the Nubian civilisation, spread in all directions, among other effects leading to pharaonic kingship further north long the Nile valley; the Egyptian version (for East, Central and Southern Africa mediated again via Nubia in Meroitic times) then had its own impact on sub-Saharan Africa, blending with earlier versions which had previously arrived from Nubia and been transformed and developed locally. Meanwhile the complex package of divine kingship was substantially enriched by specific additions from South Asia and South East Asia; in the latter however earlier themes reverberated, not only from the Ancient Near East including Egypt, but also from Neolithic sub-Saharan Africa itself.

- *What methodological and theoretical tools (e.g. those highlighting and refining the concepts of diffusion, transformative localisation, and cultural region) do we need in order to take these questions beyond the state of scholarship prevailing in African Studies of an earlier vintage; and how may these tools enhance our African Studies of today?*

Here we found that, like Martin Bernal for his re-analysis of cultural interactions in the eastern Mediterranean in the third and second millennium BCE, we had to revive older methodological and theoretical approaches thought to be long dead: diffusionism and the cultural regions approach. In our time of age, when African Studies is an established and (at least in the Netherlands) thriving field of scientific research, we did so not out of a nostalgic celebration of obsolete forms of scholarship dating from the formative decades of African Studies. We formulated, in passing, a critique of the model of Africa as current in African Studies today: an Africa first divided in North and sub-Saharan, the latter considered to be totally fragmented and to have only such unity as imposed by forces from outside the continent, yet an Africa to be examined and interpreted entirely by reference to contexts within the African continent itself. Rejection of this image of Africa forced us to look — beyond extreme fragmentation and insistence on continental insularity — for approaches better capable of handling extensive correspondences through time and space. These happened to be available, in embryonic form, in Africanist work of earlier generations.

- So far we have taken for granted that Africa, specifically sub-Saharan Africa, constitutes a viable unit of analysis; if however we are prepared to admit that Africa is a geopolitical construct ancillary — by antithesis — to the Eurocentric construction of Europe as White, Christian, and Indo-European-speaking, *how*

can we benefit from the Black Athena debate so as to explode these geopolitical constructs — redefining Africa's place in the world, and African Studies in the process?

In what is perhaps the central chapter of the present study, chapter 6, we tentatively traced such transcontinental continuities as may be discerned in and around Africa. It reflects my own special field of interest, and perhaps also Bernal's in *Black Athena*, that these continuities are especially found in the domain of religion, cosmology and myth. But also in politics and law, philosophy, in language, and in human biology such continuities may begin to be discerned. Against the background of the transcontinental continuities which have thus been brought out, new light (specifically the claim in favour of a much greater time depth and *against* the insistence on specific — for instance Egypt-Aegean — borrowing in historic times) is cast upon the question as to the existence, in the late Bronze Age, of a common east Mediterranean culture — the likely context for the sort of transmission to the Aegean which is the central claim of *Black Athena*. At an even larger scale, perhaps, are we beginning to discern, however dimly, cultural continuities straddling the three continents of the Old World. Only on the basis of such a common substratum can we begin to inquire into specific forms of diffusion from other continents towards Africa, tracing the institutional complexes involved and the ensuing patterns of transformative localisation. This kind of processes is rather well documented in a number of domains: shamanism, music, Islam, geomantic magic. It is amazing how much of these developments have been fairly recent (after the beginning of the Common Era, often even after 1000 CE) and have converged into a combined package transmitted, in combination, along the Islam-associated channels of long-distance trade.

Shamanism, music, Islam, and geomantic magic were in all probability cultural items which Africa received from the wider world in the recent past and which have rapidly installed themselves in the very heart of local African identities — as if they had been there since the beginning of time. However, this process of intercontinental cultural influx into Africa is altogether too recent to account for the causes and origins of the emerging pattern of a common Eurafrikan, or even common Old World substratum. This approach sheds a rather new light not only on the absurdity of Eurocentrism, but also on the claim of Afroasiatic roots.

If my suggestions of Eurafrikan continuities at least partially stand up to further testing, the *Black Athena* thesis can be further radicalised in an attempt to free it from such vestiges of geopolitical construction as it still retains. If a substratum of a considerable amount of cultural, linguistic, religious and political continuities has united Europe, Africa and Western Asia, for several millennia, speaking of Afroasiatic roots, however much an improvement on Eurocentrism, still does not do full justice to the true situation, according to which an enormous geographical field has tended to cultural continuity, not as a

result of more recent 'Afroasiatic' influence, but as a result of sharing the world of early farmers and pastoralists, from the very Neolithic onwards.

In a way, Bernal's emphasis on 'Afroasiatic roots' is a well-intended, but analytically dubious, and its potential for the rehabilitation of the place of sub-Saharan Africa in global cultural history is extremely limited. It is an echo (with north south reversion, the ancient Greeks taking the place of latterday Black Africans) of the old Hamitic thesis — the so-called Hamites being today classified as Afroasiatic speakers.

Recognising, meanwhile, the fact of extensive Old World cultural communality — with all it implies for intercultural recognition in our present day and age — is of far greater importance than identifying the specific historical mechanisms which have produced that communality in the first place. Diffusion may have been one of these mechanisms, and probably a very important one. But by concentrating — as Martin Bernal has done — on the interactions between just two regional part-cultures (ancient Egypt and the ancient Aegean) within a geographically much more extended field of cultural communalities, three most misleading effects are being created — which only the insightful formulation of the *Black Athena* thesis allowed us to recognise in the first place, of course:

- the extremely wide scope, in place (a sizeable portion of the Old World) and in time (at least six millennia), of that field is obscured;
- by concentrating on the third and second millennium BCE, the suggestion is created that such communalities as exist between Egypt and the Aegean dated from that relatively recent period, and did not have a long history already by that time;
- and by concentrating on specific diffusion, from Egypt or from the Ancient Near East in general, the fact is obscured that such diffusion of individual traits as may have taken place and as may be demonstrated, actually occurred already within the context of a much older and much more general communality whose detailed causes we can no longer demonstrate, but whose effects (Eurafrikan continuity) we can certainly record.

Thus it is the Africanist perspective which has helped us to identify three reasons why, on the spur of the inspiration of the *Black Athena* thesis, we absolutely have to go beyond that thesis. We now realise that Martin Bernal's thesis is unnecessarily diffusionist, and if anything, of *too limited* a geographical and temporal scope! I realise that this sounds as intellectual inflation, given the fact that critics have tended to chide Bernal for what appeared to be his megalomania, in breaking through the artificial boundaries of national cultures, insisting on addressing both Egypt, and the Aegean, and the Levant. Yet, the true scope of Old World communalities is of an even grander scale.

Having begun to identify some of the more obvious forms of Eurafrikan common culture, I positively shrink

away from the question as to what put them in place. That question will have to be postponed until the identification of Eurafrikan patterns of communality has been established on a much more solid footing, after involving the critical reflection of a large number of informed scholars.

At this point, all I want to add is the following. I suspect that any attempt to answer the question as to the origins and mechanisms of the patterns of Eurafrikan communality promises considerable, though not wholesale triumph for Afrocentrist theses now still regarded with utter suspicion and contempt.

It is my contention that in the several millennia preceding and coinciding with the rise of the Ancient Near East civilisations the flow of people, culture and language appears to have been out of Africa rather than into Africa. If this impression is correct, it implies that the transcultural continuities which I have suggested to exist in the fields of human biology, language, religion, philosophy, and law and order, may have derived in considerable part from the transcontinental circulation of African genes and African cultural achievements. Such an hypothesis — a deliberate reiteration of the Afrocentrist position! — upsets several centuries of Eurocentric chauvinism, intercultural condescension, and cultural and geopolitical construction. It also goes against the grain of contemporary anthropological and cultural historical work. For those fields of enquiry have by and large stressed fragmentation of cultural forms, multiplicity of cultural origins, and isolation of the African worlds, seeing cultural unity mainly as the result of the most recent political and technological convergence in the context of the globalisation process: the global financial institutions, military interventions, mass consumption, foreign aid, cosmopolitan education and medicine.

If continents are inadequate units of cultural analysis, their suitability does not suddenly improve when they might be invoked for anti-Eurocentric conclusions. Therefore, we have to proceed very carefully in this field wrought with ideologies and counter-ideologies. Even when sticking strictly to the rules of detached scholarship, it is far too early for conclusions. Yet, considering the fact that in the Neolithic Africa was a place of tremendous innovation and experiment, that independent domestication of food crops and animals took place there, and that there are faint indications of Africa-related, Black presences in South West Asia and South and West Europe, we must seriously count with the possibility that a substantial part of the common transcontinental Old World substratum derives from the African land mass and was exported to the north-east and north, into Asia and Europe. Afrocentrism may yet be salvaged from the ghetto, and be turned into a respectable, and immensely relevant, research programme for the third millennium CE.

It would be difficult to imagine an Africanist reinterpretation of the *Black Athena* thesis which amounts to a more radical departure from Martín Bernal's views, while at the same time remaining true to his original anti-Eurocentrist inspiration — for his has been, with all its

shortcomings, a truly responsible and inspiring vision of the modern globalising world and its future.



Figure 7. The Narmer palette, Early Dynastic period, c. 3100 BCE, *recto*.⁶⁵



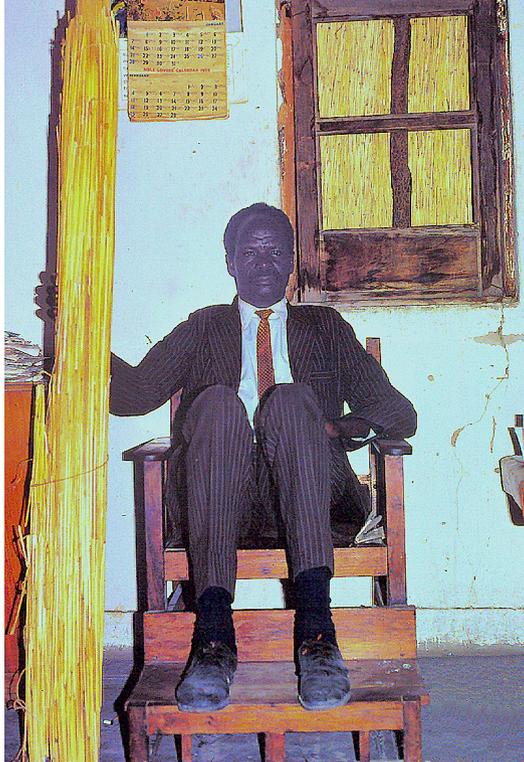


Figure 9. The late Mwene Kahare Kabambi, one of the traditional rulers of the Nkoya people, posing in state in his palace, September 1977.





Figure 11. A Meroitic electron signet ring depicting an enthroned royal figure, and flanked by a ladder (on which a perched falcon) to the left and a mankala board by the right.

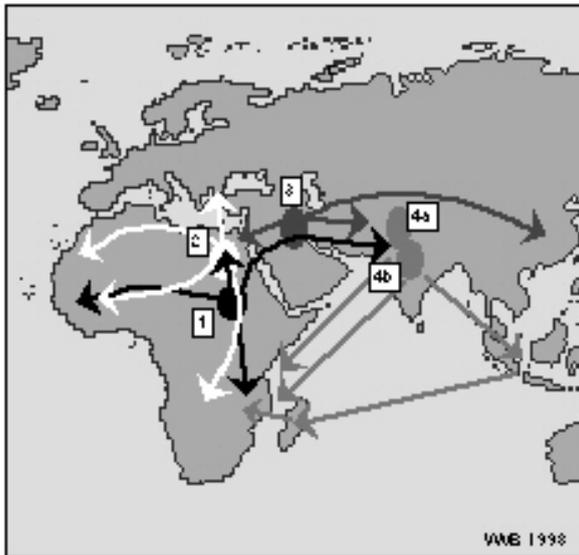


Figure 12. Transcontinental connections of African divine kingship, with special reference to South Central Africa

[since this text was taken from a much longer manuscript, the numbering of sections and illustrations is not consecutive]